

Wells County Commissioners

Regular Session February 2, 2026

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, February 2, 2026, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Present at the meeting were Commissioners, Michael Vanover and Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer and Auditor Lisa McCormick. Commissioner Jeff Stringer was absent

Minutes: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the minutes from January 20, 2026, regular session and January 29, 2026, executive session. Motion carried 2-0.

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Payroll #3 in the amount of \$323,982.66 and 143 claims totaling \$336,224.01. Motion carried 2-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 49 inmates, 15 pretrial Superior, 27 pretrial Circuit, 1 F6 DOC and 4 DOC. Holliday reported that he has received permission from Wright Insurance Company to repair the light pole that was damaged in the parking lot last year. The generator has been tested for load capacity.

Highway Supervisor: Matt Witt updated the Commissioners on projects. Witt will be presenting INDOT/LPA agreements for Bridge 51 and Bridge 106 to extend the completion date. Winter operations were needed from January 25th through 29th, completion for one pass was 6 to 8 hours. Witt has set a meeting for February 18th with the Sheriff, dispatch, and EMA for better coordination during a weather event. Several truck repairs were needed during and after the weather event, most minor. A few more tons of salt will be budgeted for the 2027 budget cycle. Bid specs were published on January 22nd and 29th for a force feed loader.

Highway Engineer: A utility permit was presented for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Mike Vanover to approve the utility permit for Citizens Telephone. Motion carried 2-0. Deadline for quotes for bridge maintenance is February 5th. BF&S delivered the annual bridge inspection report for Wells County. The overall report card for our county bridges is good and better than the average for other Indiana counties. Bridge 54 replacement is continuing as weather allows. A permit fee and bonding exemption form was presented to the Commissioners for review. The form is to be completed by eligible utility providers or residents requesting an exemption from certain permit fees and bonding requirements for permitted work within Wells County. The exemption, if approved, shall be valid for the calendar year in which it is granted. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the permit fee and bonding exemption request form. Motion carried 2-0.

Annual Cemetery Board Update: Cemetery board members Jerri Lehman and Cari Whicker presented an update on Commissioner cemeteries. \$64,851.31 was spent on cemetery updates in 2025. The five cemeteries total approximately 1,960 memorials, of which, 407 are at Batson, 8 are at Hosier, 921 at Murray, 583 at old Bluffton, and 41 at the old farm. The board seeks to create a long-term strategic plan for the continued care of the county cemeteries.

EMA Annual Review: EMA Director John Petro provided an annual review regarding EMA. Petro outlined training hours completed, and classes taken. Petro also hosted multiple training sessions for departments from all units of government. Discussed was Petro's desire to implement a volunteer program to assist fire and law enforcement personnel with traffic control.

Build Grant Letter of Support: A letter of support for Allen county's BUILD application for Poka-Bache Visionary Trail planning was requested of the Commissioners. The grant will be for the engineering portion of the trail. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to allow the Vice-President to sign the letter of support for the BUILD application. Motion carried 2-0.

Wells County Behavior and Resource Center: Neil Ainslie stated that they are still looking for space to relocate. Attorney Storer suggested they reach out to the City of Bluffton for available space. The subject was tabled until February 17, 2026, meeting.

Resolution for Compensation: A resolution for compensation of county employees due to certain emergency conditions was presented to the Commissioners for approval. On Monday, January 26, 2026, the weather conditions constituted an emergency situation which resulted in the closing of county governmental offices. The resolution states that employees assigned to work on that day are subject to section 3.19, the Inclement Weather and Emergency Closings policy, and should be compensated according to that policy. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Resolution 2026-03 for compensation of county employees due to certain emergency conditions. Motion carried 2-0.

Washington/Main Commons Event Permit: The Wells County Solid Waste District submitted a request for a shred event on May 30, 2026, from 9-11 am. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve and sign the Washington/Main Commons event permit for May 30, 2026. Motion carried 2-0.

Custodial Appointment: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to appoint Mark Double as Custodian beginning February 7, 2026. Motion carried 2-0.

Easement: An easement and right-of-way agreement with AEP Indiana Michigan Transmission Company was presented to the Board of Commissioners for consideration. The agreement allows permanent easement and right of way for electric transmission, distribution and communication lines and appurtenant equipment and fixtures, in, on, over, under, through and across tax parcel numbers 90-08-09-100-043.000-004 and 90-08-04-300-154.000-004. AEP Indiana Michigan Transmission Company will pay the Wells County Commissioners \$15,000 for the easement and right of way. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve and allow the Vice President to sign the easement agreement document and payment schedule. Motion carried 2-0.

Miscellaneous: Commissioner Gerber spoke about an issue at the Treasurers department regarding tax payments that are mailed. If mail is deposited at an area location, that mail is not metered locally it is metered in Fort Wayne which delays the stamped date on the payments. Taxpayers were issued delinquencies on those instances. Gerber stressed mailing payments early or ask for the payment to be hand stamped locally.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 5:54PM, motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover. Motion carried 2-0.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Jeff Stringer

Vice President, Michael K Vanover

Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor