

Wells County Commissioners

Regular Session November 17, 2025

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday November 17, 2025, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. In attendance were Commissioners, Jeff Stringer, Michael Vanover, Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer and County Auditor Lisa McCormick.

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

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Payroll #23 in the amount of \$292,266.91 and 199 claims totaling \$687,229.25. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 56 inmates, 20 pretrial Superior, 27 pretrial Circuit, 1 F6 DOC and 4 DOC. The Sheriff is working with insurance regarding the parking lot light claim.

Wells County Highway Supervisor: Supervisor Witt updated the Commissioners on current projects. County Home Road had a prefinal review, and the contract will stay open until spring to monitor striping damage over the winter. Grading and widening have been continuing for the Meridian Road conversion. The highway is coordinating with property owners to remove trees and replace pipes. The Cintas agreement will be continued until the December 1st meeting. Witt discussed getting two additional lifts for the highway, a larger lift will be able to lift a loaded truck if needed. An open position for a mechanic is being advertised, Commissioner Stringer asked if there were any certifications needed for the open position, regarding the highway being a fleet shop for all Wells County vehicles and warranties. Witt will investigate the matter.

Highway Engineer: Four utility permits were presented to the Commissioners for approval, AEP, Citizens and two Frontier. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the four utility permits. Motion carried 3-0. Nate Whitacre updated the Commissioners on ongoing projects. The annual bid package has been sent to the newspapers to run on November 20th and 27th. Bid opening will be held at the Highway Garage conference room on December 5th at 1pm. The low bidder for Bridge 71 was Duncan Robertson, the bid was below the engineers' estimate. Rights-of-way are being cleared for Bridge 54, this project will start when SR 3 is reopened.

Council on Aging: Betsy Collier presented the 3rd Quarter 2025 claim for reimbursement. The claim amount is \$100,552.00. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve, and allow the President to sign the 3rd Quarter 2025 claim. Motion carried 3-0. Commissioner Stringer asked Collier about educational events, Collier will email the calendar but felt the events were on the Council on Aging Facebook page.

Jefferson Township Fire Protection: The Jefferson Township Trustee, AJ Springer addressed the Commissioners regarding township fire protection. Currently the township has an agreement with Ossian for fire protection for the township. Springer would like to be out of that arrangement, with the help of the Commissioners, by creating a fire district. Attorney Storer referenced a calendar of events to create a fire district, which could take at least a two-year window to accomplish. Commissioner Stringer suggested working it out with Ossian.

State Road 1 Rezoning: Bluffton Regional Chief Administrative Officer, Julie Thompson, spoke to the Commissioners regarding the rezoning petition for SR1 that is being considered. She referenced Bluffton Regional's longevity in the community and feels that the rezoning for another health facility will reduce the availability of staff and diluted care for both facilities.

Zoning Ordinance Amendment: Mike Lautzenheiser Jr. presented an APC unanimous recommended do pass amendment to the Wells County Zoning Ordinance. The requested zoning changes were from Agricultural-1 Zoned District to a Business-3 Zoned District. 17 acres located at 2750 N SR 1 is the proposed rezoning. Attorney Jack Bentz addressed the Commissioners regarding the rezoning. Bentz stated that the vision for the property would most likely be for medical offices, not emergency services. Commissioner Stringer and Commissioner Gerber questioned why a development plan was not included in the petition. Bentz stated that zoning is a prerequisite to the development plan and purchase agreement. Tom Trent, Parkview asset strategy office, offered the option of a restrictive covenant, which would list specific uses for the property. A motion was made by Michael Vanover to approve the rezoning ordinance as presented; there was not a second to his motion. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to continue with a restrictive covenant to be included with the rezoning petition. Motion carried 3-0. Commissioner Gerber will review a restrictive covenant with Parkview and Attorney Storer to be presented at the December 1st meeting.

Rescue Vehicles: Wells County has purchased rescue vehicles for Bluffton, Liberty Center, and Ossian. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to suspend the purchase of rescue vehicles. Motion carried 3-0.

Employee Health Premium: Current health premiums for County Employees are: Single - \$51.00/month, Emp. + Child(ren) - \$155.00/month, Emp. + Spouse - \$200.00/month, and Family - \$309.00/month. Commissioner Gerber stressed that if the county portion of premiums continue to increase, the employee portion might have to increase as well and will revisit for 2027. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to keep the current employee health premiums for 2026. Motion carried 3-0.

AEP/I&M Easement Acquisition: Attorney Storer is researching the acquisition and will report back with findings.

Drug Screening: Commissioner Stringer addressed drug screens for all employees. Three screening options exist for employers: general screening, sick leave screening, and incident or accident screening. Currently random screenings are only used for safety sensitive positions. Attorney Storer will research and give options. Storer additionally mentioned that a comprehensive review of the handbook might be in order. Commissioner Stringer will gather a committee to delve into the handbook policies.

Travel Reimbursement: The Commissioners discussed travel reimbursement, claims for mileage reimbursement have not been filed in a timely manner. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber that any travel reimbursement should be filed monthly or forfeit reimbursement. Motion carried 3-0.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:20PM, the motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Jeff Stringer

Vice President, Michael K Vanover

Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor