

Wells County Commissioners

Regular Session December 15, 2025

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday December 15, 2025, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those 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 December 1, 2025, regular session. Motion carried 3-0.

Payroll And Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Payroll #25 in the amount of \$297,032.29 and 297 claims totaling \$2,114,015.79. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Commissioner Stringer reported 63 inmates, 33 Pretrial Circuit, 20 Pretrial Superior, 9 DOC and 0 F6 DOC. AJ Campbell has been appointed to the Animal Control Task Force.

Wells County Highway Supervisor: Matt Witt reported that winter operations were active over the weekend with two rounds completed on December 13th and 14th. Milder weather is forecast, no foreseeable operations in the near future. As the weather allows, highway workers are placing stone and grading to build up the base for the Meridian Road conversion. Witt is working on a uniform allowance policy and a strategic purchasing plan for vehicles and equipment. More updates will be presented in the future. Witt is conducting interviews for the open mechanic position. Five rights-of-way were presented to the Commissioners for review. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve and sign the five rights-of-way. Motion carried 3-0.

Highway Engineer: Eight utility permits from Brightspeed were presented to the Commissioners for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover, to approve the eight utility permits. Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre proposed presenting a permit proposal for work in the right-of-way at the January 5th meeting. Commissioner Stringer was in favor of a proposal implementing fees, he stated it will then match the surrounding county policies. Whitacre presented an on-call engineering services agreement with USI. This agreement would be used for Bridge 41 repairs, compiling bid documents, among other services. The agreement is effective through December 31, 2030, with a not to exceed amount of \$50,000. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve and sign the on-call services agreement with USI Consultants (Misc. 2025-05). Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre presented a summary of annual bids that were opened on December 5th at 1PM at the Highway garage. Bituminous, Stone/Aggregate, Bituminous Material Liquid, Fuel, Aluminum Box Culverts, Precast Concrete Arch Structures and Boxes, Steel Bridge Packages, Bridge Decking Products, Treated Timber Bridge Products, Steel Pipe Products, & Misc. Pipe and Fittings, Misc. guardrail posts, rails, ends, fittings & hardware, and hourly rates for on-call services. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover, to accept all bids, using the most economical pricing depending on the job location and availability, excluding the hourly rates for on-call services. Motion carried 3-0. Bridge 54 is in process and on schedule.

Veterans Service Officer: Dewey Randall came before the Commissioners stating his retirement, effective December 31, 2025. In attendance were George Thomas, Commander of the American Legion, and Joe McFarren. George Thomas recommended the commissioners appoint Joe McFarren as the new

Veterans Service Officer effective January 1, 2026. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to appoint Joe McFarren as Veterans Service Officer. Motion carried 3-0. Randall also expressed a need for his services to carry forward into the new year for one month of training for the new officer. The Commissioners agreed to the request; County Council will have to approve the rate of pay and funding.

Zoning Ordinance Amendment: Michael Lautzenheiser Jr. presented a vote 6-4, do pass recommendation for an ordinance amendment to the Wells County Zoning Ordinance regarding solar development. The proposed amendment(s) were to create new general regulation for small & structure-mounted solar energy facilities, remove medium solar energy facilities, amend non-participating pre-existing residence and non-participating property setbacks for large solar energy facilities, amend the visual buffer requirement for large solar energy facilities, and update solar energy facility definitions to use acreage instead of nameplate power rating which differs between classifications. The Commissioners will take the proposed ordinance amendment under advisement until the January 5th meeting.

Poka-Bache Task Force Impact Report: Michael Lautzenheiser Jr. updated the Commissioners on the Poka-Bache Connector Trail. The goal of the trail is to connect Pokagon State Park near Angola down to Ouabache State Park near Bluffton. The purpose of the trail is to promote Economic development and tourism, recreation, health and wellness, and transportation. When complete, the trail will provide 82 miles of connectivity. Funding has been possible with grants, state and local funding, and donations.

Indiana GIO Seed Grant: Michael Lautzenheiser Jr. requested permission to apply for an Indiana GIO seed grant. This grant will support our GIS data, Abonmarche will be the consultant, making suggestions and necessary changes to keep our data up to date and compliant. The grant period effective dates are January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026, with a maximum grant award of \$30,000. Lautzenheiser stated that there were no matching funds required. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the request for a grant application and have President Stringer sign the approval. Motion carried 3-0.

Civic Plus Contact: The civic plus contract was tabled until January 5th.

Cemetery Board: Cemetery board member Bill Dowty submitted a letter of resignation from the cemetery board as of December 8, 2025. Dowty's term expires on December 31, 2029. The Commissioners thanked Dowty for his service. The Commissioners will advertise for that board appointment.

Public Comment: Lindsay Hammond, the Northeast representative for the Office of Community and Rural Affairs, addressed the Commissioners on how OCRA benefits the community. The community block program, Indiana main street program, provide aid to communities with Community Development, connectivity programs, among others. Hammond represents 17 Northeast Indiana counties; she provided contact information to the Commissioners.

Michael Vanover expressed gratitude and thankfulness for the community regarding a fire at his father's home. If it wouldn't have been for good neighbors there would have been a different outcome.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:07PM, the motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Commissioners

President

Vice President

Member

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor