

**Wells County Commissioners**  
**Special Session February 27, 2025**

The Wells County Commissioners met in a special session on Thursday, February 27, 2025, at 9:00 AM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Physically present were Commissioners, Jeff Stringer, Michael Vanover, Blake Gerber, and County Auditor, Lisa McCormick. County Attorney Ted Storer was present via electronic means of communication, Zoom.

**Minutes:** A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the minutes as presented from February 3, 2025, regular session. Motion carried 3-0.

**Payroll and Claims:** A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Payroll #4 in the amount of \$314,231.54 and 167 claims totaling \$427,047.19. Motion carried 3-0.

**Wells County Highway Supervisor:** Shawn Bonar updated the Commissioners on ongoing projects. Currently highway employees are grading gravel roads, sanding and salting roads, plowing, and removing dead trees as needed. Road conversions are on hold for the winter months. Several highway garage issues have been resolved, outstanding issues include the cold storage and exterior door of the wash bay do not close properly, louvers are opening with doors closed, and HVAC makes clicking noises above the breakroom. Commissioner Stringer has reached out to PCI for assistance. Stringer was assured that the issue would be taken care of. Bonar informed the Commissioners that grading the roads is ineffective when the ground is frozen. The only winter option for road maintenance is patching with gravel or limestone. This process is labor intensive, costly and temporary, the worst areas will be addressed for the time being. The primary issues affecting gravel roads during the winter include frost heaves, which means the water expands pushing gravel upward creating uneven surfaces, thaw weakening, which means as ice melts the saturated soil loses strength leading to rutting and erosion, and drainage issues, which means poor drainage causing water to pool and freeze making frost heave more severe. Attorney Ted Storer addressed the Commissioners concerning an IDEM issue at the Highway garage. A corrective action plan is needed for the IDEM incident, including logged training for employees. The incident involved fuel in a gravel area. IDEM granted an extension through March for testing. Vendors have been notified for estimates for professional services. IDEM might also be asked to visit the site for clarification on the scope of what is required. Commissioner Stringer requested a corrective action plan, so the issue does not happen again. Bids were received for a track loader. Bonar explained that an additional upgrade was offered to the highway department. Bonar felt the upgrade would be beneficial for his department. Attorney Storer clarified that the Commissioners could accept the least or best bid amount. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the Bobcat bid with the additional upgrade for a total trade/purchase price of \$10,611.92. Motion carried 3-0.

**Highway Engineer:** Nate Whitacre updated the Commissioners on current and future projects. Sealed bids were opened publicly on February 19<sup>th</sup> for Bridge 65, CCMG 2024-02. The lowest bid was Duncan Robertson for \$612,161.00 which was below the Engineer's estimate of \$831,252.80. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve and sign the Duncan Robertson bid paperwork, notice of award, and the notice to proceed paperwork for the bid amount of \$612,161.00. Motion carried 3-0. An LPA consulting contract was presented to the Commissioners for the durable paving markings security grant. The contract is with Burgess & Niple, Inc. for a not to exceed amount of \$109,100. The contract is for project design. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael

Vanover to approve the LPA contract with Burgess & Niple for \$109,100 for project design. Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre presented an unofficial detour for SR 124. The work is anticipated to begin as early as fall 2025. The unofficial detour will be from CR 100 E to CR 300 N to SR 116 to SR 124. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve and sign the unofficial detour for SR 124. Motion carried 3-0. One utility permit and one right-of-way were presented for Commissioner approval. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve the utility permit and right-of-way. Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre received a noise complaint for the area of US 224 and CR 100 W. A new signalized intersection on US 224 is causing increased noise because of trucks using engine breaks to slow for the intersection. He discussed the issue with INDOT, and the options presented were to enact a county noise ordinance and/or place signs in the area for breaking excessively. Discussed was if enforcement would be done if an ordinance was created. Commissioner Stringer will discuss the issue with Sheriff Holliday regarding enforcement options. Whitacre also requested permission to negotiate small ROW purchases. In some instances, an additional ROW is needed to replace the structure. An upcoming CCMG might be an instance for this. There is a threshold that needs to have an appraisal, Whitacre feels the instances that he anticipates would fall below the threshold. The Commissioners suggested reaching out to Attorney Storer in those instances.

**Economic Development Update:** Jessica Beste, Economic Development Director, updated the Commissioners regarding January to current economic development happenings. There have been 29 Northeast Indiana leads, of which most were not exclusive to our area. Wells County has a better tax environment, but Beste feels the other locations might have better incentives. Beste suggested a round table discussion to brainstorm for new ideas. Commissioner Stringer suggested creating a spreadsheet listing each project and reasons for not getting the project to build an informational database. There are two expansion projects in the works, of which more information will be released soon. A BR&E (Business, Retention and Expansion) day is scheduled, as well as a lunch and learn, and a small-town tour for site selectors.

**Equity Protect:** Recorder Rina Stuck addressed the Commissioners regarding inserting flyers in the upcoming tax bills. The flyer informs property owners of the Equity Protect and Dox Pop programs that notify property owners of any recordings that are being completed for their properties. The only cost for the insert would be in printing, which will be absorbed by the Recorder's budget. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to allow the flyers to be inserted into the 2025 tax bills. Motion carried 3-0.

**Library Updates:** Joe McFarren presented an update of statistics for the Wells County Library. Celebrated by the library was the 409<sup>th</sup> finisher in the 1,000 books before kindergarten program. Pickup lockers located in Bluffton, Ossian, and Southern Wells High School are all being utilized. Many staff members are working toward different levels of accomplishments and serving on community and professional boards. 2024 stats were overall elevated from 2023. 54% of the potential population have a library card. Circulation material is up by 24%, eMaterial circulation is up 31%, eAudiobooks increased by 36%, eBooks increased by 25%, eMagazines increased by 178%, Hoopla increased by 45%, meeting use room is down by 11%, the study room held steady at 1%, supervised visits increased by 34%, reference questions declined by 1%, Programming attendance increased by 29%, book-a-librarian increased by 19%, notary services increased by 5%, and patron count decreased by 3%.

**Cemetery Board Appointment:** The Commissioners had requested a recommendation from the Cemetery board regarding the Commissioners next board appointment. Commissioner Gerber had a conversation with the Cemetery board president, Chris Pease, and Pease offered no recommendation.

A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to appoint Cari Whicker to the Cemetery board with the term end date of December 31, 2028. Motion carried 3-0.

**Event Permit Washington/Main Commons:** The Wells County Solid Waste Management District requested permission to use the Washington/Main Commons on Saturday, May 3, 2025, from 8:00AM – NOON for a Shred event. The time of the shredding will be from 9AM-11AM. Approval has already been given by Mayor John Whicker. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to allow use of the Washington/Main Commons on May 3, 2025, from 8:00AM-NOON for a Shred event. Motion carried 3-0.

**Contract Affirmation:** By Statute, the executive of a unit must affirm that all contracts entered into related to the provision of fire services or emergency medical services have been uploaded into Gateway. The executive may approve of the fiscal officer to submit the affirmation on their behalf. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to allow Auditor McCormick to submit the affirmation on the Commissioners behalf. Motion carried 3-0.

**Poneto Resolution:** Attorney Storer updated the Commissioners that the Town of Poneto has passed a tax sale certificate resolution on February 10, 2025, resolution 2025-01. The Commissioners equal resolution, 2025-01, was dated 2/3/2025 and recorded on 2/4/2025. The Town of Poneto can now take necessary steps to secure the deed assignment.

**Adjourned:** Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 9:57 AM, the motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber. Motion carried 3-0.

**Wells County Commissioners**

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President, Jeff Stringer

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Vice President, Michael K Vanover

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Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor