

WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL

REGULAR SESSION April 8, 2025

The Wells County Council met in regular session on Tuesday April 8, 2025, at 7:00PM in the Wells County Carnegie Annex, 223 W Washington St., Bluffton, IN. Present at the meeting were Council members, Seth Whicker, Vicki Andrews, Steve Huggins, Todd Mahnensmith, Scott Elzey, Brandon Harnish, Brian Lambert, and County Auditor Lisa McCormick.

Minutes: A motion was made by Vicki Andrews, seconded by Steve Huggins to approve the minutes from March 4, 2025, regular session. Motion carried 7-0.

Additional Appropriations: A motion was made by Steve Huggins, seconded by Brandon Harnish to approve the Additional Appropriation request Emergency Management in the General fund. Motion carried 7-0.

A motion was made by Todd Mahnensmith, seconded by Scott Elzey to approve the Additional Appropriation request for the PHEP Cooperative Agreement Grant. Motion carried 7-0. Included in the PHEP grant is a Grant Administrator Stipend, the grant period expires June 30, 2025. Auditor McCormick asked for clarification on how the stipend would be expended, fully by June 30, 2025, or calculated per annum. A motion was made by Seth Whicker, seconded by Vicki Andrews to calculate the stipend per annum effective April 8, 2025, and paid out until June 30, 2025. Motion carried 7-0.

A motion was made by Todd Mahnensmith, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve the Additional Appropriation request for CCMG 2024-02 Bridge 65. Motion carried 7-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday presented monthly reports. Holliday updated the County Council 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; updates will be provided when more information is available. Sheriff Holliday presented proposed changes to the 2025 Salary Ordinance. Holliday stressed the need for competitive wages due to vacancies in both Sheriff Deputies and Jailers positions. Also emphasized was the need to implement mid-year 2025, if possible. The Sheriff's department is the lowest paid department in Wells County, "Deputies don't generally change departments for less pay" Holliday stated. Recruitment and retention are the drive for this mid-year appeal. Requests included Sheriff Deputy increase on base wage, from \$58,368 to \$65,000, Jail base wage increase from \$44,992 to \$50,103, shift differential pay for 2nd and 3rd shift of 3% over base for 2nd and 4% over base for 3rd shift, specialty pay for instructor certification and special assignments of 2% or 3% over base, offer up to 10 years in the matrix for laterals with vacation for years of service honored, corporal rank in the jail matrix for trainers, Chief Deputy and Jail Commander max salary be equal to 75% of the Sheriff's salary. The implementation cost annually equates to \$283,079, if implemented in June \$141,539.50. The County Council requested Sheriff Holliday return to the May 6th meeting for further discussion.

Purdue Extension Annual Update: Director Bill Horan and Molly Hoag presented the Purdue Extension Annual update for the County Council. Highlighted were the many programs hosted by Purdue Extension. Those programs include Farm to School which teaches preschool children in the area about seeds and sprouts, Hidden in Plain Sight is a traveling program that is designed to help teens recognize unfamiliar hazards that are in plain sight, Wells County Women in Leadership, Food Preservation and Food Safety, Matter of Balance which discusses fall prevention, Day Camps, Junior Leaders, Feeding Tomorrow's Future Today which is a backpack program, Pest Management and Safety, Farm

Management programs, Drone education, Leadership programs, Nutrition programs, and Community Engagement.

Innkeepers Tax Update: Audry Dudley updated the County Council on the Innkeepers Tax. January through December 2024 collections totaled \$88,415, a 7% decrease from 2023. January and partial February 2025 collections totaled \$8,046.08. The event marketing grant cycle is open through April 30th for Spring/Summer applicants. The Visitor Guide will be distributed by mid-April, county map brochures are available currently. Social media, such as Facebook and Instagram, target certain audiences to guide them to the tourism website. Dudley stated that 150,000 have been targeted using social media.

Coroner On-Call Rate: Coroner Cliff Thomas requested increased on-call pay for the Coroner Deputies. The current call rate is \$100 per call. Thomas suggested increasing the rate to \$150 per call, \$150 per autopsy, and \$25 per training hour, a certificate of training hours completed would need to be submitted for payment. Thomas presented a new pay sheet for submission of payroll. A motion was made by Scott Elzey, seconded by Steve Huggins to approve the on-call Deputy Coroner pay rate of \$150 per call, \$150 per autopsy, and \$25 per training hour effective April 8, 2025. Motion carried 7-0.

Interlocal Agreement for Economic Development Services: An interlocal agreement for Economic Development Services was presented to the County Council for review. The EDA agreement is between Wells County, Indiana, and the City of Bluffton, Indiana. The term of the EDA agreement shall commence on October 21, 2024, and shall end December 31, 2024, subject to automatic renewal for successive terms of ninety days each until terminated. The Economic Development Director shall remain a full-time employee of the City, while providing services for the County. The County shall pay the City quarterly for actual expenses incurred during the quarter. The City shall submit the invoices on or about March 30, June 30, September 30 and December 31 with sufficient documentation to evidence the services provided. For the County's contribution to the City's budget, the EDO shall be considered an independent contractor for the County. A motion was made by Steve Huggins, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve the Interlocal Agreement for Economic Development Services (Misc. 2025-02). Motion carried 7-0.

Supervisor Stipend: The Highway Supervisor was granted a stipend for ERC responsibilities when Wells County was without a Highway Engineer for extra duties. The Supervisor monitored an estimated 20 grants, both State and Federal, the stipend is \$27,000 annually. Wells County has since hired Nate Whitacre as the Highway Engineer. The Supervisor still has ERC duties for 5 Federal grants that the current Highway Engineer cannot monitor due to a DOT ethics restriction. Whitacre was employed by INDOT, who monitored those 5 Federal grants for Wells County. Wells County Council discussed reducing the stipend since the responsibilities have diminished significantly. A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Steve Huggins to reduce the Highway Supervisor ERC stipend to \$5,000 annually until ERC projects are complete, effective April 8, 2025. Motion carried 7-0.

2026 Budget Dates: 2026 proposed budget dates were distributed to the County Council for review. The proposed dates were August 28th for the meeting with all department heads, September 3, 9, & 10 at 6pm for additional budget workshops, the public hearing on September 2nd at 7pm, and the budget adoption on October 7th at 7pm. Council President Whicker asked that Council look at their calendars for any conflicts. The budget dates will be presented at a future meeting for further review.

Adjourned: An 8:44PM motion was made by Brian Lambert, seconded by Scott Elzey to adjourn. Motion carried 7-0.

WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL

President, Seth Whicker

Vice President, Vicki Andrews

Attest: Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor