

Wells County Commissioners

Regular Session July 15, 2024

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, July 15, 2024, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Present at the meeting were Commissioners, Jeff Stringer, Michael Vanover and Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer, and Auditor Lisa McCormick.

Minutes: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the minutes from the July 1, 2024, regular session. Motion carried 3-0.

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Payroll #14 in the amount of \$292,017.84 and 143 claims totaling \$575,127.74. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 78 inmates, 20 pretrial Superior, 39 pretrial Circuit, 1 F6 DOC and 18 DOC. Repair on the cracked pipes in the Jail is complete. Areas that had cracks were cut out and replaced with PVC. New elbow joints were replaced where needed. The Sheriff reported that the odor issue has not been a problem over the last weekend. Brad Driver from Ameresco will meet with the Sheriff regarding recommendations concerning HVAC issues that have been ongoing since the Jail renovation. Holliday will inform the Commissioners of the recommendations.

Wells County Highway Supervisor: Crews are grading stone roads, repairing suck holes and cross pipes in the northern part of the county. Bonar voiced a plea for farmers to cut the crops back to make the roadways as safe as possible. The current road conversions have some minor ditch work and grass seeding to be completed. Crews will be applying two coats of 9's during the chip seal rotation. Minor projects are being completed on the highway garage. The highway is in the process of creating a page for updates for the public concerning current road projects. Bonar presented to the Commissioners gravel road conversion petitions and right-of-way status. Bonar suggested three sections of roadway to be converted in 2024, 100N from 500W to 600W, 450E from 250S to 300S, and 625S from SR3 to Willow Road. The recommended road conversions for 2025 are 750E from 650N to 750N, 650N from 750E to 800E, and 800E from US224 to 750N. The recommended road conversion for 2026 are 500W from 100N to 1100N, 600E from 1100S to 1200S, Meridian from 1000N to 1100N, 200W from SR124 to 100N, and 800E from 800S to 900S. Commissioner Stringer stressed that he would like to see a priority for roads that have the most residences. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the recommended road conversions for 2024, 2025, and 2026 as presented. Motion carried 3-0. Two rights-of-way and one utility permit were presented to the Commissioners for review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve, and sign the two rights-of-way and one utility permit. Motion carried 3-0.

Highway Engineer: Nate Whitacre updated the Commissioners on ongoing and upcoming projects. Whitacre is finishing up Q2 reports for Federal Aid projects. Small structure replacements for Nottingham 1455 and 1457 on CR 1000S have been sized. Whitacre met with a supplier, and they have the precast units in stock. He is working with a contractor for quote work and timing for the project. The contractor estimates that both structures can be removed and replaced within a one-week road closure.

Family Centered Services: Paige Hamilton, Executive Director of Family Centered Services, addressed the Commissioners regarding an increase in annual funding. Currently Family Centered Services receives \$15,000 annually from the Commissioners. Hamilton's request was for \$20,000 annually. Funding stays in Wells County, rural families are the most underserved in Indiana, Hamilton stated. He would like to minimize that statistic by making programs more accessible for rural families. Community education on suicide prevention, and internet safety are other areas he would like to expand upon. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the 2025 \$20,000 annual funding for Family Centered Services. Motion carried 3-0.

Poka-Bache Task Force: Michael Lautzenheiser Jr. requested 2025 funding for the Poka-Bache Task Force. The request was for \$1,784.00 which would contribute to the ongoing efforts of the task force. The task force has put together a grant team to develop an engineered plan for the undeveloped miles of the trail. Commissioner Stringer felt the trail was a want, not a need and would like to see private funding for this project. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the funding request of \$1,784 for the Poka-Bache Task force for 2025, to be paid out of the LIT Economic Development fund. Motion carried 3-0.

Library Board Appointment: Five applications were received for the expiring Library Board appointment and were reviewed by the Commissioners. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to appoint Joseph McFarren to the Library board for a four-year term commencing on August 16, 2024 – August 15, 2028. Motion carried 2-1, Commissioner Stringer voted no.

Public Comment: Robert Park, 5984N 100E, Uniondale, addressed the Commissioners regarding an all-way stop at the intersection of US 224 and 100E. INDOT investigated the intersection with a review of crash history, traffic count, a signal warrant analysis, and a review of all-way stop control criteria. INDOT's analysis found that crash history primarily consisted of multiple right-angle collisions each year from cross traffic attempting to find safe gaps on US 224. INDOT determined that an all-way stop would address recent crash patterns and best suit the area. Traffic volumes are well short of meeting the minimum thresholds for warranting a signal, was their opinion to Mr. Park in an email. Park strongly disagreed with the opinion of INDOT and didn't feel that a stop sign would be enough to inhibit traffic flow at the intersection. Highway Engineer Nate Whitacre spoke to INDOT earlier in the day and felt that INDOT's view was that the situation has been evaluated and does not meet the criteria for a signal so there will not be a signal. July 24th is the implementation date for the all-way stop. Whitacre suggested he could coordinate with INDOT to make sure advance notice signage is installed initially. Commissioner Stringer offered to discuss the matter with State Representative Matt Lehman and Senator Travis Holdman.

Plaza Request: Bluffton Free Street Fair requested use of the Courthouse Plaza for September 22-29, 2024. 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 22-29, 2024, and payment of the \$1,500 2024 donation. Motion carried 3-0.

EDC Update: Commissioner Stringer updated the Commissioners on Economic Development. Stringer stated that 20 applicants for the Director position have been received. He estimated that interviews will be given in August with an offer made by mid-September. Holly Gaskill inquired if an interlocal agreement with other entities would be created or an organization formed. County Attorney Storer stated that that would be a decision for the Commissioners and the other participating units.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:21PM, motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Jeff Stringer

Vice President, Michael K Vanover

Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor