

Wells County Commissioners
Public Hearing/Regular Session October 5, 2026

The Wells County Commissioners met in a public hearing and regular session on Monday October 5, 2026, at 5:00PM in the Commissioner's Room of the Wells County Carnegie Annex, Bluffton, IN. Those in attendance were Commissioners, Jeff Stringer, Michael Vanover, and Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer and County Auditor Lisa McCormick.

PUBLIC HEARING

Jason Willis filed a petition with the Board of Commissioners of Wells County, Indiana requesting a right-of-way vacation, to wit: Part of Rockford Addition as shown In Plat Book 2, Page 83 in the Office of the Recorder of Wells County, Indiana. All interested persons were given the opportunity to be heard in reference to matters set out in the petition. After the public hearing, the Wells County Commissioners may, by ordinance, grant the petition and the proposed vacation. Attorney Gina Eisenhut and petitioner Jason Willis were in attendance. County Attorney Ted Storer stated that there was no written objection or remonstrances to the petition. Attorney Storer asked Willis if the vacated alley would hinder growth or orderly development in the neighborhood, hinder access to lands, church, schools, or other public building or place, or if it would hinder the use of a public way by the neighborhood in which it is located or to which it is contiguous. Jason Willis stated that the vacation would not hinder in any way. There were no comments. The public hearing was closed.

Minutes: A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve the minutes from September 8, 2026, regular session. Motion carried 3-0.

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Payroll #19 in the amount of \$309,221.88 and Payroll #20 in the amount of \$321,403.74, 172 claims totaling \$1,006,585.37 and 184 claims totaling \$302,423.57. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Sheriff Holliday reported 47 inmates, 13 pretrial Superior, 25 pretrial Circuit, 0 F6 DOC and 7 DOC. A renewed Resolution for compensation of certain Sheriff employees due to a special grant was presented to the Commissioners for approval. A federal grant has been awarded to the Sheriff's department that allows Sheriff Deputies who participate in the grant to be paid double overtime in leu of time and a half. The grant period is October 1, 2026, through September 30, 2027. Attorney Storer presented a Resolution to allow for that compensation. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Resolution 2026-06 for compensation of certain sheriff employees due to the special grant at double overtime pay. Motion carried 3-0. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to waive the second reading of Resolution 2026-06. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Highway Supervisor: Matt Witt updated the Board of Commissioners on the current projects within the Highway Department. Witt presented an INDOT/LPA contract for Bridge 106 Des. #1702735. The amount to be added to the Bridge 106 project is for Construction Inspection and will not exceed \$6,805.50. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve and allow the President to sign the INDOT/LPA contract for Bridge 106. Motion carried 3-0. Witt's overview of operations included shoulder clipping and patching is in process, CR 250W is complete, 11 bridge cleanings have been completed, a Meridian Road scoping meeting was held on September 22nd, and a

CR 800E scoping meeting was held on September 29th. Also discussed was the flooding incident that occurred on September 17th. Due to the flooding, Witt discovered that additional signage and barricades are needed at the highway garage. Also discovered were residents who needed additional maintenance regarding their drive pipes and ditches, private pipes that needed updated, and tree roots were a problem in most instances. 1,400 sandbags remain in the garage. Two 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 two rights-of-way. Motion carried 3-0.

Highway Engineer: Nate Whitacre presented six permits for Commissioner review. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover, to approve the six permits. Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre presented an unofficial detour for SR 218. The unofficial detour will be CR 500 E to CR 550 S to CR 600 E. The work is anticipated to begin as early as Autumn of 2027. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the unofficial detour for SR 218. Motion carried 3-0. Witt requested quotes for a log jam removal, 100W over the Wabash River, Frauhiger was the low bid of \$7,000. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the log jam removal quote from Frauhiger of \$7,000. Whitacre reported that corrective action has been completed on the pavement marking project. The GRIP grant agreement has been signed, and Whitacre is working on the final proposal and an agreement for services from TRAINFO. Bridge 54 work is complete, and Whitacre is scheduling a pre-final walk through. Bridge 71 has complete deck steel, the deck was poured on September 30th, and approach slabs are being prepped to be poured.

Elevator Modernization Estimates & Video Camera: 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. A state inspection of the elevators found that the phones in the elevators did not pass inspection. The inspection was completed on September 23rd and Double has 60 days to repair the phones or face a daily fine. Attorney Storer needs to review the contract with Otis, so the Commissioners delayed the modernization discussion until October 19th. The City of Bluffton was awarded a grant for a projector to cast image from the attic of the Courthouse. Double has been working with the City regarding their needs for the project. The Commissioners will meet with City Officials to see what options are available.

Zoning Ordinance Amendment: Mike Lautzenheiser Jr. presented a recommended APC do pass amendment to the Wells County zoning ordinance. The requested zoning changes were from a Suburban-1 Zoned District to a Business-3 Zoned District for 1.97 acres located at 10794 N SR1, Ossian, IN. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Ordinance 2026-15 to amend the Wells County zoning ordinance and zone maps. Motion carried 3-0. Mike Lautzenheiser Jr. presented a recommended APC do pass with commitment proposed zoning amendment. The requested zoning changes were from Agriculture-1 Zoned District to an Agriculture Residential Zoned District. The commitments listed included: Limit the future major subdivision to 6 residential lots, and upon approval of the future major subdivision, the owner shall provide a visual buffer between the development and the neighboring residential property located to the southwest. The visual buffer shall be installed using the standards for a visual buffer set forth in the Wells County Zoning Ordinance. Commissioner Stringer had questions on drainage and if this petition followed the 2035 plan for housing. Lautzenheiser stated that the Wells County housing study and the 2035 plan both called out the need for residential development and to focus rural development where septic systems were available to reduce the need for septic systems. A draining plan needs to be provided as part of the project, Lautzenheiser stated. Attorney Storer explained to the Commissioners that their general obligation was to hear the petition from the Area Plan Commission. There is no obligation to vote on

the petition on the current date. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to revisit the zoning amendment during the October 19th meeting. Motion carried 3-0.

LOW Tax Request: Treasurer Pam Gregory made a request to the Commissioners to add LOW Tax Info to the Property Tax system. The add on would allow taxpayers to access their property tax information and allow easier access for payment. LOW Tax would waive the cost for the first year, years two and three would increase the annual maintenance cost by 2.5%. Attorney Storer would like this proposal to go through the contract process set out by statute and revisit the request on October 19th.

EMA Flood Update, Purchase Requests: EMA Director John Petro updated the Commissioners regarding the flooding that occurred on September 17th. Petro gave a thank you to the Highway department staff. Because of the emergency that occurred Petro became aware of deficiencies within his department. A sandbagger was borrowed from another entity for more efficient bagging. Petro brought pricing for automated sandbagging machines, pricing for additional signage (high water and road closed), cones, a trailer for the sandbagging machine and signage, and a truck to haul the trailer and use for his current job duties. A motion was made by Michael Vanover to allow for the purchase of the Rapid Fill Bagger from The Sandbag Store for \$24,850. After discussion regarding the other requested items the Commissioners thought the purchases should be decided on as a lot, Vanover rescinded his motion. The Commissioners will revisit the purchases on October 19th.

Vacating of a Platted Public Way Ordinance: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Ordinance 2026-16, an ordinance vacating a portion of a platted public way in the Rockford Additon, Wells County, Indiana. Motion carried 3-0.

Plaza Request: Katie Janssen, music therapist at Bi-County Services, requested the Courthouse plaza on October 20th from 11am – Noon for a peaceful rally of the FSSA's recent cut of Medicaid waivers. Five Bi-County customers have received denial letters with seven more pending. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve the plaza request for October 20th from 11am – Noon. Motion carried 3-0.

Ameresco: The Commissioners entered into a Guaranteed Energy Savings Contract with Ameresco for the Jail renovation. An annual saving report is required by the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF) to be submitted for each year of the project term. Ameresco handles preparation and delivery of this document to the DLGF as described in the contract. The term is 15 years. The full M&V report was approved by the Commissioners and submitted by Ameresco for 2026. The cost of the full report is \$2,000, which increases by 3% annually. The Commissioners can discontinue M&V services, Ameresco will still prepare and submit the report for \$500 annually which escalates by 3% annually. A motion was made by Jeff Stringer, seconded by Michael Vanover to discontinue M&V services and allow Blake Gerber to sign the letter of notification to Ameresco. Motion carried 3-0.

Health Department Generator: The Commissioners approved of the purchase of a generator by the Health Department for the Annex. The funding of the generator was not determined at that time. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to allow funds to come from the LIT Economic Development fund for the Generator purchase. Motion carried 3-0.

Weather Resolution: A resolution for compensation of county employees due to certain emergency conditions was presented for Commissioner review. On September 17, 2026, flooding caused some employees to be late to work. The resolution allows county officers to pay employees impacted by the

weather conditions pursuant to the Inclement weather and emergency closing policy, for their actual time missed, but only up to a total of two hours. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Resolution 2026-07 allowing for compensation of county employees due to certain emergency conditions. Motion carried 3-0.

2027 Meeting Dates: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the 2027 Board of Commissioners meeting dates as presented. Motion carried 3-0.

Wellness Plan Design: The current wellness plan design was discussed with the Commissioners. Employees on the health plan have biomarkers to assess points. Points not earned equal additional premium for the employees' portion of the monthly health premium. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the current plan design, biomarkers and funding amounts for the 2027 plan year. Motion carried 3-0.

Donation Fund Ordinance: An Ordinance creating a nonreverting Wells County Donation Fund was presented to the Commissioners for review. The fund shall be used only for community projects and endeavors for the benefit of all citizens of Wells County. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Ordinance 2026-17 creating a nonreverting Wells County Donation Fund. Motion carried 3-0. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to waive the second reading of Ordinance 2026-17. Motion carried 3-0.

Miscellaneous: Commissioner Stringer introduced the need for a Wells County Building Inspector. He would like to continue the discussion during the October 19th meeting. Attorney Storer introduced the possibility of an Ordinance to establish a fee for costs to the county for vacate petitions.

Public Comment: Morris Lewis addressed the Commissioners regarding Flock Cameras located in Wells County; he stands against Flock cameras and 24/7 surveillance.

Sandra Flum spoke regarding the proposed rezoning; she would like the number of allowable lots to be no more than 4, citing drainage concerns.

Matt Thomas would like the Commissioners to deny the proposed rezoning because of increased traffic, drainage issues, and possible septic issues that would be created.

Rachel Thomas would like the Commissioners to deny the proposed rezoning citing the reduction of agricultural land.

Vonnetta Zalac had questions regarding Flock cameras. Who authorized the cameras and what date?

The Wells County Sheriff authorized and paid for the cameras from Commissary funds, stated Attorney Storer. Was Ordinance 2022-04 followed? The issue was not brought to the Commissioners, stated Attorney Storer. Who has the final legal authority over the installation, funding, and continued operation for Wells County? Attorney Storer was not able to comment on who has legal final authority. Will there be public weigh in if more cameras are added to the County? If it is on a county road it will have public weigh in, Commissioner Stringer stated.

Commissioner Vanover would like all Flock cameras removed from Wells County.

Adjourned: A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to adjourn at 6:42PM. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Commissioners

President, Jeff Stringer

Vice President, Michael K Vanover

Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor