

WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARINGS & REGULAR SESSION
September 2, 2025

Wells County Council held Public Hearing(s) and a Regular Session on Tuesday, September 2, 2025, at 7PM in the Wells County Carnegie Annex meeting room, 223 W Washington St., Bluffton, IN. Present at the meeting were: Seth Whicker, Vicki Andrews, Todd Mahnensmith, Steve Huggins, Scott Elzey, Brian Lambert, Brandon Harnish, and Auditor Lisa McCormick.

PUBLIC HEARING:
Local Income Tax Ordinance

Wells County Council held a public hearing regarding the proposed Ordinance for Local Income Tax imposed within Wells County. The proposed Ordinance for Local Income Tax will be readvertised due to a clerical error, the public hearing will be rescheduled for October 7, 2025.

PUBLIC HEARING:
2026 Budgets

Public Hearing on Rock Creek Conservancy: The 2026 Rock Creek Conservancy advertised budget estimate is \$92,250.

Public Hearing on Wells County Solid Waste District: The 2026 Wells County Solid Waste District advertised budget estimate is \$278,219.

Public Hearing on Wells County Budget: The 2026 Wells County advertised budget estimate is \$26,924,891.

Council President Seth Whicker opened the floor for public comment, there were no public comments, the Public Hearing was closed.

REGULAR SESSION

Minutes: A motion was made by Brian Lambert, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve the minutes from August 5, 2025, regular session, August 25, 2025, executive session. Motion carried 7-0.

Additional Appropriations: A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Steve Huggins to approve the additional appropriations for the Supp Adult Probation Svc, Sup Juvenile Probation Svc, and 2019 Court Interpreter Grant. Motion carried 7-0.

A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve an additional appropriation in the Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency fund. Motion carried 6-1.

Transfer: A motion was made by Vicki Andrews, seconded by Brandon Harnish to approve the transfer in the Highway Maintenance & Repair fund. Motion carried 7-0.

Library Update: Sarah MacNeill presented updates on statistics for the Wells County Public Library. Registered in the Summer Reading Program this year there were 1,464 children, 281 teens, and 588 adults. Infants (birth to 24 months) completed 1512 activities, children (age 2 to 6th grade) read 489,420 minutes, teens read 711,309 pages, and adults read 1,399,918 pages. Stats are above last year's numbers for circulation, study rooms, and meeting rooms. The library was able to donate 116 books to Kate's Kart, those books get distributed through the local Emergency Room. Tuesday, October 11th is

the start of the Children's Book Festival. MacNeill thanked the Wells County Foundation through the Virginia Gene Neuenschwander Youth Fund, The Wabash Endowment, Local School PTO's, Gay Saunders, and the Friends of the Library for their support with program funding.

Assessor Budget Review: Laura Roberts presented the Assessor general fund budget request of \$142,984, the Reassessment Fund budget request of \$300,461, and the Sales Disclosure Fee Fund request of \$4,900. A 3% increase in wages was requested.

Economic Development: Economic Development Director Jessica Beste updated the County Council on new business and job numbers. 350 new employment opportunities and 66 million in capital investment has been brought into our community. Palmer Donovan has recently located in the Adams Street spec building. 15% of students are enrolled in trades classes, which she would like to see expanded. Conversations are being held regarding a post-secondary learning exploratory school. The talks center around if Wells county could support that type of school. An immediate need, in her opinion, are shovel ready sites for new business construction. Healthcare and childcare are concerns, she stated.

2026 Proposed 911 Budget: E911 Director Mike Miller presented the 2026 911 budget for the City of Bluffton. Following the interlocal agreement the proposed 911 budget has been approved by the budget committee and the 911 board. The budget total is \$1,405,747.30 for 2026. A motion was made by Steve Huggins, seconded by Todd Mahnensmith to approve the 2026 911 budget with the City of Bluffton. Motion carried 7-0.

Town of Ossian Developers Project: Josh Barkley representing the Town of Ossian spoke to the County Council regarding a 5.4 million redevelopment project in Ossian. This property is part of an Economic Development project; the Town of Ossian would like to be included in the same type of agreement that was passed during the Commissioner meeting with the Bluffton Land Trust.

Ordinance 2025-07 Modifying Local Income Tax Rates for Wells County: Due to a clerical error Ordinance 2025-07 will have to be readvertised. The error was an omission of the Certified Share existing LIT rate and Proposed LIT rate. There are no changes to the Certified Share rate. The proposed LIT Notice To Taxpayers will eliminate the remaining .14 property tax credits, redirecting .07 of the credits into PSAP and the remaining .07 credits into EMS services. Each credit has a value of \$90,954.87. The .07 credits into LIT PSAP and LIT EMS would total \$636,684.09 for each allocation. A motion was made by Scott Elzey, seconded by Vicki Andrews to readvertise Ordinance 2025-07 Modifying Local Income Tax Rates for Wells County with the Certified Share existing and proposed rates entered at 1%. Motion carried 7-0.

Joint Resolution Approving a Loan of Funds: Brandon Harnish, Seth Whicker, and Stephen Pastore, on behalf of Wells County Revitalization and Wells County Foundation, spoke to the County Council regarding a loan of funds to the Bluffton Land Trust. The requested funds will be used to acquire and develop blighted real estate in Bluffton. 29.8% of the current second floor space and 26.8% of third floor space in downtown buildings are unused or unusable. There is risk in doing nothing, which is likely that these buildings will deteriorate further, was stated. All purchased buildings will be brought back to a historical state, which allows historical tax credits to be applied. The trust will request funds from the line of credit for the purchase of specific properties. Those specific properties will be mortgaged to Wells County. A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve the Joint

Resolution 2025-08 approving a loan of funds to the Bluffton Land Trust LLC for Economic Development. Motion carried 6-1.

Resolution 2025-09 Adopting the ADA Coordinator and Procedures: A resolution of the Wells County Council to adopt the Americans with Disabilities Act ADA coordinator and procedures was presented for Council review. Highway Engineer Nate Whitacre alerted Attorney Storer that the current ADA documents needed updating. Attorney Storer prepared the resolution for County Council for further compliance with ADA policies. Bobbie Studebaker is designated as the ADA Coordinator for Wells County. The Wells County ADA Grievance Procedure was attached to the Resolution. A motion was made by Vicki Andrews, seconded by Steve Huggins to approve Resolution 2025-09 adopting the Americans with Disabilities Act ADA Coordinator and Procedures. Motion carried 7-0.

Adjourned: 8:30 PM motion was made by Scott Elzey, seconded by Vicki Andrews to adjourn. Motion carried 7-0.

WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL

President, Seth Whicker

Vice President, Vicki Andrews

Attest: Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor