

Wells County Commissioners
Regular February 17, 2026

The Wells County Commissioners met in a regular session on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at 5:00 PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Physically present were Commissioners, Michael Vanover and Blake Gerber, County Auditor Lisa McCormick and County Attorney Ted Storer. 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 as presented from February 2, 2026, regular 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 #4 in the amount of \$349,072.42 and 227 claims totaling \$592,334.75. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Council on Aging: Betsy Collier, Council on Aging Executive Director, presented the 4th Quarter 2025 claim for reimbursement, the claim amount totals \$107,353. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve, and allow the Vice-President to sign the 4th Quarter 2025 reimbursement claim. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Collier updated the Commissioners with year-to-date stats for passenger trips, mobility device trips, vehicle miles, and revenue miles.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 47 inmates, 14 pretrial Superior, 27 pretrial Circuit, 1 F6 DOC and 4 DOC. There were no other updates reported.

Wells County Highway Supervisor: Matt Witt updated the Commissioners on recent activities in the highway department. The highway department was called out for winter operations on February 5th through the 7th. Witt is meeting with EMA, Sheriff, Dispatch, and the EMS Director on February 18th to set up coordination and outreach procedures for future weather events. Force Feed loader quotes were presented to the Commissioners for review. Witt requested quotes for new or used equipment, two bids were received. Brandeis Machinery & Supply Company supplied a quote on a new force feed loader for \$292,415.84, additional options were not included in the base price. Ayers Machinery Co. supplied a quote for a 2024 used force feed loader for \$249,900. Witt recommended the used loader from Ayers Machinery, noting that it already included the options not included in the Brandeis quote. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the quote from Ayers Machinery for \$249,900. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. A mobile lift quote was presented to the Commissioners. The quote from Gasoline Equipment Petroleum Contractors is for two rotary mobile columns delivered and installed for a cost of \$28,029.00. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and allow Witt to sign the job quote for the mobile lift pair. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Five rights-of-way were presented to the Commissioners for review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the five 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 LA Brown and one from Citizens Telephone. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Whitacre requested approval for an INDOT/LPA CN agreement for the Durable Pavement Markings grant. The document will

be provided to the Commissioner President via Docusign. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and allow the President to sign the INDOT/LPA CN agreement for the Durable Pavement Markings grant. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Presented to the Commissioners was a request to apply for the Community Crossings Matching Grant for 2026, pending SB 179 being passed allowing additional funding. Whitacre would like to advertise for bids to be ready. A title sheet was presented for Commissioner signatures. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the advertising and sign the title sheet. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Quotes for bridge maintenance for five bridges were received. R.L. McCoy, Pioneer, and Duncan Robertson submitted quotes with Pioneer being the lowest quote for all five bridges. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the low quote from Pioneer for the five bridge projects. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Old Hoosier Highway has been divided into two segments, the Commissioners had asked for suggestions regarding the renaming of the two segments. Suggested was North Cignetti Way (from CR 200S to the Railroad tracks) and South Cignetti Way (from CR 300S to the Railroad tracks). A motion was made by Jeff Stringer, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve North Cignetti Way and South Cignetti Way as the new road names. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Bridge 54 is moving forward and on schedule.

Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan: EMA Director John Petro submitted a professional services proposal for the Wells County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan update. The proposal is from Burke whose services would be to update the Wells County Multi-Hazard Mitigation plan. Burke's fee for completing the project is \$29,300, which will be billed monthly based on the percent completed for the project. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the proposal from Burke. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to allow the Vice-President to sign the Burke proposal. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Also presented was an EMA on-call assistance proposal from Burke. This proposal was to aid with assistance to help rebuild the emergency management program in Wells County. Petro did not feel that proposal was necessary for his office, no vote was taken.

Opioid Advisory Committee Recommendations: Steven Pastore representing the Opioid Advisory Committee submitted recommendations to the Commissioners regarding payouts of Opioid funds, both restricted and unrestricted. Recommended was: Grace and Mercy \$16,319 in restricted funds, Astrum Wellness \$47,000 in restricted funds, Boys and Girls Club \$49,895 in restricted funds, Hannah's House \$50,000 in restricted funds, Norwell (Crew78) \$7,500 In unrestricted funds, Renovate Counseling \$7,500 in restricted funds, Wells County Foundation \$50,000 of which \$35,00 in unrestricted funds and \$25,000 in restricted funds, Resilient House \$55,000 in restricted funds. Restricted funds totaled \$240,414 and unrestricted funds totaled \$42,500. Commissioner Stringer hesitated on the Wells County Foundation distribution; he would opt for a more controlled distribution to a direct service provider. Commissioner Vanover would like the Commissioners to be kept abreast and notified of how funds are spent. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the recommended funding requests submitted by the advisory committee. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Attorney Storer will draft a document for grant recipients to request the granted funds.

Library Updates: Joe McFarren presented an update of statistics for the Wells County Public Library. 30 children completed 1,000 books before kindergarten in 2025 totaling 41,261 books. Joe discussed accomplishments the library has seen throughout 2025 such as participation in community events, cooperating with local businesses, daycare story time visits, offered tax assistance, free lunches during school breaks, a mini golf event, and hosted many programs for all ages. 2025 stats were holding steady from 2024. 53% of the potential population have a library card. Circulation material is up by .34%,

eAudiobooks increased by 10%, eBooks decreased by 10%, eMagazines increased by 35%, Hoopla increased by 35%, the public computer use decreased by .5%, wireless connections increased by 6%, Meeting use room is up by 35%, the study room increased 6%, book-a-librarian increased by 13%, and notary services increased by 8%. Due to state legislation an estimated \$200,000 will need to be reduced from the library budget. McFarren listed digital and physical offerings that will be discontinued as well as increases in meeting room fees.

Commissioner Stringer was disconnected from zoom for the next two votes, then reconnected.

Wells County SEED Grant Professional Services Agreement: A professional services agreement was presented to the Commissioners for review. The agreement is with Abonmarche to assist Wells County with the SEED grant and improving data in GIS. The agreement is for \$30,000 which will be distributed upon receipt of funds from the IGIO SEED grant. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover, to approve the Abonmarche professional services agreement and allow the President to sign electronically. Motion carried 2-0.

Wells County Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Solar: Michael Lautzenheiser Jr. presented a 6-4 vote, do pass recommendation for an 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 submitted recommendations to the Plan Commission for modifications in the zoning ordinance amendment. Recommended modifications were that an SES facility shall be at least one thousand five hundred feet from a non-participating pre-existing residential property line, the Board of Commissioners support the requests of the Town of Ossian and City of Bluffton to permit a solar energy facility by a municipal utility, rural electric membership corporation regulated public utility, any free-standing solar array or arrays that occupy an area up to 15 acres, as measured from the outer perimeter of the solar array or arrays, total surface area of the panels shall not exceed 10 acres, and a permit shall not be required for solar panels occupying an area less than 30 feet. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the recommendations to be submitted to the plan commission for modifications. Motion carried 2-0.

Wells County Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Vanover: Michael Lautzenheiser Jr. presented a 11-0 vote, do pass recommendation for an amendment to the Wells County Zoning Ordinance for 9.77 acres in the NE/4 of 23-25N-12E to be rezoned from an Agriculture-1 Zoned District to a Business-3 Zoned District. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the zoning ordinance amendment for Vanover Farms LLC, Ordinance 2026-02. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Wells County Behavior and Resource Center: The Wells County Behavior and Resource Center did not have a representative present; the subject was tabled.

ADA Coordinator: Attorney Storer explained that an organization with more than 50 employees should have an ADA Coordinator. The position is recommended to be an employee of the organization and could be split amongst two employees.

2025 Annual Report: The 2025 Annual Report for Wells County was emailed to the Commissioners prior to the meeting for review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the submission of the 2025 Annual Report. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Association of Indiana Counties Annual Conference: The AIC conference for 2026 is being held in Fort Wayne on September 21-24. Allen, Adams, Wells, Kosciusko, Steuben, and Dekalb Counties are the host counties. Auditor McCormick requested approval for the Surveyor, Auditor, Clerk, Recorder, Assessor, and Treasurer be allowed to procure hotel accommodations during that time since there will be early mornings and late evenings due to the responsibilities of being a host county. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve hotel accommodations for participating Wells County offices on September 21-24, 2026, for the AIC Conference. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:05 PM, 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