

Wells County Commissioners

Regular Session May 15, 2023

The Wells County Commissioners met in a regular session on Monday, May 15, 2023, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those in attendance were Commissioners, Michael Vanover, Blake Gerber, and Jeff Stringer, County Attorney, Ted Storer and County Auditor, Lisa McCormick.

Regular Session

Minutes: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the minutes from the May 1, 2023, regular session and the April 28, 2023, Executive Session. Motion carried 3-0.

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve Payroll #10 in the amount of \$280,396.07 and 238 claims totaling \$444,679.33. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 60 inmates, 22 pretrial Superior, 20 pretrial Circuit, 8 F6 and 7 DOC. Holliday reported the remaining door to be installed should be delivered in 1-2 weeks. A roof repair and landscaping are the outstanding items to be completed. He expects those tasks to be completed by the month end.

Imagine Early: Chad Kline and Jessica Bricker presented a request for funding for Imagine Early. This is a newly implemented coalition between Adams and Wells Counties to address concerns related to access to quality early childhood education. A funding request of \$25,000 annually for 3 years was presented to the Commissioners. The coalition is hopeful that Adams County will match the \$25,000 request, and grant funding can also match those funds. Imagine Early would like to hire a director that will help produce the results needed to change the early learning opportunities for Adams and Wells Counties. The goal is to prepare children for preschool and kindergarten but to also alleviate strains on the workforce concerning childcare. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the Imagine Early funding request for \$25,000 annually for 2023, 2024, and 2025 and to expend those funds from the LIT Economic Development fund. Motion carried 3-0. Commissioner Stringer requested semiannual Commissioner updates from the coalition.

BHMSD Update: Assistant Superintendent Julie Meitzler, Information Officer Jessica Bricker, and Area 18 CTE Director Brittany Kloer updated the Commissioners on accomplishments at Bluffton Harrison Metropolitan School District. The Indiana State Teacher of the year, Tara Cocanower, is a BHMSD teacher. A website has been created to update the public with press releases. BHMSD has added the Commissioners and Council as email subscriptions for updates. Cyber Tiger sports teams have won state titles, which makes the players eligible for scholarship opportunities. Various awards were given for middle and high school students participating in academic teams. Brittany Kloer spoke on awards given to area students who participated in career pathways, which will lead to what is needed in the area workforce. Career pathways are classes that students can participate in that will give them what they need to succeed.

Highway Supervisor: Shawn Bonar updated the Commissioners on highway projects. Highway crews are starting to mow side ditches. Crews are prepping roads to be chipped this year. Bonar presented a letter of understanding/unofficial detour for Commissioner review. INDOT will be closing SR218 for

bridge overlay work. This work will begin as early as fall 2023. SR218 will be closed therefore creating the need for a detour. The unofficial detour will be 100E to 700S to 200E returning to SR218. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the unofficial detour for SR218. Motion carried 3-0. Bonar revisited the subject of asphalt in lieu of chip and seal that was discussed at a previous meeting. Attorney Storer suggested putting proper procedures in place with a 30-day notice to give all property owners an opportunity to participate.

Public Comment: Tom McElhaney, Cynthia McElhaney, April McElhaney, James Walden, and Darlene Walden were in attendance to inform the Commissioners about a one-mile section of gravel road that they would like to be converted to chip and seal. The road is located on CR 700S from 300W to 400W in Poneto. Tom McElhaney stated that he has been petitioning this location for chip and seal for many years. There is one hold out for the right of way, that person does not live on this section of road. McElhaney has offered to purchase this property from the current landowner to no avail. McElhaney stated that the ditch is eating away at the road, which causes a hazard for anyone traveling on that road. Commissioner Stringer commented that he is not in the business of taking people's rights away, but safety is the key.

Highway Engineer: Nate Rumschlag gave updates on ongoing projects. Road conversion petitions for 2023 will close on June 1. Petitions received after June 1st will be included in 2024 petitions. Bridge 85 and Bridge 170 bid packages have been advertised. The highway department has encountered commercial dumpsters that have been placed in the right of way. Rumschlag was looking for input from the Commissioners regarding issuing letters to the property owners. Commissioner Vanover stated that the dumpsters are creating a strike hazard and would ask homeowners to back these out of the right-of-way. The proposed letters should state that it is not acceptable to have the dumpsters placed within the right-of-way and must be removed, sending one letter to the property owner and one letter to the vendor. The Commissioners advised Rumschlag to draft the letter and review it with Attorney Storer prior to sending it to the property owners and dumpster vendors. Rumschlag gave a quarterly report on the Regional Sewer District and the use of ARPA funds. There have been 6 distributions to date for the Craigville sanitary sewer system with remaining funds totaling \$422,179.00 including retainage. One right-of-way was presented for Commissioner approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve, and sign the right-of-way. Motion carried 3-0.

Jail Status Query: A contract bond status query was received from Liberty Mutual Surety on the status of the Jail renovation. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to allow the President to sign the status query for the Jail renovation. Motion carried 3-0.

Vacate Alley – Banner City: Attorney Storer received a revised Petition to Vacate an alley located in Banner City. The Commissioners must hold a public hearing within 30 days of the date of the Petition. The Commissioners will hold a public hearing at 5PM on June 5, 2023, prior to the regular session.

Geiser Farms: Geiser Farms has agreed to dismiss Mounsey Family Farms and Kurt and Lance Fiechter from the claim concerning the County Farm. The amount of \$1,107.00 had been previously approved by the Commissioners as settlement. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve payment of the claim for \$1,107.00 to Gordon and Associates for legal fees. Motion carried 3-0.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 5:48PM. A motion was made by Jeff Stringer, seconded by Blake Gerber. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Michael K Vanover

Vice President, Blake Gerber

Member, Jeff Stringer

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor