

**Wells County Commissioners**  
**Regular Session March 3, 2025**

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, March 3, 2025, 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, County Attorney Ted Storer and County Auditor Lisa McCormick. Commissioner Blake Gerber was absent.

**Minutes:** A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Jeff Stringer to not approve the minutes listed on the agenda of February 3, 2025, which were already approved at the Special Session on February 27, 2025. Motion carried 2-0.

A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the minutes from February 27, 2025, special session. Motion carried 2-0.

**Payroll and Claims:** A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve Payroll #5 in the amount of \$307,289.29 and 162 claims totaling \$342,336.33. Motion carried 2-0.

**Wells County Sheriff:** Sheriff Holliday reported 64 inmates, 13 pretrial Superior, 37 pretrial Circuit, 0 F6 DOC and 12 DOC. The Department of Homeland Security Pressure Vessel Inspector completed an inspection on 5 broilers and 3 water heaters located in the facility. The boilers had outdated permit tags attached that were not updated and registered when the boilers were updated. Also discovered was PVC pipe pressure valve plumbing to the water heater, which should be copper. Sheriff Holliday stated that all issues have been resolved.

**Wells County Highway Supervisor:** Shawn Bonar informed the Commissioners on ongoing projects. The Hoosier Highway Local Trax project will resume construction on March 10<sup>th</sup>. Paving is scheduled for early April with an estimated completion date in May. Work has begun on Bridge 106, the expected completion date is November 7, 2025. Currently highway employees are grading gravel roads, sanding and salting roads, plowing, and removing dead trees as needed. 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. Dust control sign up starts on April 1 through the 24, 2025. There is no increase in price, \$2.07 per linear foot. Bonar requested an increased limit for his credit card. Attorney Storer will have an amended resolution reflecting an increase for the March 17<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Wells County Highway Engineer:** Engineer Nate Whitacre presented an Unofficial Detour for SR3 in Markle for Commissioner review. INDOT will be performing a thin deck overlay, bridge deck overlay and bridge painting on SR 3 over the Wabash River. The work is anticipated to begin as early as Spring of 2026. The unofficial detour will be from Oak Rd. to N 300 W. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the unofficial detour for SR 3 over the Wabash River. Motion carried 2-0. An INDOT LPA contract for the construction phase for Bridge 54 has been sent to Commissioner President Jeff Stringer via DocuSign for his signature. Whitacre would like the document to be tabled and reviewed further during the March 17<sup>th</sup> meeting. He had some questions for INDOT concerning the project. Whitacre will reach out to INDOT for clarification before proceeding. Whitacre received an INDOT letter for Bridge 72 outlining alternative options for funding. INDOT is looking for responses back to the letter informing INDOT if Wells County could or would capture more of the funding responsibilities, such as an increased county match amount, fully funding the PE phase, etc.

Wells County could also respond back that there will be no increased participation and keep the responsibility the same. Whitacre will reach out to INDOT for more information, INDOT would like a response by March 12, 2025.

**Public Defender Contract:** Judge Kiracofe addressed the Commissioners regarding a wage increase for three public defenders. Public Defenders are paid out of the Commissioners budget. The increase requested is based on an increase made at the state level. Kiracofe requested an increase of \$5,000 annually for each public defender paid out of the Commissioners’ budget. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve of a \$5,000 annual wage increase for each of the three public defenders. Motion carried 2-0. Judge Kiracofe also introduced the idea of creating a board allowing Wells County to become a Commission County for Public Defenders. The board would be created via an Ordinance. Judge Kiracofe stated that the Ordinance created would allow for the formation of a three-person committee. From there the path to move forward or remain the same will be determined. Judge Kiracofe requested to be on the Commissioner’s agenda March 17th to request the creation of the Ordinance.

**Council on Aging:** Betsy Collier, Council on Aging Executive Director, presented the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2024 claim for reimbursement, the claim amount is \$118,443.00. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve, and allow the President to sign the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2024 reimbursement claim. Motion carried 2-0. Collier also presented a certification to allow continuation of the pass-through agreement between the Wells County Council on Aging and the Wells County Commissioners for the upcoming CY2026 Grant Application. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and allow the President to sign the pass-through agreement certification. Motion carried 2-0. Wells on Wheels is having a car show fundraiser on June 28<sup>th</sup> and would like to have a Commissioners choice prize. Collier distributed a fundraiser flyer.

**Miscellaneous:** EMA Director John Petro updated the Commissioners on his first month as EMA Director. Petro has completed 100 hours of training. His office is scanning binders and updating policies. Petro is pursuing training for Wells County department heads related to FEMA emergency events. The date of June 12, 2025, is tentatively set. More information to follow, this training will be the month of June’s department head meeting.

**Adjourned:** Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 5:57 PM, motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Jeff Stringer. Motion carried 2-0.

**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