

Wells County Commissioners

Regular Session January 21, 2025

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Tuesday January 16, 2024, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Physically in attendance were Commissioners, Michael Vanover, and Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer and County Auditor Lisa McCormick. Commissioner Jeff Stringer participated in the meeting by electronic means of communication, Zoom, which allowed Stringer to simultaneously attend and observe the meeting. All votes taken during the meeting were taken by roll call vote.

Minutes: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the minutes from January 6, 2025, regular session, and January 6, 2025, executive session. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve Payroll #2 in the amount of \$312,912.61 and 242 claims totaling \$702,500.24. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 67 inmates, 22 pretrial Superior, 36 pretrial Circuit, 2 F6 DOC and 8 DOC. Courthouse Security statistics for 2024 were distributed for Commissioner review. Sheriff Holliday discussed minor upgrade needs for the Sheriff's department which included the west parking area and tuck point issues on the exterior of the building. Bradley Driver, Ameresco Senior Project Developer, discussed completed punch list items. All outstanding items were completed prior to the end of 2024. Any remaining issues are considered warranty items. Driver submitted a delivery and acceptance certificate, and a percent completed acknowledgement certificate for review. Sheriff Holliday was asked if he was agreeable with the completed projects to date. Holliday agreed if any other issues were to arise, they would be warranty items. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the delivery and acceptance certificate, the percent complete acknowledgement certificate and final payment to Ameresco of \$40,000. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to allow the Vice President to sign the delivery and acceptance certificate and the percent complete acknowledgement certificate paperwork. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Warranty and maintenance manuals will be sent electronically to be downloaded for the Commissioners, Sheriff, and Jail personnel. Ameresco will begin a 15-year period study regarding jail lighting and water efficiency.

Highway Supervisor: Shawn Bonar updated the Commissioners on ongoing projects. Snow plowing, sanding and salting, and dead tree removal are on the current list of things to do. Road conversions are on hold until the spring. Bridge 51 is on schedule and expected to be complete by May 1, 2025. A discussion concerning a 25' ROW reduction for road conversions was had with the Commissioners and Attorney Storer. Attorney Storer suggested the highway create a form that both the Highway and Commissioners could sign off on the 25' ROW reduction on a case-by-case basis. Conor Jackson was on hand to discuss issues that are still outstanding on the Highway garage. Garage door thresholds are still an issue, door closing issues, louvers not opening when they should, leak in roof, valve leaking oil, HVAC, and entry gate not opening. Jackson is working with contractors on all the issues, some of which have been resolved, and stated that Jackson Construction will be doing some of the repairs. Jackson stated that all items were warranty items and would be taken care of. Four rights-of-way were presented to the Commissioners for review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to

approve the four rights-of-way, of which two are subject to landowner signatures. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Highway Engineer: Nate Whitacre informed the Commissioners that the bid advertisement for Bridge 65 is being published, the bid opening is February 19th in the County Highway conference room. The durable pavement markings project has been awarded to Burgess & Niple, Whitacre is awaiting the contract. The Meridian Road CCMG 2025 application is almost complete, Whitacre provided a letter of financial commitment for the application for Commissioner approval. The matching funds will come from the Highway fund, total project costs are \$466,304.29. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and sign the letter of financial commitment for Meridian Road CCMG 2025. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. A supplemental agreement for Bridge 54 was presented to the Commissioners for review. The supplemental agreement will amend and supplement the contract dated Monday, April 6, 2020, for PE services with USI. The supplemental agreement amount will increase the total cost of the project by \$16,500.00, total contract with supplemental is \$476,750.00. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the supplemental agreement for \$16,500 with USI for Bridge 54 PE services. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Equity Protect Program: Recorder Rina Stuck informed the Commissioners about a current program for property owners called equity protect. The program helps to prevent property fraud while protecting the rightful landowner. If the service is provided through Wells County the fee to the landowner for the first year is \$149 not including sales tax, \$99.95 not including sales tax for each additional year. Equity Protect prevents anyone from recording a new deed without removing the landowners' claim. Facial recognition is the only way a lien can be removed, with provisions for death. Recorder Stuck inquired about including an informational flyer in the 2025 tax bills. The Commissioners would like more information regarding cost and deadlines for tax billing. It was suggested that Stuck return to the February 3rd meeting to discuss further.

Chamber of Commerce Advocacy Committee Update: Rick Johnloz presented an update on the Chamber of Commerce Advocacy Committee. The committee has been meeting monthly since 2024. They have been a 3rd house meeting host, hosted candidate forums, entrepreneurial meet and greet, have continued to provide awareness regarding the drug task force, advocate for business' when there are issues, and assist in the development of the Make My Move program.

Workers Compensation Renewal: Walker Hughes Insurance presented an updated Workers Compensation Renewal to the Commissioners. The effective date of the policy is 02/01/2025-02/01/2026. One proposal was offered from Indiana Public Employers' Plan for \$76,082, which increased 2.757% from the prior premium. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to accept the Indiana Public Employers' Plan proposal for \$76,082 and bind coverage. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

EMA Appointment: The Commissioners reviewed 5 applications for EMA Director, one has since removed their name from the pool of applicants. Commissioner Gerber was excited to have applications from all very qualified persons and stated that some inadequacies within the department need "shored up". Commissioner Vanover expressed concern with the current state of emergency preparedness and felt that citizens' concerns were high about Wells Counties' readiness. Vanover stated that all applicants were asked what they could bring to the table to add to the department, the current EMA Director included. Commissioner Stringer has had discussions with the Sheriff, the Fire Chief, and others in the

realm regarding the current state of the department. Stringer felt it was perfect timing to appoint the most qualified candidate to represent the county and fill the gaps that are there. Commissioner Vanover made a recommendation to appoint Robert J. Petro as the EMA Director. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to appoint Robert J. Petro as the EMA Director for 2025. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

2025 Board Appointments: Two applications were submitted for the Cemetery board appointment vacancy. Discussion was tabled until the February 3rd meeting, giving time for the Cemetery board to make a recommendation. The Commissioners would like to hear from the President of the cemetery board regarding that recommendation. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to reappoint Michael Vanover to the E911 board. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Statement of Wages and Compensation: The Commissioners received and reviewed the annual 100R report and the Summary of Receipts and Expenditures for 2024. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to accept the 100R and the Summary of Receipts and Expenditures. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:04PM. The motion was made by Blake Gerber.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Jeff Stringer

Vice President, Michael K Vanover

Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor