

## **Wells County Commissioners**

### **Regular Session June 2, 2025**

The Wells County Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday June 2, 2025, at 5:00 PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those in attendance were Commissioners, Jeff Stringer, Michael Vanover, and Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer and County Auditor Lisa McCormick.

**Minutes:** A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve minutes from May 19, 2025, regular session. Motion carried 3-0.

**Payroll and Claims:** A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Payroll #11 in the amount of \$306,676.36 and 176 claims totaling \$776,919.98. Motion carried 3-0.

**Wells County Sheriff:** Sheriff Holliday reported 68 inmates, 18 pretrial Superior, 39 pretrial Circuit, 0 F6 and 3 DOC. Holliday gave an update about the current quote regarding the kitchen repairs. He has been working with the County Engineer for additional support on the issues. The Commissioners felt, at the May 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, that more issues might be uncovered later if cast iron had been used for electrical as well. Whitacre asked the Superior representative for his perspective of using cast iron over PVC and the idea of replacing all electrical and plumbing in lieu of the proposed repairs of just the kitchen plumbing. It is not uncommon for cast iron to have moisture issues coming from the inside to the outside, Superior stated. Superior also said that in a kitchen setting the water temperature determines if cast iron or PVC is used. A temperature of over 140 degrees suggests cast iron should be used. The industrial dishwasher runs at a temperature of 170, which is what suggested cast iron for Superior's estimate. Commissioner Stringer thought that the internal temperature of the dishwasher might be 170 but the water temperature would not be that high coming out at the end of the cycle. Stringer again suggested merging all electrical and plumbing as one job, of which Whitacre stated it would require a new bidding process. The current estimate for the kitchen repair from Superior is \$64,600. Whitacre feels PVC would be more cost effective than cast iron. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve the estimate with Superior addressing the current kitchen problem with PVC, not cast iron. Motion carried 3-0.

**Highway Engineer:** Nate Whitacre presented two utility permits for review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve two utility permits. Motion carried 3-0. CCMG 2025-1 (Meridian Road) funding has been received from INDOT, Whitacre would like to postpone starting that project until Adams Street is open to traffic, if possible. Adams Street is expected to be open by the last week of June. Bridge 71 ROW phase is complete. Whitacre had requested pricing for a patch repair on 300W. The price he received was higher than he thought it should have been. E&B Paving explained that the cost was higher because of idle equipment time, the cost was rationalized for Whitacre. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve E&B Paving to patch 300W for not to exceed price of \$26,000. Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre discussed two streets in Ossian that dead end but could be connected to a larger development. The County Commissioners have expressed interest in connecting Dyer and McNeal to the larger development. Whitacre met with Biggs, Geiger, and MLS for pricing for the connections. A not to exceed cost of \$47,000 will connect Dyer and McNeal to the larger development while also eliminating ongoing drainage issues. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the not to exceed cost of \$47,000 with Biggs Group. Motion carried 3-0. An amendment to the motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by

Michael Vanover to allow the County Engineer Whitacre to enter into an agreement with Biggs Group. Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre met with United REMC regarding excessive charges that are caused by an oversized transformer. REMC stated that they will eventually replace the 750 KVA transformer with a 225 KVA transformer. REMC will also remove the Highway from the commercial rate, placing the Highway at a general 3-phase rate. Savings for the Highway should be approximately \$1,000 per month. The north crew is working with property owners resolving complaints and working on the 800E road conversion. The south crew is doing spot repairs ahead of chip seal and helping with pipe installation in the north area. Whitacre would like to get an employee certified as a CDL instructor as it is more cost effective to have a certified instructor in house. Whitacre discussed a soil conditioner attachment that has compatibility issues with the new skid steer. The new hydraulic attachment is priced at \$13,684, with discount and trade-in the total cost for the compatible attachment is \$8,184.00. Landscaping at the Highway garage needs assistance. Two landscaping companies gave quotes, the lesser quote was \$5,000 with Outdoor Concepts. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Outdoor Concepts to do landscaping at the Highway garage for \$5,000. Motion carried 3-0.

**Heating Control System Bid Results:** Custodian Bobbie Studebaker received bid packets from two vendors for the heating control system upgrade. The bid packets were from Freije and Dilling Group. \$238,700 was the low bid from Freije, Dilling Group submitted a bid of \$285,670. The Commissioners have tabled further discussion until the June 16<sup>th</sup> meeting to look at both proposals in more detail. The Annex elevator will be repaired next week, with an inspection needed after the repair. Studebaker felt the elevator should be running within the next couple of weeks. Studebaker also discussed refurbishing the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor restroom to make it handicap accessible. She requested pricing from three local contractors with one quote received. Studebaker received pricing from C.A. Harris Construction totaling \$12,250, she will be using ADA funds for most of the project, the rest will be absorbed in the Custodians budget. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the 3<sup>rd</sup>-floor bathroom update with C.J. Harris Construction for \$12,250. Motion carried 3-0.

**Bi-County Services:** Tim Ramsey presented his annual financial update and a request for funding for Bi-County Services to the Board of Commissioners. Tim stated that Bi-County's biggest challenge is staffing and retention, staffing levels have been stable but lower than they would like. To increase and retain staff they are considering increasing the hourly pay. 69 Wells County residents are served by Bi-County. Bi-County requested a five percent increase for 2026 funding over 2025 which totals \$47,678.00. Adams County Commissioners and Council have approved the same contribution amount. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the 2026 funding of \$47,678.00 for Bi-County Services. Motion carried 3-0.

**Dossett Consulting:** An agreement to provide professional consulting services with Dossett Consulting was presented to the Commissioners for review. The service provided is for a cost allocation plan for reimbursements for indirect costs related to child services. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the professional consulting services with Dossett Consulting for a three-year term. Motion carried 3-0.

**House Enrolled Act 1509:** Attorney Storer provided a memorandum for Commissioner review regarding House Enrolled Act 1509 which outlines compliance with meeting notices and agendas concerning appointed board members. Effective July 1, 2025, all board meeting notices and agendas must provide the following information regarding each appointed officer serving on the board: the officer's name, appointing authority, and the beginning and expiration date of the officer's term of appointment. The Commissioners agreed with the contents of the memorandum and suggested distribution of the

document to all boards that have Wells County appointments to inform and give direction for the affected boards.

**Public Comment:** Bob Park, Uniondale, expressed discontent with the Norwell Road four way stop, which is located at SR 224 and 1100E. He suggested other options, such as a yellow flashing light, or a signal light. Noise is a problem with truck traffic having to stop at that intersection, he stated. He is concerned with the possibility of more stop signs being considered for the area. Commissioner Stringer indicated the State dictates SR 224.

Community Corrections Field Officer Scott Turmail, Wells Circuit Court Judge Kenton Kiracofe, and Wells Superior Court Judge Andrew Antrim addressed the Commissioners regarding the Community Corrections Advisory Board recommendation to appoint the Assistant Chief Probation Officer to serve as an Interim Director of Community Corrections for a period of 90 days. Turmail stated that the Director is not a part-time position that could be effectively carried out by someone still performing his duties in Probation, and that because Community Corrections is a 24/7 operation, he feared attention to the offenders may be diminished with the proposed plan. Scott Turmail and Judge Antrim stated that neither Community Corrections staff nor Judge Antrim, who oversees most offenders on Community Corrections, have been meaningfully consulted or involved in discussions or decisions about the transition or potential merger of Probation and Community Corrections. Commissioner Vanover read from a prepared statement regarding the Community Correction Advisory Board recommendation, emphasizing that the Commissioners had at the previous public meeting requested options be presented by the Board, not just one option. Vanover felt the recommendation regarding the Assistant Chief Probation Officer acting as Interim Director of Community Corrections would be skewed toward a potential merger with the Probation Department instead of being an objective evaluation as was initially suggested. Commissioner Vanover stated that no evidence regarding the alleged problems with Community Corrections or its Director has been presented to the Commissioners despite repeated requests. He believes it is worthwhile to appoint a new Director to see if a well-run Community Corrections program can benefit the County. He cited the cost-savings statistics for other Indiana Counties that used Community Corrections for offenders in lieu of jail and noted that two thirds of Indiana Counties maintain separate Community Corrections and Probation programs. Vanover would like specific guidelines and performance measures implemented for the Director and Community Corrections program to facilitate more oversight by the Commissioners as well as the Community Corrections Advisory Board. He would like the applications for Director to be reviewed and considered and a proposed appointment made by the Board. Judge Kiracofe responded to the statements and took issue with any assertion that there were ill motives regarding the recommendation. Judge Kiracofe believes that the Board recommendation and potential merger could result in more efficient operations, and he stated that Department of Corrections has encouraged the merger of Community Corrections with Probation for smaller counties like Wells. Commissioner Stringer joined the discussion and expressed his belief that the current recommendation includes a preconceived notion that the programs would be combined. Stringer affirmed he has stated on several occasions he wanted options, which he didn't feel were given to the Commissioners. Commissioner Gerber joined the discussion and indicated he voted in favor of the appointment of the Interim Director, but is in favor of increased transparency and accountability, however this ends up. A motion was made by Michael Vanover to reject the recommendation of the Community Corrections Advisory Board to appoint an interim director from the Probation Department for ninety days, seconded by Jeff Stringer. Motion carried 2-0-1, Commissioner Gerber abstained. The Commissioners suggested the Advisory Board come back on June 16<sup>th</sup> with additional options for the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Stringer and Commissioner Vanover are against an interim director appointed from within the Probation Department.

**Adjourned:** Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 7:12PM. 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