

Wells County Commissioners

Regular Session January 20, 2026

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Tuesday January 20, 2026, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Physically in attendance were Commissioners, Michael Vanover, and Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer and County Auditor Lisa McCormick. Commissioner Jeff Stringer participated in the meeting by electronic means of communication, Zoom, which allowed Stringer to simultaneously attend and observe the meeting. All votes taken during the meeting were taken by roll call vote.

Minutes: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the minutes from January 5, 2026, regular session, and January 8, 2026, executive session. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve Payroll #2 in the amount of \$328,402.01 and 274 claims totaling \$786,955.04. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 51 inmates, 15 pretrial Superior, 27 pretrial Circuit, 1 F6 DOC and 8 DOC. The 2025 Wells County Jail report and Courthouse Security statistics for 2025 were distributed for Commissioner review. Holliday discussed disposing of the security equipment no longer in use. He will investigate options for disposal. Cast iron pipe issues have been developing in the jail. Holliday will work with vendors for a plan. Digital outputs for the current generator need updated, the state fire inspector noted the issue on the inspection. Holliday will investigate pricing and find a solution.

Highway Supervisor: Matt Witt presented a highway uniform and personal protective equipment policy for Commissioner review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the uniform and personal protective equipment policy for the highway department (Misc. 2026-02). Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. The highway had winter operations on January 15, 16, and 20th. They have cleared brush away from approximately 62 bridges. Bid specs will be published on January 22nd and 29th for a force feed loader. New and/or used equipment is being advertised for those bids. Witt is interested in additional lifts for his department and will be seeking quotes. Two rights-of-way were presented to the Commissioners for review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the two rights-of-way. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Highway Engineer: Nate Whitacre presented two utility permits for Commissioner approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the two utility permits, one from Craigville Telephone and one from Citizens Telephone. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Whitacre presented an Unofficial detour for US 224 estimated to begin as early as spring 2027. The unofficial detour will be CR 600E to CR 500N to CR 800E. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. The Durable Pavement Markings bids were opened last week; the bids were over budget. Whitacre reached out to INDOT and INDOT agreed to maintain 90/10 funding split, even over the engineers' estimate. Five bridge locations were found to have deficiencies during the 2025 inspections. Whitacre sent out RFQ's for the five locations and will open quotes at the highway department on February 5, 2026, at 1pm. Bridge 54 is in process and on schedule.

Workers Compensation Renewal: The Wright Insurance Company presented an updated Workers Compensation Renewal to the Commissioners. The effective date of the policy is 02/01/2026-02/01/2027. One proposal was offered from Indiana Public Employers' Plan for \$84,931. Brandon Wright stated that the increase in premium is due to the amount of workers compensation claims that have been incurred from 2/1/2025 to present. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to accept the Indiana Public Employers' Plan proposal for \$84,931 and bind coverage. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Wells County Behavior and Resource Center: Neil Ainslie spoke to the Commissioners regarding the room they currently occupy in the Annex. The behavior and resource center had a timeline to vacate the annex room by the end of January. Commissioner Stringer stated that he has reached out to Julie Thompson regarding space within the Lutheran network. Commissioner Vanover stated that they are reaching out to find another affiliation that might be able to house them. The Commissioners don't wish to displace them but would like them to actively seek another location. Ainslie stated that they have a board meeting, at which a representative from Parkview Behavioral could potentially be in attendance. Ainslie asked if the Behavior and Resource Center would still be able to have a page on the Wells County website, of which, the Commissioners did not see that as a roadblock.

2026 Huntington Library Appointment: The Huntington County Commissioners approved DeLynn Johnston as their appointment to the Huntington City/Town Library Board. This is a joint appointment between the Huntington and Wells County Commissioners. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to appoint DeLynn Johnston to the Huntington City/Town Library Board. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Economic Development Resolution for a Housing Optimizer Grant: A resolution opting into the housing optimizers preconstruction grant program to support pre-development activities for housing activation was presented to the Commissioners for review. The housing optimizers preconstruction grant program is administered by the Northeast Indiana Strategic Development Commission and the Northeast Indiana Regional Development Authority as the fiscal agent and provides sustainable financial support to cover eligible preconstruction activities. Participation in the program will enable Wells County to leverage regional funding, reduce local financial barriers and catalyze new housing activation within Wells County. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the resolution opting into the housing optimizer preconstruction grant program, Resolution 2026-02. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Code of Ordinance Update: An estimate range of \$500-\$900 was given to update the Code of Ordinance book through 2025. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the estimate provided for the S-10 Supplement for the Code of Ordinance book. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Statement of Wages and Compensation: The Commissioners received and reviewed the annual 100R report and the Summary of Receipts and Expenditures for 2025. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to accept the 100R and the Summary of Receipts and Expenditures for 2025. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Custodian Interviews: Custodian Interviews will be held during an Executive Session on Monday January 26, 2026.

ADA Coordinator: An email and application were sent to all departments for any department head or employee interested in fulfilling the ADA Coordinator duties. No response was received.

Solar Zoning Update: Attorney Storer updated the Commissioners on the ongoing review on solar. The ordinance is being reviewed individually by other political subdivisions with no scheduled timeframe for revision submissions.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 5:46PM. The motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Jeff Stringer

Vice President, Michael K Vanover

Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor