

Wells County Commissioners
September 8, 2026
Regular Session

The Wells County Commissioners met on Tuesday, September 8, 2026, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those in attendance were Commissioners, Michael Vanover, Blake Gerber, 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 August 17, 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 #18 in the amount of \$325,200.82 and 214 claims totaling \$841,928.63. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 44 inmates, 11 pretrial Superior, 24 pretrial Circuit, 0 F6 DOC and 5 DOC. The CHIRP Grant is up for renewal; Sheriff Holliday requested an updated wage resolution to allow for double overtime while the Deputies work the grant. The CHIRP Grant is a reimbursement grant. Fear Powersport donated four generators to the Sheriffs Department, three will be used by the Emergency Management office and the fourth will remain at the Sheriffs Department.

Wells County Highway Supervisor: Matt Witt presented an INDOT/LPA contract amendment #1 for the County Home Road project, DES#1802955. The amendment provides an extension to the term to allow for the completion of the project. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer, to approve the amended contract for County Home Road to an extended completion date of June 30, 2027. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. An amended motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to allow the President to sign the amended contract for County Home Road. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Witt presented Ordinance 2026-09 for the second reading. The Ordinance would allow for licensing for each horse drawn vehicle that is operated on a highway. The Ordinance was approved during the August 17th Commissioner meeting but was being presented for the second reading. Commissioner Vanover reiterated that he would like to see a more comprehensive plan that encompasses all the issues related to road damage. He felt the message of the current Ordinance singled out one group in our community. Wheel Tax was discussed regarding agricultural road damage but cannot be addressed until 2027 for 2028 tax. Commissioners Gerber and Stringer were agreeable to pause until spring of 2027 allowing for a more comprehensive plan to be designed. A motion was made by Michael Vanover to indefinitely delay the horse drawn vehicle ordinance, seconded by Jeff Stringer. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Shoulder clipping and patching is in process, work on CR450 is complete, CR 250E work has started, and Meridian Road from 100N to 1200N will be scoped in two weeks. One right-of-way was presented to the Commissioners for approval. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the right-of-way. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Highway Engineer: Nate Whitacre presented three permits for review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the three permits. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Whitacre presented an Unofficial Detour for SR 1 over Eightmile Creek. INDOT will be performing a

small structure replacement with work anticipated to begin Spring of 2027. The unofficial detour will be 1050 N, 450 E, and 800 N. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the Unofficial Detour. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. A letter of financial commitment was presented to the Commissioners for approval. Wells County Structure 1439, CR 1000 S over Rock Creek, has functional deficiencies. Whitacre would like to apply for the next Community Crossing Grant, CCMG 2027-1, to address the deficiencies. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve and sign the letter of financial commitment for the CCMG 2027-1 application. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Whitacre addressed the Commissioners regarding the ADA Coordinator appointment that is currently vacant and agreed to accept the appointment. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the appointment of Nate Whitacre as the ADA Coordinator for the remainder of the year. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. Presented to the Commissioners was an agreement with USI to assist with ADA compliance, the agreement is for four years. The Commissioners would like three different pricing options for review and will revisit during the October 5th meeting. Pavement marking restriping is tentatively scheduled for September 14th. Bridge 71 is in process; Bridge 54 was open to traffic on August 21st. Whitacre was notified that Wells County has been awarded the FY27 Railroad Grade Crossing Fund. The Grant award is \$43,197.50. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to approve the grant award and allow the President to sign the grant agreement. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Elevator Modernization Contract Estimates: Custodian Mark Double addressed the Commissioners regarding modernization contract(s) for the County elevators. Currently there is a Maintenance Contract with OTIS, but not a modernization contract. The Commissioners would like to review during the October 5th meeting, allowing the County Attorney time to digest the material.

Variance Request: Atlee Weaver and Martin Schwartz addressed the Commissioners regarding a variance request. Schwartz was requesting a 20' setback for a fence from the center of the road. Current regulations require a 30' setback from the center of the road. The Board of Zoning Appeals allowed conditional approval, dependent on the County Commissioners approving the 20' setback. The Commissioners expressed concern about not honoring the current policy. A motion was made by Jeff Stringer, seconded by Blake Gerber to deny the variance request. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Board Appointments: Two boards have vacancies, the Cemetery Board, and the Opioid Committee Board. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to appoint Erin Prible to the Opioid Committee Board. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to appoint William Dowty to fulfill an existing term and the subsequent 5-year term for the Cemetery Board, August 8, 2026, through December 31, 2031. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Plaza Request: Hunter Copeland, representing Bluffton NOW, addressed the Commissioners requesting approval to use the Courthouse restrooms and plaza on October 3rd for a Chili Walk. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Jeff Stringer to permit plaza and restroom usage on October 3, 2026. Motion carried 3-0 by roll call vote.

Generator Funding: Approval of the purchase of a Generac generator at a cost of \$31,830 for the Annex was given on July 20, 2026. The source of funding for the generator was not specified. The Commissioners would like to revisit the topic during the October 5th meeting.

Ordinance for a Donation Fund for County General: Requests for a fund for donations to the County General fund have been received. The Commissioners directed Attorney Storer to create an Ordinance for a donative fund for County General for the October 5th meeting.

Public Comment: Steve Meyers and Mike Bower spoke about out-of-county residents living on roads that most of the residents would like to have chip and sealed, the out-of-county residents are not signing the required paperwork, hence the road cannot move forward. Witt stated that everyone is a landowner whether they live on the road or not and the current policy requires all property owners' signatures before moving forward.

Attorney Storer stated there will be a Public Hearing on October 5th if we get the petition to vacate and advertise prior to that meeting.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 6:23PM, 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 Vanover

Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor