

Wells County Commissioners
Regular Session October 7, 2024

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday October 7, 2024, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those in attendance were Commissioners, Jeff Stringer, Michael Vanover, and Blake Gerber, County Attorney, Ted Storer and County Auditor, Lisa McCormick.

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

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Payroll #19 in the amount of \$288,977.19 and Payroll #20 in the amount of \$294,473.20, 196 claims totaling \$741,769.85 and 213 claims totaling \$358,861.01. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 75 inmates, 21 pretrial Superior, 40 pretrial Circuit, 3 F6 DOC and 5 DOC. An Ameresco account statement was received by the Board of Commissioners for the remaining balance for the jail renovation of \$40,000. Sheriff Holliday had a conversation with Bradley Driver, Ameresco Senior Project Developer, regarding updates on the items previously listed as outstanding. Five items were discussed during the conversation and Ameresco stated they were handling the items as warranty and will contact the appropriate subcontractor to investigate and resolve. Driver asked the Commissioners to continue to withhold the final payment. Ameresco will provide feedback by Friday, October 11, 2024, to the Sheriff on the status and direction of the five items. An update will be presented to the Commissioners during the next meeting. Holliday also discussed the smell issue within the jail. Stated was that the smell is isolated and Superior will come on Thursday to devise a plan with the maintenance team. Sheriff Holliday mentioned that his current county IT employee is leaving Wells County employment. Holliday mentioned contracting with the current employee on a part time basis until a new IT employee is hired and trained on the Sheriff Department equipment.

Business Advocacy Committee: Erin Prible and Chandler Gerber addressed the Commissioners regarding the newly formed Chamber Business Advocacy Committee. The Committee is working with Make My Move to attract remote workers to relocate to Wells County. Attorney Storer is working with Make My Move for an updated contract. The Commissioners will meet with the Chamber Business Advocacy Committee after the Make My Move contract is approved.

Vacating of a Public Right-of-Way Ordinance: An amended Ordinance was presented to the Commissioners regarding the vacating of a public right-of-way for Rock Creek Stone Quarry. Chase Feichter spoke on behalf of the quarry to answer questions and offer opinions. Several revisions were discussed, it was recommended by the County Attorney to modify the document with the revisions that were discussed and present it back to the Commissioners during the October 21st meeting.

Highway Engineer: Nate Whitacre updated the Commissioners on current and future projects. 450E from 1000N to 1100N is complete and was opened for traffic on September 26th. Some complaints from residents have been made about the steep stone shoulder. Whitacre stated that everyone is aware of the issue and a plan of action is being developed for improvements. Whitacre has met with the design firm and will prevent this from being a future issue as well. Nottingham 1455 and 1457 small structures

have been replaced, the road was closed on September 12th and reopened on September 16th. Bridge 71 documents for RFP and CE services have been submitted to INDOT for review. Whitacre is awaiting selection confirmation from INDOT. A grant application for a Special Safety Call was submitted for review. This grant funding request is intended to be used to add durable pavement markings on road segments throughout Wells County that have significant traffic volume and history of roadway departures. Whitacre presented a letter of financial commitment for that project for Commissioner review and approval. The estimated cost of the project is \$826,740, of which \$82,674 would be the local match for Wells County. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve and sign the letter of financial commitment for the HSIP low-cost systemic LPA Project. Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre presented an unofficial detour for SR 124. The unofficial detour will be Meridian Road to E 100 S to South Adams St. then returning to SR 124. The work is anticipated to begin in early spring of 2025. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the unofficial detour for SR 124. Motion carried 3-0.

ADA Coordinator Update: ADA Coordinator, Bobbie Studebaker, updated the Commissioners on ADA projects. Annually the Commissioners budget \$10,000 for ADA projects. Studebaker felt that the current funding might be best used for planning and engineering for future projects. Engineer Whitacre and Studebaker are working together for the planning of projects. Whitacre suggested applying for Community Crossing grants for some of the proposed projects. Community Crossing projects need to be shovel ready when applied for. Curb ramps and sidewalk replacement are the projects that are being considered. If funding did not get expended for one year, those funds to be used on a larger project the following year, Studebaker suggested.

Wells County Highway Supervisor: Shawn Bonar updated the Board of Commissioners on the current projects within the Highway Department. James S. Jackson Co. submitted pay App 21 & 22 for the final closeout payment. The Commissioners questioned Bonar about any outstanding punch list items. Bonar stated that the HVAC issues were complete, and a leak in the roof was complete. There is one door to adjust, but he felt good about allowing the billing to be closed out. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve the payout to Jackson Construction in the closeout amount of \$218,287.16. Motion carried 3-0. Bonar mentioned some utility bills that he thought should have been paid by Jackson but were paid by the highway. The Commissioners suggested pulling the utility claims and researching them further. County Home Road letting results were received from INDOT with Brooks Construction having the winning bid of \$1,949,531.00. A total of 6 bids were received. Supervisor Bonar accepted bids for an excavator through Sourcewell, a purchasing agent for government agencies. The low bid was from Truland Equipment in Bluffton, IN with a price of \$96,000. Ten rights-of-way were presented to the Commissioners for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the ten rights-of-way. Motion carried 3-0. Bonar presented a driveway permit flyer for review. The Commissioners thought it was very informative and professional looking. The flyer will be posted on the highway webpage and Facebook page.

Health Department Grant Application Request: Public Health Nurse, Lynn Blevins, requested approval to submit a grant application for a PHD Federal Grant. He stated that Wells County has received funding through this grant in previous years. The grant amount is \$25,000 and can be used for flu clinics, dispensing medicines, and basic emergency preparedness. It has an annual grant cycle running from July 1 through June 30th and is a reimbursable grant. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the grant application submission for the Health Department. Motion carried 3-0.

Markle Park Board: John Markley, secretary treasurer for the Town of Markle park board, was requesting funding from the Commissioners for playground equipment for Walk Way Park in Markle, IN. The town board has secured \$65,000 in grant funding to date. The equipment will be geared for children in the 5-12 age range. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve funding \$15,000 for playground equipment for Walk Way Park to be paid out of the LIT Economic Development fund. Motion carried 3-0.

Zoning Ordinance Amendment: Michael Lautzenheiser Jr. presented an Ordinance for a partial text amendment to the Wells County Zoning Ordinance. The proposed amendment consists of the removal of the statement “Operations where punch presses or such types of equipment are part of the manufacturing process” from the Heavy Manufacturing definition. By changing this definition, a manufacturing facility would not automatically be placed in the heavy manufacturing definition that requires it to be zoned heavy industrial. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Ordinance 2024-17 allowing for a partial text amendment to the Wells County Zoning Ordinance. Motion carried 3-0. Mike Lautzenheiser Jr. presented a recommended APC do pass amendment to the Wells County zoning ordinance. The requested zoning changes were from an Agriculture-1 Zoned District to a Business-3 Zoned District for 3 acres east of 5049 N SR1 in Lancaster Township. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Ordinance 2024-12 to amend the Wells County zoning ordinance and zone maps. Motion carried 3-0.

Northeast Indiana Partnership Agreement: A partnership agreement between the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership and Wells County was presented to the Commissioners for approval. The agreement is for a term of three years with a funding level for Wells County of \$15,000. County Attorney Storer referenced a statement in paragraph three that states that all agree to comply with the Regional Code of Ethics. Storer would like to view the Regional Code of Ethics. Also discussed was a reference in the document to the “Wells County Economic Development Corporations”, of which Storer did not know if there was such a corporation. Commissioner Stringer would like a red line version to view and to be presented with an amended agreement for the October 21st meeting.

2025 Meeting Dates: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the 2025 Board of Commissioners meeting dates as presented. Motion carried 3-0.

Wellness Plan Design: The current wellness plan design was discussed with the Commissioners. Employees on the health plan have biomarkers to assess points. Points not earned equal additional premium for the employees’ portion of the monthly health premium. There was a discussion regarding increasing the point funding amounts required by the employees. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the current plan design, biomarkers and funding amounts for the 2025 plan year. Motion carried 3-0.

Comments: Commissioner Jeff Stringer discussed an article that had appeared in the local newspaper regarding a death threat. Stringer asked, “is the newspaper a vessel to report the news or is it a tabloid?” Commissioner Stringer commented that the statements in the article were hearsay and should not have been reported as a factual article.

Adjourned: A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to adjourn at 6:36PM. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Jeff Stringer

Vice President, Michael K Vanover

Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor