

## WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL

### REGULAR SESSION April 7, 2026

The Wells County Council met in regular session on Tuesday, April 7, 2026, at 7:00PM in the Wells County Carnegie Annex, 223 W Washington St., Bluffton, IN. Present at the meeting were Council members, Seth Whicker, Vicki Andrews, Steve Huggins, Todd Mahnensmith, Scott Elzey, Brandon Harnish, Brian Lambert, and County Auditor Lisa McCormick.

**Minutes:** A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Steve Huggins to approve the minutes from March 3, 2026, regular session. Motion carried 7-0.

**Additional Appropriations:** A motion was made by Todd Mahnensmith, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve the Additional Appropriation request for Coroner in the General fund. Motion carried 7-0. The Additional Appropriation request for Emergency Management in the General fund was tabled until the May 6<sup>th</sup> meeting.

A motion was made by Scott Elzey, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve the Additional Appropriation requests for the Opioid Restricted and Unrestricted funds. Motion carried 7-0.

A motion was made by Todd Mahnensmith, seconded by Vicki Andrews to approve the Additional Appropriation request for 20.205 Bridge 72 Des#2401826. Motion carried 7-0.

A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Steve Huggins to approve the Additional Appropriation request for CCMG 2025-01 Meridian Road grant fund. Motion carried 7-0.

A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve the Additional Appropriation request for the Wells County CASA grant fund. Motion carried 7-0.

**Transfers:** A motion was made by Vicki Andrews, seconded by Steve Huggins to approve the transfer request in the Commissioner budget in the General fund. Motion carried 7-0.

A motion was made by Brandon Harnish, seconded by Brian Lambert to approve the transfer request for the LIT – Economic Development fund. Motion carried 7-0.

**Wells County Sheriff:** Sheriff Holliday reported 55 inmates, 7 pretrial Superior, 28 pretrial Circuit, 0 F6 DOC and 15 DOC. Sheriff Holliday presented monthly reports, which included activity and income reports for March, the Courthouse activity report for March, and the quarterly Commissary report.

**Economic Development Update:** Economic Development Director Jessica Beste updated the County Council on new business and job numbers. Three projects are being developed in Ossian which will create new employment opportunities. Almco Steel is in the process of a new addition and should be wrapping it up this summer. Bluffton Rubber is renovating some areas and making efficiency updates to their premises. Wells County had 60 plus million in new investments last year. Beste is working with area schools trying to bridge the gap between business and education. She stated that many businesses assist with education costs for students. Post secondary education is a priority for Beste, she feels there is work to be done and avenues available to be discovered. Home development is booming and conversations are happening regarding home development. \$40,000 in grant and gift funding was received by Beste in 2025, to date in 2026 she received \$26,000 of which she is very thankful. Council member Harnish questioned Beste regarding Data Center and Carbon Capture pipeline inquiries. Beste confirmed that there have been inquiries but nothing that has required further conversation.

**Purdue Extension Annual Update:** Director Bill Horan and Molly Hoag presented the Purdue Extension Annual update for the County Council. Highlighted were the many programs hosted by Purdue Extension. Those programs include Farm to Medicine which serves individuals experiencing food insecurity and those managing chronic conditions, Connecting with Nature in which participants learn about the health impacts of nature deprivation and the benefits of time spent outdoors, Rooted and Resilient Homesteading Conference, Healthy Aging which promotes lifelong wellness through evidence-based education, Northern Indiana Animal Science Day Camp, Junior Leaders, Feeding Tomorrow's Future Today which is a backpack program, Pest Management and Safety, Mini 4-H, Youth Leadership Forum, Farm and Financial Management, Natural Resources, and Community Development. Bill also mentioned a restructuring for Purdue Extension could take place in 2027 but reiterated that the 4-H program will be left untouched.

**Innkeepers Tax Update:** Audry Dudley updated the County Council on the Innkeepers Tax. January through December 2025 collections totaled \$72,034.38, a 16% decrease from 2024. The first quarter 2026 collections totaled \$16,452.24 which is up 39% over 2025 first quarter collections. The mission of the Wells County Convention and Visitor Commission is to strengthen Wells County's visitor economy by supporting local tourism assets, promoting the county's unique attractions, and enhancing visitor experiences through strategic partnerships, marketing and community development. Due to the decrease in revenue, they budgeted conservatively for 2026. Audry attended the Indiana Tourism Association conference in Indianapolis on March 16-18. She is working on strategic marketing ideas, increasing visitor experience resources, and updated visitor maps.

**MUST:** Council President Whicker touched on an upcoming task force, the Municipal Unti Strategic Taskforce (MUST). Counties may, prior to October 1, 2026, convene a MUST made up of one county council representative and the fiscal officer of a city or town within the county. The purpose of the taskforce is to negotiate and, with agreement, establish a Local Income Tax agreement related to the county's maximum tax rates of 2.9%. Whicker will ask for discussion during the May Council meeting.

**2027 Budget Dates:** 2027 proposed budget dates were distributed to the County Council for review. The proposed dates are August 20<sup>th</sup> for the meeting with all department heads from 8-1:30, August 26 & 27 at 6pm for additional budget workshops, the public hearing on September 8<sup>th</sup> at 7pm, and the budget adoption on October 6<sup>th</sup> at 7pm. There were no objections to the dates, they are scheduled on the Annex meeting room calendar.

**Adjourned:** An 8:23 PM motion was made by Scott Elzey, seconded by Vicki Andrews to adjourn. Motion carried 7-0.

## WELLS COUNTY COUNCIL

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President, Seth Whicker

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Vice President, Vicki Andrews

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Attest: Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor