

WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL

REGULAR SESSION May 6, 2025

The Wells County Council met in regular session Wednesday, May 6, 2025, at 7PM in the Wells County Carnegie Annex, 223 W Washington St., Bluffton, IN. Present at the meeting were: Seth Whicker, Vicki Andrews, Steve Huggins, Todd Mahnensmith, Scott Elzey, Brandon Harnish, Brian Lambert, and Auditor Lisa McCormick.

Minutes: A motion was made by Todd Mahnensmith, seconded by Brandon Harnish to approve the minutes from April 8, 2025, regular session. Motion carried 7-0.

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

Transfers: A motion was made by Vicki Andrews, seconded by Scott Elzey to approve the transfer request in the General fund for Superior Court and the Community Corrections Project Income fund. Motion carried 7-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported inmate status of 60 total, 39 pre-trial Circuit, 17 pre-trial Superior, 2 DOC, and 0 F6 DOC. Monthly reports were distributed. Solas Obrian created plans for the kitchen drainage issue for vendors to submit bids for the project. Sheriff Holliday stated that he has had two walkthroughs with vendors regarding that project. He projects that the project will be under \$50,000. A matrix proposal was presented during the April meeting, Council tabled the discussion in April for more time to process the presented information. Sheriff Holliday stressed retention and recruitment as the main objectives of the updated matrix proposal. He stated that more than half of the current jail staff has less than five years of longevity and retirement is hitting both departments hard. Seth Whicker questioned whether an increase in pay would stop the flow of retirements. Vicki Andrews spoke to Sheriff personnel who told her that the jailers have a tough job and need increased wages, Andrews was hesitant to make a mid-year adjustment on wages. Senate Bill 1 and the uncertainty of 2026 property tax reductions were troubling all the Council members. In the Sheriff's original request he had asked that the Jail Commander and Chief Deputy make 75% of the Sheriff's annual salary, he has decided not to tie that wage to the Sheriff's wage. Currently the Chief Deputy makes 65% of the Sheriff's salary and the Jail Commander makes 58% of the Sheriff's salary. Steve Huggins was agreeable to allowing shift differentials, instructor pay, special assignment pay, lateral, and corporal rank pay. Brandon Harnish asked the Sheriff what the 2026 budget would look like if the mid-year matrix adjustments were allowed. Sheriff Holliday thought that there would be no increase for 2026, likely. Harnish was not in favor of modifying the current salary ordinance for adjustments and suggested passing a resolution approving wages for 2026 so personnel could know increases were eminent. A motion was made by Steve Huggins, seconded by Scott Elzey to approve the mid-year adjustments to add shift differentials of 3% of the base for second shift and 4% of the base on third shift, specialty pay for instructor certifications and special assignments would add 2%-3% of the base, offer up to 10 years in the matrix for laterals along with vacation, and corporal rank in the jail matrix for trainers (which will increase the Shift Lieutenant and Shift Sergeant pay by \$1,000 annually). Motion carried 6-1, Brandon Harnish voted no. The County Council would like a resolution created regarding 2026 pay to be presented during the June 3rd meeting, the Sheriff could then inform of the 2026 wages during the hiring process.

BRIC Grant: Emergency Management Director John Petro submitted a statement regarding the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Grant (BRIC). Petro had previously reported to the County Council regarding this matching grant that would provide funds to develop the countywide pre-disaster mitigation plan. FEMA has recently announced a decision to shift the agency's priority from pre-disaster mitigation activities to disaster response and recovery measures exclusively. If funding had not already been received, it would not be coming. Wells County had not yet received the funds.

Letter of Financial Commitment for Radios: County Council President Seth Whicker is working with the City of Bluffton regarding grant funding for emergency radio updates. The local match originally was 25% but has been modified to be a 50% local match. The updates for the radios will cost approximately \$1,000,000, of which the City of Bluffton and Wells County will split the match. Whicker will provide updates as needed.

Amended 2025 Wells County Salary Ordinance: An updated 2025 Salary Ordinance was presented to the County Council for approval. Updates to the Ordinance included: coroner on-call pay increased to \$150 per call, highway supervisor stipend decreased to \$5,000 annually, and a Health department grant stipend for Fund #8102 was added for \$5,000 annually. The adjustments had been previously approved by the County Council. A motion was made by Scott Elzey, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve Ordinance 2025-02 Wells County Salary Ordinance. Motion carried 7-0.

Public Comment: Commissioner Stringer informed County Council that Highway Supervisor Shawn Bonar has resigned. Stringer expressed disappointment in the Highway Supervisor stipend that was reduced during the previous meeting. County Council member Brandon Harnish stated that the stipend was reduced due to a reduction in duties that the stipend was originally approved for. A discussion to increase Bonar's overall wage could have also been a possibility, Harnish added. Stringer cited a lack of communication, of which, President Whicker verified that he had indeed spoken to Bonar prior to the meeting about a change in his pay. Stringer also informed the County Council of the decision to implement a timekeeping system for all Wells County employees.

Adjourned: The 8:13PM motion was made by Vicki Andrews, seconded by Todd Mahnensmith to adjourn. Motion carried 7-0.

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President, Seth Whicker

Vice President, Vicki Andrews

Attest: Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor