

Wells County Commissioners

Public Hearing/Regular Session June 5, 2023

The Wells County Commissioners met in Public Hearing and Regular Session on Monday June 5, 2023, at 5:00 PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those in attendance were Commissioners, Michael Vanover and Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer and County Auditor Lisa McCormick. Jeff Stringer was absent.

Public Hearing

A petition was filed with The Board of Commissioners of the County of Wells, Wells County, Indiana. The requested petition is to vacate a 20' wide alley off of the north boundary of Lots 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36, the east boundary of Lot 34 and a .078-acre tract located directly west of Lots 37-39, and the south boundary of Lot 37 and the 0.78-acre tract located directly north of Lots 34-36, all in the unincorporated Town of Banner City, Indiana (referred to hereafter as the "Street"). The Board of Commissioners of the County of Wells may, after the public hearing on the petition, grant the request by the passage of an ordinance vacating the above-described portion of the Street. Attorney Matthew Hays and petitioner David Driscoll were in attendance for the petitioners. County Attorney Ted Storer stated that there was no written objection or remonstrances to the petition. Storer asked Hays and Driscoll if the vacated alley would hinder growth or orderly development in the neighborhood, hinder access to lands, church, schools, or other public building or place, or if it would hinder the use of a public way by the neighborhood in which it is located or to which it is contiguous. Hays stated that the vacation would not hinder in any way. Highway Engineer Nate Rumschlag had no objection to the vacate petition. The public hearing was closed.

Regular Session

Minutes: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve minutes from the May 15, 2023, executive session, and the May 15, 2023, regular session. Motion carried 2-0.

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Payroll #11 in the amount of \$276,251.48 and 179 claims totaling \$446,320.16. Motion carried 2-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 60 inmates, 18 pretrial Superior, 23 pretrial Circuit, 7 F6 and 10 DOC. The kitchen door is scheduled to be installed next week. July 4th is the tentative date for the finalization of the jail renovation. Sheriff Holliday reported that he is refurbishing shower areas one block at a time. Reduced jail numbers make that possible. He estimated that each block will take two to three days to complete.

Highway: Supervisor Shawn Bonar informed the Commissioners that tractors are currently mowing side ditches. Crews are patching and leveling roads on the 2023 chip seal list. The 200W road conversion is ready for the sealing process. One crew is repairing broken tiles and the final application of dust stop will be applied tomorrow. The highway garage update included: 90% of the main sanitary lines are complete. Bulk storage walls will be poured before the next meeting. Wash bay concrete will be getting started this week and the siding is being installed.

Highway Engineer: Nate Rumschlag presented the Commissioners with updates for ongoing projects. Bid openings for Bridge 85 and 170 are on Thursday June 8th at 2pm. Bridge 19 is close to completion. Rumschlag has requested updated cost estimates for CR450E phase 2, he would like to apply for grant funding for that project during the CCMG 2023-02 application process. He will prepare letters of financial commitment for the June 20th meeting for Commissioner review. Letters have been drafted for dumpsters in the ROW and should be sent out to culprits this week. An updated road conversion petition status document will be presented to the Commissioners in July, after Rumschlag reviews the totals. Rumschlag received a letter from a resident asking for a change of direction of the yield sign for CR 400W and CR 800N. Rumschlag recommended replacing pavement ends signs, replacing the yield sign and posting the sign at the proper height, and adding a 500' supplemental warning plaque. Rumschlag stated that the road could be chip sealed within 5 years, which would change the intersection materially. Commissioner Gerber would like to have Commissioner Stringers feedback before proceeding further, this is Commissioner Stringer's district. Wells County was awarded \$1,114,261 from the Federal Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant for the Wells County Hoosier Highway Local Trax realignment to Adams Street.

Bi-County Services: Tim Ramsey presented his annual financial update and request for funding for Bi-County Services to the Board of Commissioners. Tim stated that Bi-County's biggest challenge is staffing. Finding qualified staff is a difficulty that they are constantly working to overcome. Their focus currently is on maximizing program revenue, controlling operating expenses and improving staffing levels. Bi-County is asking for a 10% increase in funding for 2024, \$45,408.00. Adams County Commissioners and Council have approved the same contribution amount. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the 2024 funding of \$45,408.00 for Bi-County services. Motion carried 2-0.

Wells County Fire Chiefs: Two Wells County Fire Chiefs, Jon Gray and Mike Grant, came to the Commissioners to discuss possible funding options for volunteer firefighters. Required training for Volunteer firefighters has increased significantly. Volunteers are required to provide EMS services, hazardous materials response, structure firefighting, wildland firefighting, water rescue, car accident rescue, heavy machinery rescue as well as others. The time commitment can be substantial which makes it harder to find and retain volunteer firefighters. Other states have implemented various credits or exemptions for volunteer firefighters on their property tax bills. Indiana has not implemented any credits or exemptions currently. Their request was for the Commissioners to take into consideration similar practices. Commissioner Gerber suggested the option of the creation of a fire territory for financial assistance. Commissioner Vanover encouraged open lines of communication.

Ordinance to Vacate Alley: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Ordinance 2023-06, an ordinance vacating a portion of a platted public way in the town of Banner City, Wells County, Indiana. Motion carried 2-0.

Creation of a Committee to Investigate the Role of a Building Inspector: A resolution to investigate the creation of a building department was presented to the Commissioners for consideration. Commissioner Gerber is interested in investigating the possibility of a building inspector. Commissioner Vanover would like to have a committee that understands those responsibilities and role to research the roll and to report back with the recommendations and findings. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Resolution 2023-03 investigating the creation of a building department. Motion carried 2-0.

Plaza Request: Bluffton Free Street Fair requested use of the Courthouse Plaza for September 17-23, 2023. The Certificate of Insurance will be submitted after issuance in July. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to allow the Bluffton Free Street Fair Association use of the Plaza September 17-23, 2023, and payment of the \$1,500 2023 donation. Motion carried 2-0.

Public Comment: Commissioner Vanover opened the floor to public comment. He first stated that we all serve the people of Wells County first and foremost. He stressed to educate those you interact with and to be gentle with the authority granted to you. Taxpayers and citizens deserve friendly and professional service consistently. Vanover stated that the issue at hand is a library issue and might be better handled with the library and the library board. He stressed that we live in this community and should always treat others as we wish to be treated. The floor was opened for public comment. Chris Koiner was taken aback when his children received a rainbow-colored bracelet from the Wells County Public Library for the summer reading program. Koiner felt that the library needed better judgement when picking and distributing the prize. He requested a fact-finding mission by the Commissioners about the intent of the bracelets. Kevin Miller agreed with Koiners point and was upset when his 3-year-old and 7-year-old received the bracelets. Miller does not want his children to be forced to promote an ideology that they are too young to understand. Brian Hollingsworth is a defender of the Constitution. He believes that people are people and should be able to live their life how they want to live their life. His granddaughter prints and colors rainbows consistently and does not see a problem with a rainbow bracelet. Hailey Ashman is the creator of the Diversity and Inclusion Coalition and is a supporter of the bracelets. Rainbows are everywhere and are a symbol for a variety of organizations and causes, Ashman stated. Cindy Burchell is the library employee who ordered and purchased the bracelets. She placed the order in December for the summer reading program, not giving a thought to the June date for the summer reading program and how the bracelets would be perceived. Burchell stated that kids like rainbow colors, she was thinking only of the children and their preferences. The Commissioners thanked everyone for their comments and stated that there are always two sides to the story.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:00PM. The motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Michael K Vanover

Vice President, Blake Gerber

Member, Jeff Stringer

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor