

## Wells County Commissioners

### Regular Session March 16, 2026

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, March 16, 2026, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those 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 March 2, 2026, regular session, as presented. 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 #6 in the amount of \$325,254.18 and 227 claims totaling \$241,741.89. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

**Wells County Sheriff:** Blake Gerber reported 54 inmates, 17 pretrial Superior, 28 pretrial Circuit, 1 F6 DOC and 6 DOC.

**Wells County Highway Supervisor:** Matt Witt updated the Commissioners on current projects. A pipe was extended on CR 1200S between 100W and 200W, a headwall was formed and poured, which was a new project for his crew. Projects include grading gravel roads, ditch cleaning, bridge cleaning, and wind related work. The fence at the highway garage has been repaired and withstood the high winds in the past week. Witt and his crew are conducting vehicle inspections on May 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. Small equipment purchases include a vehicle code scanner, vehicle repair software, and an AC machine to recharge AC units in any vehicle. Three quotes were received for dump truck chassis. Stoops Freightliner – New Haven submitted a quote for \$146,413; Stoops Western Star of Michigan submitted a quote for \$147,600; and Stoops Freightliner – Indianapolis submitted a quote for \$147,825. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to accept the bid from Stoops Freightliner – New Haven with a quote of \$146,413. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Four rights-of-way were presented to the Commissioners for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve and sign the four rights-of-way. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

**Wells County Engineer:** Four utility permits were presented to the Commissioners for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the four utility permits. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Bid opening for a Community Crossing Matching Grant for 2026 will be on March 19<sup>th</sup> at 1pm at the highway garage. Bid opening for Bridge 41 repair will be on March 31<sup>st</sup> at 1pm at the highway garage. Bridge 54 is in process and on schedule.

**Community Corrections 2027 Grant:** Community Corrections Director Madison Hake presented the 2027 Community Corrections budget and the grant application letter of approval for Commissioner signatures. The Community Corrections Advisory board had approved the 2027 budget that was attached for Commissioner approval. A motion was made by Jeff Stringer, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve, and sign the 2027 Community Corrections Grant letter of approval. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

**Community Corrections Advisory Board Appointment:** Judge Andrew Antrim addressed the Commissioners regarding a vacancy for a public defender on the Community Corrections Advisory board. The advisory board recommended the appointment of Andrew Carnall to that board by the Commissioners. Commissioner Stringer questioned the size of the advisory board. Judge Antrim stated that the seat was statutorily required for the board. Attorney Storer will investigate the statute, the Commissioners suggested that Carnall complete a board application. The subject will be revisited.

**Personnel Memo:** A memo was drafted regarding vacation leave eligibility for Community Corrections Director Madison Hake. The memo granted leave eligibility consistent with employees who have met the same years-of-service requirements for Well County employees. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and sign the vacation leave eligibility memo. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

**Huntington/Wells Library Update:** David Ferguson, Sr. gave an update on the Huntington/Wells Library. Due to the newly implemented budget constraints, he felt the library was being underutilized. In his capacity as a board member, he stresses to the other board members that any work to be completed on the Library should be accomplished by local vendors, when applicable. He questioned how often the Commissioners would like to have an update, they suggested two times a year.

**Wells County Zoning Ordinance Amendment - Meadowlark:** Michael Lautzenheiser Jr. presented a 11-0 vote, do pass recommendation for an amendment to the Wells County Zoning Ordinance for 2.72 acres on US Hwy 224 west of the intersection of SR 1 and 224, to be rezoned from a Suburban-1 Residential Zoned District to a Business-3 General Business Zoned District. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the zoning ordinance amendment for Meadowlark Properties LLC, Ordinance 2026-03. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

**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 Commissioners submitted recommendations to the Plan Commission for modifications in the zoning ordinance amendment on February 17, 2026. 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. The Area Plan Director presented a zoning ordinance amendment with the requested modifications. A motion was made by Jeff Stringer, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve and sign the amendment to the Wells County Zoning Ordinance 2026-04. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

**Opioid Fund Donative Agreements:** Attorney Storer presented, to the Commissioners, agreements for services for organizations that were approved for Opioid restricted and unrestricted funds. Agreements presented were for Grace and Mercy, Astrum Wellness, Boys and Girls Club, Hannah’s House, Norwell (Crew 78), Renovate, Wells County Foundation, and Resilient House. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and allow the Vice-President to sign the agreements for services. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

**Adjourned:** Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 5:38 PM. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to adjourn. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

**Wells County Commissioners**

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President, Jeff Stringer

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Vice President, Michael K Vanover

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Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor