

Wells County Commissioners
Regular Session July 6, 2026

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, July 6, 2026, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Physically present at the meeting were Commissioners, Michael Vanover and Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer and 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 as presented from June 15, 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 #13 in the amount of \$328,737.50 and #14 in the amount of \$325,383.64 and 219 claims totaling \$1,090,553.26. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 50 inmates, 15 Pretrial Superior, 24 Pretrial Circuit, 0 F6 DOC and 6 DOC. Holliday reported that Superior has completed the cleanout which should help with any future issues. Previously approved at the June 15th meeting, the Sheriff presented the Southern Wells SRO agreement for signatures. Also presented for review was a memorandum of understanding between the Board of Commissioners and Norwell Community Schools (NWCS). Norwell Community Schools has hired a retired law enforcement officer, Shane Neuenschwander, as an employee of NWCS. Norwell Community Schools and the Wells County Sheriff believe that Neuenschwander's experience as a law enforcement officer will relieve some of the burden from the assigned SRO and the Wells County Sheriff at school functions. Both parties wish to have the Wells County Sheriff appoint Neuenschwander as a special deputy only for purposes necessary for the benefit of NWCS to bolster safety and security within NWCS. Neuenschwander shall complete a basic School Resource Officer training program and yearly state mandated training. All costs related to supplies and training will be absorbed by the Wells County Sheriff. The memorandum of understanding is effective through December 31, 2026. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the memorandum of understanding and allow Vice President Vanover to sign the document. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Highway Supervisor: Supervisor Witt addressed the County Commissioners regarding ongoing projects. INDOT is declining to extend the INDOT LPA contracts for the Bridge 51 and County Home Road projects. Witt is reaching out to INDOT to expedite the process to be complete by the deadline of September 30, 2026. There have been some issues with chip and seal recently. 450E, 200N, and County Home Road are the problem areas. Witt does not have an exact reason for the affected areas, but too much dust content in the stone is the likely culprit. Witt will use straight EA90 oil for the remainder of the season; AE90S is what was used and contains polymers that make the oil sensitive to dust content in the stone. The Meridian Road conversion is moving forward. The highway crews are patching roads in preparation for chip and seal. Some ag equipment and/or semi damage was located on 550S, 600E, and 700E. Discussed was an Ordinance for horse drawn vehicles. The Ordinance imposes license fees for each horse drawn buggy and horse drawn trailer in Wells County. The Ordinance will have an effective date of January 1, 2027. The proposed Ordinance will be advertised two times prior to the meeting for approval, anticipated to be during the August 17th meeting. Witt is working with Southern Wells Schools regarding an ICE student for the 26-27 school year. Witt reported damage that was caused by a highway truck to a personal vehicle when the crew was working on the road. Witt filed a claim with our

insurance carrier. The Commissioners would like to have an accountability plan and tracking of damage for any instance that occurs within the county with the county fleet.

Highway Engineer: Nate Whitacre presented four permits for Commissioner review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and sign the four permits. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Bid results were received and presented to the Commissioners for the Liberty Center paving project. E & B Paving was the lowest bid of \$146,221.05. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to award the Liberty Center paving project to E & B Paving. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Whitacre presented a speed ordinance amendment for Commissioner review. Speed studies were conducted in three locations, Elm Grove Road, 100S, and 900S. Whitacre explained that Elm Grove road is currently 30 MPH and the study concluded that it could be changed to 45 MPH. 100S and 900S did not necessitate a change per the speed study. The Commissioners expressed agreement in increasing the speed limit to 45 for Elm Grove Road and leaving 100S and 900S as it currently is. Attorney Storer will prepare the Ordinance for future Commissioner review. The Commissioners were also updated on current projects, Bridge 71 and Bridge 54.

Wells County Master Plan 2026: Michael Lautzenheiser, Jr presented a unanimous do pass recommendation to the Commissioners regarding the Wells County Master Plan 2026. Included in the proposed plan are visions and strategies for Wells County, rural areas, City of Bluffton, Town of Ossian, Town of Uniondale, Town of Vera Cruz, and the Town of Poneto. Not included in the plan is the Town of Zanesville, they completed a master plan on their own. A summary and next steps rounded out the master plan. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and sign Resolution 2026-05 adopting the Wells County Master Plan 2026. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Request for Grant Application: EMA Director John Petro introduced a potential grant prospect for a dispatch center, the FEMA FY 2026 Emergency Operations Center grant program. Commissioner Stringer suggested including plans and cost estimates for building a new dispatch center for Wells County. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to move forward with the grant application. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Plaza Request: Hunter Copeland, representing Bluffton NOW, addressed the Commissioners requesting approval to use the plaza for upcoming events. A concert was rescheduled due to weather, and Copeland requested the date of July 21st for plaza and restroom use. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to permit plaza and restroom usage on July 21st. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Also added to the Bluffton NOW schedule was an art event scheduled for August 8th requiring plaza and restroom use. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to permit plaza and restroom usage on August 8th. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Ameresco: Ameresco presented via email the Year 1 Measurement & Verification (M&V) report for Commissioner review. The report was dated February 1, 2025, through January 31, 2026. The report stated that overall, the year 1 guaranteed savings amount was \$562,369, which consisted of \$13,585 in energy savings and \$563,369 in operating cost savings. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and allow member, Blake Gerber, to sign the annual report. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Statement of Salaries and Wages: The Commissioners were presented Form 144, statement of salaries and wages for all Wells County departments for the 2027 budget cycle. Statutorily this is presented to

the Commissioners at the July meeting for review and recommendations. Any Commissioner recommendations should be presented to the county fiscal body before August 20th.

2027 Budgets: The 2027 Budget worksheets, Commissioner General Fund and LIT Economic Development, were completed by Commissioner Stringer and presented to the Board of Commissioners for review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the 2027 Commissioner and LIT Economic Development budgets as presented. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Economic Development Agreement for Services: Attorney Storer presented an agreement for services between the Wells County Economic Development Corporation (WCEDC) and the Wells County Board of Commissioners. This agreement will commence on July 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026, and shall automatically extend for successive intervals of one year following the initial term. Wells County shall retain the services of the WCEDC in an independent contractor relationship to promote, attract and retain commercial employees within the Government Unit's corporate boundaries. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and sign the Agreement for Services. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Public Comment: Ted Claghorn, Mike Bauer, Ted Sprunger, Paul Schwieterman, Kathy Bryant, Ron Beck, Michelle Engle, and Aaron Mason spoke in opposition to a proposed confined feeding operation, 4,000 head organic dairy, in rural southern Wells County.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:38PM. 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