

ROLL CALL

Vicki Andrews	Michael Karafin
Thomas Mulkey	Geoff Lance
Tyson Brooks	Tim Rohr
Rick Elwell	John Schuhmacher
	Melissa Woodworth
Bill Horan	

Michael Lautzenheiser, Jr., Director
Tim Sipe, Attorney

On October 2, 2025, Tyson Brooks called the meeting of the Area Plan Commission to order at 7:00 pm, and ten members were present for a roll call. Jarrod Hahn was not in attendance. Thomas Mulkey was serving as an alternate for Harry Baumgartner, Jr.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Tim Rohr moved to approve the minutes with changes from the September 4, 2025, meeting. Vicki Andrews seconded the motion, which carried 10-0.

OLD ITEMS:

A 25-06-08 JEFFERSON TWP. NE/4 21-28N-12E Hillcrest Development Corporation requests approval for a proposed Gas Station and Convenience Store. The property is located at the NW corner of SR 1 & Wood Creek Drive, Ossian, IN 46777, and is currently zoned B-3.

Michael Lautzenheiser talked about the new continuance request from the petitioner. He said this was the last time it could continue. He asked the board for permission to place a new sign at the site with the continued meeting information. The board was ok with the additional sign to replace the old sign.

Motion to continue to the November 6th meeting: Tim Rohr

Second: Bill Horan

Vote: 10-0

NEW ITEMS:

Tyson Brooks took a moment to review the board and meeting protocol before reviewing the following items.

A 25-10-19 LANCASTER TWP. NE/4 21-27N-12E. Marlin L. Valentine & Carol E. Valentine, and Parkview Health Systems, Inc., request approval for a rezoning to B-3. The property is located at 2750 N SR 1, Bluffton, IN 46714, and is currently zoned A-1.

Jack Bentz with Beers Mallers, Kevin Shultz with Parkview, Mark Reinhard with Engineering Resources, the Valentines, and Rick Jonloz, the property manager, were at the meeting for the petition review and presentation. Mr. Bentz explained the rezoning request and the medical needs in the area, noting that Parkview believes it could fill that void. He said the timing is currently undetermined, but they seem to have the community's support. Mr. Bentz explained how the rezoning request followed the comprehensive plan. There was discussion about plans and the project's early analysis phase. There was a community support discussion about the

needs analysis, which showed a need for more physicians and services in the area. There was additional discussion on the timeline.

Tyson Brooks opened the floor for public comment. Diane Snyder said they are preparing to sell their property near this location and asked whether there are any plans to expand across the street. She also noted her support of the rezoning. Julie Thompson, Chief Administrator at Bluffton Regional, gave a recap of the area's clinics. She felt that adding another medical group would dilute care availability in the region and fracture healthcare in our community. She said that Bluffton Regional is a long-term provider in the community and that she hoped the board would support them and that the property would not be rezoned. The public comment portion was closed.

Tyson Brooks recapped the questions given to the board during the public comment period. Jack Bentz said that they do not plan to cross SR 1. He also mentioned Parkview, which is already in the community and has its medical office up and running. He mentioned Parkview still feels that the community wants its services in the area. There was talk of the city possibly annexing in the future. Michael Lautzenheiser explained that the current use, as long as it remains active, would comply even with the zoning change. The board reviewed the motions that are allowed.

Motion to send a Do Pass Recommendation to Commissioners: Bill Horan

Second: Melissa Woodworth

Vote: 10-0

A 25-10-20 ROCK CREEK TWP. SW/4 16-27N-11E Fisher McAfee Farm, LLC. requests approval for a proposed CFO project including two 41'8" x 428' Layer Barns, one 64' x 160' Manure Barn, Cooler 56' x 70', Generator and Well Building 18' x 38', and four Feeder Bins. The property is located at 3599 W 300 N, Bluffton, IN 46714, and is currently zoned A-1.

Krista Markley, Kami Fey, Bob Bixler, and Mark Reinhard presented the petition. Mrs. Markley explained the site layout and reviewed the project points. She described the steps to reduce odor at the abatement points. She mentioned the items of concern from the Plat Committee review and how they were addressed before this meeting. There was a discussion of the birds' timeline in the barns and the differences between layers and broilers. Mr. Reinhard reviewed the property's drainage. There was a board discussion on Tier 1 vs Tier 2 odor abatement levels and the PAAQL that created those tiers. There was a review of the barn protocols for different scenarios, the truck traffic, and the barn fans. Mr. Bixler explained the water usage for the barns.

Tyson Brooks opened the floor for public comment, but asked everyone to please be mindful of time so others could speak as well. Bart Sesler reviewed the number of CFOs in the county. He wondered about wastewater and if there was a catastrophic loss plan in place. He expressed concern about drinking water and issues he believed would arise on his small farm if this were approved. Jerry Meyer and Steve Clark passed when called to speak. Zach Dobson voiced his strong support for the project and explained that they were trying to support their families by building this CFO operation. Tyler George handed out papers to the board and letters from his doctors explaining his eye disease. He explained that he has to get eye injections monthly and will need them for the rest of his life. He asked the board to consider how this would affect his health and future and to please vote no.

Jennifer Fisher said this is industrial farming on generational farmland. She asked why CFOs were getting pushed through when IDEM found issues. She mentioned a fire chief who was unaware of how dangerous these barns could be. Mrs. Fisher said that we need to preserve the land. Emily Lenard voiced concern about groundwater and shallow wells in the area. She also mentioned concerns over the large scale of the project. She said that state regulations were only effective if they were enforced. She asked that we help protect all in Rock Creek Township and the farmland. Ms. Lenard said to delay until all studies are completed. Dusty Deckard noted that the bird flu risk spread rapidly. He said to protect all who breathe the air and drink the water. He asked how this benefits Wells County.

Todd Williams mentioned that we need to look closely, as the negatives far outweigh the benefits. He wondered about points and how there should be an option for negative points. Mr. Williams said that this project needs to quit being compared to the Herr farm and operation. He said that the board has a moral obligation to protect those around them and can choose to protect the county. He voiced concern about the setbacks and mentioned those who home-schooled and took online college courses. Mrs. Williams mentioned the poultry manure piles and the number of dead birds around the property. Mr. Williams submitted a petition with signatures from those opposed to this project. Kristi George said she was there to advocate for her son, who had spoken earlier. She asked the board to consider the health of all those in Rock Creek. Jimmy McAfee raised concerns about property values, manure storage, and the water table. He also asked why they are building here and not where they live. Bruce Herr said he wasn't planning to speak, but since he was called out earlier, he would. He said that his CFO collects 50,000 eggs a day, and gave a recap of the water used. He said they have been in operation for 31 years, stating that good operations stay in business. There was a discussion on how barns are regulated and how there are very few bad operations left. He said that he lives on the property where his barns are located and that he walks to work. He also talked about the winery they have on the property next to the barns. Mr. Herr said that we need to support our local farmers. These are family farms, not factories; agriculture is his passion. He also mentioned false accusations against CFOs and a letter to IDEM stating that someone from the opposition would burn down the proposed barns. Steve Clark said that he supports this development and lives 2 miles from the project. He said that there are smells with any animal. He said you don't knowingly put up something that would harm you. He said they will be held to high standards, and if there are issues with the water source, it usually falls to the barn to make it right. He said that if you are unsure about a project before the meeting, reach out to the one building, ask another facility, or contact the farmer before complaining about their project. Mr. Clark, they are doing everything they can to address odor concerns to please the community. Lyndal Frane said that everyone else covered her concerns, but asked about the future and if there would be more barns. Frank Gaier said his concerns were mentioned, but he wanted a guarantee on his well since it's only 19' deep. Bob Park said he was a concerned citizen who wasn't for or against the project. He voiced his concerns and asked about a study on the water tables and on county roads. Chris Cosar was opposed to the project. He wondered about inspections and how much of the revenue would go towards the community. He also asked where the eggs went and said that everyone tends to put profit ahead of others' health and compassion. Mr. Brooks asked if anyone who wished to speak had a chance. Blake Johnson with Wells County Farm Bureau said they support projects that meet current requirements. He asked that the board vote not on emotion but on the set rules established by the ordinance. The public comment portion was closed.

Tyson Brooks reviewed the list of concerns and questions. The board reviewed the manure storage and hauling. No points are being given as the manure is being sold as a commodity.

Trent Markley explained the IDEM application for dry litter. Bob Bixler explained the mass casualty plan in place, the different audits and checks the barns undergo, and the timelines for those procedures. He also talked about cleaning waste, since there will be minimal waste since no egg washing will take place on site. There was a conversation about manure usage and how it will be used up. There was a board discussion about water tables and IDEM vs. DNR. Setbacks for the project and the mentioned public place were confirmed earlier and remain beyond the required setback minimum. There was a discussion on wells and who was responsible. They also discussed all the weekly and daily inspections the barn will have. The future expansion was discussed, and Mr. Bixler said that Berne Hatchery would have only 2 barns on one property. The board discussed air quality testing, the logs to be kept, and PPE. Mr. Markley said that fire departments have fire training once a year and tour CFOs. Becky Yoder with the IN State Poultry Association said that if a complaint is made to IDEM, there are no warnings before they come to the site for an inspection. Tim Sipe gave a review and stated that the state laws, ordinances, and laws in place are up to code. There was a discussion about whether this petition meets the ordinance requirements. They also discussed whether they could limit where manure was spread; it was said that neighbors need to talk to neighbors. A motion was made, and additional information was added. A final motion was made.

Michael Lautzenheiser reviewed the 30-day appeal process.

Recommendation and not required: Contact Tyler George if spreading around his home.

Condition: Recorded Commitment for maintaining points throughout the project. Drainage Board approval

Motion to Approve with Condition and Recommendation: Bill Horan

Second: Geoff Lance

Vote: 10-0

OTHER BUSINESS:

V2023-021: Rodger Watson, 7666 S 200 E, Bluffton (Junk Accumulation)

Michael Lautzenheiser gave an update on the property. He suggested another 90 days. There was a board discussion about sending a letter giving 90 days and warning of possible legal action if significant improvements weren't made.

Motion to continue to the January 8th meeting: Tim Rohr

Second: Rick Elwell

Vote: 9-1 (Geoff Lance)

WELLS COUNTY VISION 2035 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PROGRESS:

Michael Lautzenheiser gave an update on the master plan update.

REVITALIZATION & TRAILS UPDATES

Michael Lautzenheiser gave an update on the SR 124 Trail, signage at launch sites along the river, and the erosion control discussion along River Road.

HOUSING STUDY UPDATE

Michael Lautzenheiser mentioned the NE IN new housing funds available for certain projects in cities with a population of 5,000 or more.

ADVISORY:

The October 14, 2025, special meeting of the Wells County Area Plan Commission, to be held at the 4-H Expo Building, was confirmed. Also confirmed was the November 6, 2025, meeting.

ADJOURN:

John Schuhmacher moved to adjourn the meeting, which Melissa Woodworth seconded. The motion carried 10-0. The Area Plan Commission meeting was adjourned on October 2, 2025, at 10:32 pm.


Tyson Brooks, President

ATTEST:


Michael Lautzenheiser, Jr., Secretary