

**Wells County Commissioners**  
**Regular Session April 7, 2025**

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday April 7, 2025, 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 March 17, 2025, regular session. Motion carried 3-0.

**Payroll and Claims:** A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Payroll #7 in the amount of \$303,763.51 and 261 claims totaling \$621,640.62. Motion carried 3-0.

**Wells County Sheriff:** Sherriff Holliday reported 63 inmates, 18 pretrial Superior, 41 pretrial Circuit, 1 F6 DOC and 2 DOC. Holliday updated the Commissioners on a cast iron pipe failure within the walls of the kitchen and possibly jail area of the building. Salas Obrien is looking into the issue. Sheriff Holliday stated that his main priority is the kitchen area. Commissioner Stringer would like a plan for newer pipes tied into the jail. Once Salas Obrien has a recommendation, a bid package will be developed, advertised, and distributed to vendors.

**Walker Hughes:** Walker Hughes Agent, Dan Lipp, presented a renewal proposal for County liability insurance. Selective Insurance, increasing 12.5% to \$118,871 annually, covers the property and Inland Marine items. Bliss McKnight, increasing 11.4% to \$253,362 annually, covers multiclass liability, wrongful acts, and commercial auto. The proposed rate for cyber increases 1% to \$14,999.85 annually. The total premium for all policies effective 5/1/2025-5/1/2026 is \$387,232.85 which is up 11.3% overall. Increased deductibles were introduced for collision coverage and property deductible coverage. Increasing the collision to \$2,500 from the current \$1,000 would reduce the annual premium by \$6,593. Increasing the property deductible to \$50,000 from \$25,000 would reduce the annual premium by \$11,538. The Commissioners tabled further discussion until the April 21<sup>st</sup> meeting.

**Highway Supervisor:** The Commissioners were updated on ongoing projects. Ditch work, prepping stone roads, and tree removal are current projects for highway workers. Dust control sign-up ends April 28. An update on the Local Trax project included erosion issues that were identified and corrected, the open graded asphalt layer has been applied, INDOT introduced a new asphalt design which added a \$14,403.19 change order to the project, added two pipes to the two end check dams for water flow. The estimated completion date is May 16, 2025. Work on the old Hoosier Highway will begin upon completion. Bridge 51 is near completion, the expected date the road will open is May 1, 2025. Bridge 106 has been delayed due to high water. The project is still on schedule with an estimated completion date of November 7, 2025. The wash bay man door is not closing, louvers are opening with all doors closed, HVAC is making clicking noises above the breakroom ceiling from the VAV's, and water still enters under some of the overhead doors. A Resolution was presented to the Commissioners amending and restating Resolution 2012-1 to increase the credit card limit to \$5,000 for the Highway Supervisor. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Resolution 2025-02 which increases the credit card limit to \$5,000 for the Highway Supervisor. Motion carried 3-0. An RFQ for a riding lawn mower was on the agenda, Shawn requested moving it to the April 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. The Highway Annual report was also on the agenda, Shawn stated that he had not looked at it and requested moving that item to the April 21<sup>st</sup> agenda. Three rights-of-way documents were presented to

the Commissioners for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to accept, and sign the three rights-of-way documents. Motion carried 3-0.

**Highway Engineer:** Three utility permits were presented to the Commissioners for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover, to accept and sign the three utility permits. Motion carried 3-0. Engineer Whitacre updated the Commissioners on projects. The Right of Way certification letter was sent to INDOT. CCMG 2025-1 Meridian Road will have bid opening on April 14<sup>th</sup> with the results disclosed at the April 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. Field work has begun on the pavement markings project. The site plan for CR 500W is near completion. A Resolution was presented to the Commissioners amending and restating Resolution 2016-03 to increase the credit card limit to \$5,000 for the Highway Engineer. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Resolution 2025-03 which increases the credit card limit to \$5,000 for the Highway Engineer. Motion carried 3-0.

**Public Defender Board:** Judge Kiracofe revisited the Commissioners regarding the creation of an Ordinance to create a Public Defender Board. A Public Defender board, by statute, consists of a Commissioner appointee, a judicial appointee, and a member from the Indiana Commission of Court-Appointed Attorneys. The mission of the board would be to determine if the program would be viable. Losing local control was the major hesitancy from the Commissioners. The subject was taken under advisement until the April 21<sup>st</sup> meeting for further discussion and possible legal review.

**Community Corrections Grant:** Director Blake Poindexter presented the 2026 Community Corrections Plan and Grant Application Letter of approval for Commissioner signatures. Poindexter represented that the Community Corrections Advisory Board had worked on and approved the 2026 Plan and Application Letter. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve, and sign the 2026 Community Corrections Grant letter of approval. Motion carried 3-0.

**Regional Sewer District:** RSD board members Ryan Lefeld and Lewis Brown with district Attorney Mark Burry addressed the Commissioners regarding a funding request. The presentation outlined the history of the RSD including completed projects in Murray, Liberty Center, Craigville, and Kingsland. Ryan Lefeld discussed the economic impact of the sewer improvements in Craigville, Murray, and Kingsland. The next project they would like to complete is Tocsin. 117 residences would connect to the sewer system with an estimated cost of \$4.8 million dollars. The RSD hopes to get \$2 million in grant funds for the Tocsin project. They felt the possibility of grant approval was greatly increased with community involvement. Matching funding from Wells County of \$200,000 was the proposed request. The Commissioners will take the proposal under advisement and revisit at a future meeting.

**Building System Controls:** Custodian Bobbie Studebaker presented a quote for a building control system retrofit for the Courthouse. She had asked three vendors for proposals, two of which could not accommodate the retrofit. Attorney Storer indicated that the project needed to comply with the Purchasing Policy. Studebaker will advertise for quotes and return at a future meeting.

**ADA Transition Plan:** ADA Coordinator Bobbie Studebaker addressed the Commissioners regarding the third-floor restroom. It is currently not ADA accessible; it is in the jury room and the judges would like it to be ADA compliant. Studebaker had a contractor look at the area who suggested an engineer evaluate and scope out the project. The Commissioners advised her to contact the Wells County Engineer to look at the situation first. Also discussed was the annex entry door, Studebaker had pricing from one

company for replacement. Commissioner Stringer asked for confirmation that the proposal comply with the Purchasing Policy.

**City of Bluffton Fireworks Request:** Common Council member Rick Elwell made a request for funding for the annual fireworks show. Elwell has contracted with a local vendor which would allow for a bigger presentation than past firework shows. The request was for \$7,800, which is half of the total bill. Commissioner Stringer spoke of wants and needs and expressed with the current state of expenses this would be a want and was not comfortable funding it. Commissioner Gerber thought a one-year trial would be a good option. Commissioner Vanover agreed with Stringer, Vanover would contribute personally but not taxpayer funds, he stated. No motion was made.

**Murray Cemetery Restoration:** Board President Chris Pease and board member Jerri Lehman addressed the Commissioners regarding the \$50,000 that was appropriated for cemetery restorations in 2025. The Commissioners suggested the cemetery board clean up their procedure process and come back with a plan. The topic was tabled until the April 21<sup>st</sup> meeting.

**Historical Society:** The historical society board president Jim Sturgeon requested support for an America 250 celebration. The event that is being planned is named “two lights for tomorrow”. The first shots on the green at Lexington were fired on April 19, 1775. The night before, Paul Revere saw the lights in the Old North Church in Boston signifying the British movement before the Battle of Lexington and Concord. That is when he made his famous ride through the night to alert the colonists. Two lights for tomorrow will commemorate that famous ride. Sturgeon was asking that two lights be placed in the Wells County Courthouse in the highest possible window, on the north side, on the nights of April 18 and 19. The Commissioners stated that the Custodian, if made aware, would do that.

**Plaza Request:** John Fennelly requested the use of the Courthouse plaza for a protest. He would be using a 4 x 8 table, a 45-quart cooler and bull horn. The requested dates were May 4 – May 10, 2025. The Commissioners suggested the dates of May 6, 7, and 8, 2025.

**Remote Claims:** Auditor McCormick presented a quote for remote claims with our current financial system, LOW. The annual price is \$4,000 for the system and would be for all departments, reducing or eliminating paper. The auditor will pay for this system out of Auditor funds. The Commissioners were also informed of a timekeeping system proposal for all departments. Implementation costs were estimated at \$49,000, with annual maintenance costs of \$15,000. Commissioner Stringer suggested reaching out to other counties that have the system for reference.

**Adjourned:** Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 7:35PM. Motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover.

#### **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