

Wells County Commissioners

Public Hearing & Regular Session November 3, 2025

The Wells County Commissioners met in a public hearing and regular session on Monday, November 3, 2025, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Present at the meeting were Commissioners, Jeff Stringer, Michael Vanover, Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer, and Auditor Lisa McCormick.

Public Hearing

A public hearing was held regarding a petition filed by Brian Fennig and Michelle Fennig with the Board of Commissioners of Wells County, Indiana to vacate a portion of Water Street, Main Street and Wabash Street, and Alley No. 8, all part of the Plat of New Lancaster, now Murray. After the public hearing, the Wells County Commissioners may, by ordinance, grant the petition and the proposed vacation. Attorney Tony Crowell and petitioner Brian Fennig were in attendance and spoke on behalf of the petition. County Attorney Ted Storer stated that there was no written objection or remonstrances to the petition. Attorney Storer asked the petitioner if the vacated alley would hinder growth or orderly development in the neighborhood, hinder access to land, church, schools, or other public buildings or places, or if it would hinder the use of a public way by the neighborhood in which it is located or to which it is contiguous. Fennig stated that the vacation would not hinder in any way. There were no public comments, the public hearing was closed.

Regular Session

Minutes: A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve the minutes from October 20, 2025, regular session. Motion carried 3-0.

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Payroll #22 in the amount of \$301,277.11 and 157 claims totaling \$581,532.95. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 58 inmates, 17 pretrial Superior, 26 pretrial Circuit, 1 F6 DOC and 11 DOC. Sheriff Holliday emailed the 2025 jail inspection report to the Commissioners, no issues were reported. The kitchen repairs are 99% complete and back in operation. Some tile work is the only remaining labor to be completed. A semi damaged a light pole in the west parking lot; the Sheriff has contacted our insurance carrier for the claim.

Wells County Highway Supervisor: Two rights-of-way were presented to the Commissioners for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the two rights-of-way. Motion carried 3-0. Requests for bids for an asphalt distributor were advertised. One bid was received from Southeastern Equipment Company at a price of \$362,605.00. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the purchase of the asphalt distributor from Southeastern Equipment Company for \$362,605. Motion carried 3-0.

Highway Engineer: Nate Whitacre presented an Unofficial Detour for SR 3 bridge over Prairie Creek, .02 miles north of SR 18. SR 3 will be closed to replace the bridge; work began on July 7, 2025. The unofficial detour will utilize Wells CR 1200S between N 100W and N 100E. INDOT agrees to reimburse Wells County for costs related to damages on the listed unofficial detour. Attorney Storer questioned

the need for the unofficial detour; the bridge replacement is in process. Whitacre explained that for INDOT to do any needed repairs, this document is necessary. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the unofficial detour for SR3 pending Attorney Storer's review. Motion carried 3-0. The CCMG 2026-01, River Road over Bill's Creek, application has been submitted. Bridge 54, rights-of-way are being cleared today, the road closure is estimated for 260 calendar days and will begin when the SR3 project is complete. The road opened last week for Bridge 65 replacement. Three rights-of-way were presented to the Commissioners for their approval from Area Plan. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the three rights-of-way contingent on landowners' signatures. Motion carried 3-0.

Ordinance to Vacate: A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Ordinance 2025-13, an ordinance vacating a portion of a platted public way in the town of Lancaster, now known as Murray, Wells County, Indiana. Motion carried 3-0.

Insurance Update and Introduction: Brandon Wright, President of the Wright Insurance Company, assumed the broker responsibilities for Wells County on November 1, 2025. He stated that he has received 3 out of the 4 policies from current carriers with Wells County, he is expecting the fourth policy to arrive within the week. Wright will provide quarterly updates to the Commissioners moving forward.

PHP: A renewal for health coverage was presented to the Commissioners with PHP. The PHP proposal included a 9% premium increase for the current plan which also included \$63,500 wellness credit on the first billing of 2026. Claims are currently at 110% of premiums and climbing. PHP had alternate plan proposals which would increase deductibles while lowering premium. Principal Vision, Dental and Life plans have a 0% increase for 2026. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the renewal with a 9% increase with PHP and keep the deductibles as they are currently. Motion carried 3-0.

Cyclical Reassessment Contract: Assessor Laura Roberts presented the Nexis Group Cyclical Reassessment Contract for assessment years 2027-2030 for Commissioner review. Nexis was the only contract received by Roberts and submitted to the Commissioners. The four-year contract price for Nexis services is \$500,000. Attorney Storer requested the Commissioners to check box 45, guaranteed most favorable terms prior to signing the contract. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve and sign the Nexis Cyclical Reassessment Contract for assessment years 2027-2030. Motion carried 3-0.

Rezoning Request: Michael Lautzenheiser Jr. came before the Commissioners regarding a rezoning request from Marlin L and Carol E Valentine along with Parkview Health Systems for 2750 N SR 1. The requested change is from an Agriculture 1 zoned district to a Business 3 zoned district. Lautzenheiser requested the rezoning be continued until the November 17th Commissioner meeting. The discussion will be continued on November 17th.

Library Update: Library board member, Joe McFarren updated the Commissioners on library activities. Stats through the 3rd quarter were - card holders are up 440 for the year, circulation of physical material is at 80% of last year, electronic material is at 73% of last year, study room use is at 81%, book-a-librarian reservation are at 88% of last year's numbers. Fall reading program numbers are at 75% for children, adult and teen reading programs at 80% and 77% respectively. The children's book festival was a huge success with 1,400 attendees. The programs are made possible through generous donations

from Virginia Gene Neuenschwander, Gay Saunder, The Wells County Foundation, Wabash Endowment Fund and the Friends of the Library.

1100 N: Dave Dickes, 6698 E 1100 N, Chris Nuttle, 4737 E 1100 N, and Steve Heckber, 4605 E 1100 N, addressed the Commissioners regarding converting 1100N from gravel to chip and seal. Three property owners have declined to sign right-of-way documents that are necessary for conversions, 100% participation is required. Stringer stressed that the right-of-way process allows the road to be structured completely and safely. The property owners who have declined to sign have been contacted, with no response. Commissioner Stringer will reach out to the property owners again and urge a conversation.

Make My Move: Wells County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Erin Prible addressed the Commissioners regarding Make My Move. In November of 2024, the Commissioners approved a two-year \$15,000 agreement with Make My Move. Make My Move incentivizes workers to relocate into an area to bolster local economy. Since inception no workers have relocated to Wells County. Prible provided stats showing 151 remote worker applications have been received, 14 offers extended with no accepted offers. In person workers have submitted 344 applications with 0 offers extended. Prible stated that Make My Move feels like a large investment with little return. Prible added that she would rather see those funds used to incentivize Wells County students to stay in the area. Commissioner Stringer stated that a conversation with Ben Ledo, Make My Move, included the offer that Wells County would get back its initial investment if not fulfilling the duration of the agreement. The Commissioners thanked Prible for her hard work.

AEP: The AEP easement acquisition was tabled until the November 17th meeting.

Regional Sewer District: A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to release \$200,000 in funding previously committed to the Regional Sewer District for the Tocsin project. Motion carried 3-0.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:17PM. The motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Jeff Stringer

Vice President, Michael Vanover

Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor