

WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL

REGULAR SESSION

July 08, 2025

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

Minutes: A motion was made by Todd Mahnensmith, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve the minutes from June 3, 2025, regular session. Motion carried 7-0.

Additional Appropriations: A motion was made by Todd Mahnensmith, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve the Additional Appropriation request in the General Fund for Circuit Court. Motion carried 7-0. A motion was made by Vicki Andrews, seconded by Brandon Harnish to approve the Additional Appropriation request in the General Fund for Emergency Management. Motion carried 7-0. A motion was made by Steve Huggins, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve the Additional Appropriation request in the LIT – Correction/Rehab Facility Fund. Motion carried 7-0. A motion was made by Scott Elzey, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve the Additional Appropriation request in the Citizens Against Drug Abuse (CADA) Fund. Motion carried 7-0. A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve the Additional Appropriation request in the Wells County CASA Grant Fund. Motion carried 7-0.

Transfers: A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Steve Huggins, to approve the transfer request in the General Fund for Commissioners. Motion carried 7-0. A motion was made by Scott Elzey, seconded by Brandon Harnish to approve the transfer request in LIT Economic Development. Motion carried 7-0.

CADA Annual Report: CADA President Heather Baumgartner presented the 2025 grant distributions for Citizens Against Drug Abuse (CADA). Funds for the grants are collected through the “Drug Free Community Fund”; a total of \$20,733.86 was collected in 2024 for distribution in 2025. Total grant requests for the 2025 period were \$22,131.45. The grants are divided into four categories: Administration, Education/Prevention, Treatment/Intervention, and Judicial. \$5,183.45 being distributed for Other/Admin, \$5,183.47 being distributed to Education/Prevention, \$5,183.47 being distributed to Treatment/Intervention, and \$5,183.47 being distributed to Judicial. Heather Baumgartner requested use of Opioid Funds for additional CADA grant funding of \$4,054.89. The County Council will review the request during the August 5th meeting.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 63 inmates, 25 pretrial Superior, 34 pretrial Circuit, 0 F6 DOC and 4 DOC. The monthly Officer/Jail report for June was presented to Council Members. The Commissary Report was distributed for the period of January through June 2025. A Resolution to support a future compensation schedule for the Sheriff’s office was presented to the County Council for consideration. The resolution states that to continue to support the Wells County Sheriff’s Department, the County Council desires to identify its intentions for compensation of the department for 2026. Effective January 1, 2026, the County Council intends, as part of the budgeting process, to approve the recommended compensation increases for the Sheriffs department subject to and conditioned upon County Councils ongoing obligations for fiscal responsibility and any unforeseen circumstances that may

impact the proposed revenue or budget of Wells County for 2026. A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Steve Huggins to approve Resolution 2025-05 which supports the future compensation schedule for the Sheriff's office. Motion carried 7-0. Sheriff Holliday also reported that Deputy Andrew Gerz will be Northern Wells School District SRO for the 2025-2026 school year.

Veterans Office: Veterans Officer Dewey Randall presented an updated job description for the Veterans Officer. Randall stated that the updated job description expands duties and expectations. A motion was made by Brian Lambert, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve the amended job description for the Veterans Officer. Motion carried 7-0.

Opioid Settlement Funds: Prosecutor Colin Andrews and Council member Brandon Harnish addressed the County Council regarding Opioid Settlement funds, both restricted and unrestricted. Andrews, a board member of the Wells County Local Judicial Reinvestment Advisory Council (JRAC) stated that the JRAC board voted in favor of support of Wells County to consider the Wells County Foundation Project as a potential use of a portion of the Opioid funds. The current list of projects are within the city limits. The Opioid funds, if approved, would provide financial support to the land trust under the umbrella of using a more economic development approach for long term drug abuse with more community space that would elevate the community as a deterrent. Harnish stated that to justify the use of Opioid funds, the funds would be tied to blighted buildings and law enforcement documents confirming drug activity. Urban blight and flop housing would be diminished, which would lower the crime rate and the cost of crime to those areas. Scott Elzey asked where the displaced would go? Harnish stated that rising tide lifts all boats and decreasing blighted areas will decrease illegal activity and positively influence the people within those areas. Andy Yergler stated that people died for this funding to be available, families need this money. Local agencies that deal with addiction and treatment could use additional funding, Yergler stated. Yergler listed not for profits that could benefit and qualify for Opioid funds, such as, the Boys and Girls Club, Hannah's House, Helping Hands, Community Care, Grace and Mercy, Breanna's Hope, and Hope Family Recovery.

Wells County Foundation Revitalization Project: The Wells County Foundation has created a nonprofit, the Wells County Land Trust, to restore historic downtown properties, expand housing, support small business growth and break the cycle of long-term blight. The Trust was formed to acquire properties and reinvest locally, ensuring growth and success of downtown. The Trust anticipates partnering with PAGO USA in an advisory and management capacity for the Trust. Council member Brandon Harnish addressed the County Council regarding partnering with the Wells County Foundation through a \$1M line of credit earning 5% interest for the purpose of capitalizing the Land Trust which would acquire Bluffton real estate assets for the purpose of revitalization and addressing underutilization and blighted areas. PAGO USA excels at acquiring tax credits and grants, the fees for PAGO are for that purpose. Also proposed was a partnership with the City of Bluffton to split the \$180,000 PAGO USA advisory annual fee, of which the County portion would be paid out of the Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund. When the Wells County Foundation establishes a firm financial commitment a decision can then be made to determine the position for Wells County. Seth Whicker stated that Wells County is not competing with the private sector. John Stauffer felt the conversations that are happening should be taken to the public for more input.

Data Pit Stop: Darren Bates addressed the County Council regarding recent legislative changes. Bates discussed Homestead credit changes, agricultural base rate changes, Over 65 and Disabled Deduction, and Business Personal Property changes. LIT changes that will be effective in 2028, introduce separate, stacked LIT rates of 1.2% for Cities or Towns with a population of 3500. Counties will also have a

maximum LIT rate of 1.2%. Bates stated that Wells County, to keep the current amount of LIT funding, could adopt a rate of .8%. For counties with a Property Tax Relief rate of .5% or below, Bates is recommending eliminating that rate. Bates suggested Wells County put that rate into LIT EMS for assistance for EMS for the next two years. Wells County LIT PTRC is .14%, which amounts to \$1,273,368 annually. Currently there are LIT buckets, the buckets will be eliminated, and the County Council will have to budget those obligated expenses within the new LIT Fund. Revenue growth for counties will be dependent on Local Income Tax increases. Seth Whicker suggested that council members think about redistribution of the LIT credits to be discussed at the August meeting.

2026 Budgets: The 2026 Budget worksheets, Council General Fund, the Cumulative Capital Development Fund, the Rainy Day Fund, the LIT Correction/Rehab Facility Fund, the LIT Dedicated to PSAP Fund, and the LIT Dedicated to EMS Fund, were presented to the County Council for review. Council President Seth Whicker compiled the data for the worksheets. A motion was made by Vicki Andrews, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve the 2026 budget worksheets as presented. Motion carried 7-0.

Adjourned: A 9:07 PM motion was made by Steve Huggins, 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