Wells County Commissioners

Regular Session October 19, 2026

The Wells County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday October 19, 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, Blake Gerber, County Attorney Ted Storer, and County Auditor Lisa McCormick.

Minutes: A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve the minutes from the October 5, 2026, regular session and the October 6, 2026, Special Session. Motion carried 3-0.

Payroll and Claims: A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Payroll #21 in the amount of $328,837.61 and 196 claims totaling $552,493.54. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Sheriff: Jeff Stringer reported 52 inmates, 15 pretrial Superior, 24 pretrial Circuit, 0 F6 DOC and 10 DOC.

Highway Supervisor: Highway Supervisor Matt Witt updated the Commissioners on current projects. Witt presented a Norfolk Southern 5% payment agreement for $350,206 regarding the closure of three highway-railroad grade crossings. The closure project has been completed and Norfolk Southern agrees to make the contribution directly to Wells County within 120 days after Wells County executes and INDOT consents to the letter agreement. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve and allow the President to sign the Norfolk Southern contribution agreement. Motion carried 3-0. 23.43 miles of shoulder clipping has been completed and patching is in progress. Trees are being cleared on Meridian Road from 1000N to 1200N. Quotes are being received for removal of larger trees that are beyond the highways capacity to remove safely on 800E. Witt would like to auction several pieces of equipment and parts after January 1st; he will submit a proposal for Attorney review. Bids have been published for a truck upfit, bid openings will be held on November 2, 2026.

Highway Engineer: Nate Whitacre presented updates to the Commissioners on ongoing projects. Two permits were presented to the Commissioners for approval, one from MediaCom and one from VTF. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover, to approve and sign the two permits. Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre presented an unofficial detour for SR 116. The unofficial detour will be CR E 300 N to CR N 100 E to SR 124. The work is anticipated to begin as early as Spring 2028. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the unofficial detour for SR 218. Motion carried 3-0. Whitacre presented a contract for services with TRIANFO Corp., which will allow installation of a sensor at the 700N rail crossing. The sensor will alert when a train is stopped or will be stopped on the tracks. The sensor will then talk with a solar powered beacon and sign at either end of CR 700N to convey to motorists not to take this route due to the stopped train on the tracks. The cost of the project is $63,395, of which $43,197.50 will be grant funds. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve and sign the contract for services with TRIANFO. Motion carried 3-0. Bridge 54 is awaiting pre-final inspection with INDOT. Bridge 71 approach slabs have been poured, base stone is scheduled for tomorrow, guardrail and seeding is scheduled for later this week or next.

Huntington/Wells Library Update: David Ferguson, Sr. updated the Commissioners on the Markle Library. Ferguson stated that there is a new library director, who is fitting in well. Ferguson said the

current board is well balanced. The library is a beautiful place, and he is hopeful more patrons will utilize it.

Hylant: Chris Johnson, representing Hylant, updated the Commissioners on 2027 health insurance options. The renewal presented was with PHP, he stated that other carriers were not interested. This year's loss ratio is currently 87%; PHP renewal is 6%. Johnson stated that an additional 12% in savings could be captured if Wells County went with an Options Network with PHP, which only includes the Lutheran Network. Other options for reducing costs are centered around increasing deductibles, while also increasing the health reimbursement amounts (HRA) for employees from Wells County. That change ultimately reduces the overall premium and could produce savings on the reimbursement side.

Elevator Modernization Estimates: Custodian Mark Double discussed modernization contracts with the Commissioners. A recent state inspection of the elevators found that the phones in the elevators did not pass inspection. Phone repairs will be covered in the modernization contract. Three modernization contracts were received, American Elevator for a modernization which would include the cab interior upgrade for $148,107, Americal Elevator for a modernization which would not include the cab interior upgrade for $117,167, and OTIS for a modernization cost of $144,525, with an additional $22,000 for a cab interior upgrade. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the American Elevator modernization with the cab interior upgrade for $148,107 to be paid out of the Cumulative Capital Fund. Motion carried 3-0. An amendment to the motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to allow the President to sign the modernization contract. 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 will waive the cost for the first year, years two and three will increase the annual tax maintenance cost by 2.5%. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the Addendum to the LOW Service Contract. Motion carried 3-0.

EMA Flood Update, Purchase Requests: EMA Director John Petro updated the Commissioners regarding the flooding that occurred on September 17th. Because of the emergency that occurred Petro became aware of deficiencies within his department. 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. Petro has also spoken with County Council regarding the needs of his department. County Council requested that LIT Public Safety funds be used for the purchase, but to let the Commissioners decide on the needs of the EMA office. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve the purchase from I 69 trailer sales for a Mirage Cargo Trailer for $6,900, and a Dodge Ram 250 from Premiere Truck Rental for $40,000, and the upfit for the Dodge Ram Truck for $15,000. Motion carried 3-0. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to purchase the sandbagger from the Sandbag Store for $24,850, highwater and road closed signs from Hall Signs for $1,566, and barricades from Three Rivers Barricade for $16,250, to have an written agreement for storage of the trailer and supplies with the highway, and a plan for the vehicle to keep mileage at a minimum. Motion carried 3-0. The total expense is $106,987. Commissioner Stringer would like frequent checks on the equipment to ensure good working order when it is needed.

Emergency Declaration: An emergency declaration was prepared by Attorney Storer for approval. The declaration was for a flash flooding event that occurred on September 17, 2026, that impacted 170+

homes in Wells County. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve and sign the Emergency Declaration effective September 17, 2026. Motion carried 3-0.

Zoning Ordinance Amendment: A recommended APC do pass with commitment proposed zoning amendment was presented to the Commissioners. The requested zoning changes were from Agriculture-1 Zoned District to an Agriculture Residential Zoned District for 24.38 acres on the east side of CR 300W south of CR 1100N. 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. A motion was made by Michael Vanover, seconded by Blake Gerber to approve Ordinance 2026-19 to amend the Wells County zoning ordinance and zone maps. Motion carried 3-0.

Flock Camera Discussion: Commissioner Vanover began the discussion with his stance regarding Flock cameras. His goal is to see Flock cameras removed from Wells County. Our community should be able to say no to this kind of surveillance. Better safeguards would not change Vanover's' stance on Flock, he stated, these cameras record peoples' movements and that is not a tradeoff our residents should be expected to accept. This is about public trust and the kind of community we want to be in. He feels it was a unilateral decision that should have included more input. Commissioner Stringer would like all Flock cameras removed from all of Wells County, City and private business also. Stringer said it is not just a County issue but a National issue. Commissioner Vanover said statistically retrieving stolen cars were the main closed cases with Flock cameras. Also stated, he would not like to give up his Fourth Amendment Liberties for stolen cars. Stringer agrees Flock does solve some crimes but, in his eyes, it is just public surveillance. People deserve a voice, Vanover said.

Building Inspector: Commissioner Stringer reintroduced the topic of a building inspector for Wells County. He said builders have no accountability in Wells County. An estimated $100,000 plus wage was mentioned, also including other county entities to share in the financial side. Josh Barkley said three counties in Indiana do not have a building inspector. The discussion has been ongoing for years with no resolution for Wells County, stated Barkley. A job description has already been approved for the position. Attorney Storer suggested a fee for services contract if other entities are involved or a joint board. Stringer would like to discuss it further at the November 2nd meeting.

Credit Card Resolutions: Three credit card resolutions were presented to the Commissioners for approval. The proposed resolutions are for Community Corrections with a $5,000 limit, the Health Department with a $5,000 limit, and the Sheriff with a $10,000 limit, with a standard limit of $2,500 for any one card under the account. A motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover to approve Resolution 2026-09 for Community Corrections, Resolution 2026-10 for the Health Department, and Resolution 2026-11 for the Sheriff's Department. Motion carried 3-0.

Board Appointments: Auditor McCormick supplied a list of board appointments that will be expiring on December 31, 2026. She informed them that she will be advertising the appointments in the News Banner on November 5th, 12th, and 19th as well as the Commissioner page of the website.

Public Comment: Morris Lewis addressed the Commissioners regarding Flock cameras. Lewis listed ways China monitors its citizens and thinks US citizenry is getting nudged that way. 69 officers have been charged nationwide for abusing Flock monitoring. A Facebook page titled DeFlock Wells County was created by Lewis for Wells County comments.

Jenny Collins addressed the Commissioners regarding the Feichter Family Organic CFO dairy recently approved by the Area Plan Commission. Per the pasture plan, 3,500 cows will be moved 75 feet in front of her home from pasture to barn 7,000 times a day, she estimated. With that much traffic the path is guaranteed to be bare dirt and heavy manure corridors. She addressed zoning setback issues. Zoning setbacks exist to keep high impact livestock operations a safe distance away from property lines. She is not against the CFO; she wants to ensure proper setbacks for her property, 800 feet.
Jim Isch addressed the Commissioners regarding the approved dairy operation. 520 acres are already secured but 900 are needed, he wondered why the petition was passed. He said that the truck traffic has made it hazardous for children to play. Also questioned was why a county ditch, Boyer, was moved, Attorney Storer said approval had not been given to move the ditch, it was discussed but not approved during a Drainage Board meeting.
Ted Claghorn stated that on Friday and Saturday, 600S has already had the road blocked by tankers going in and out of the area.

Adjourned: Wells County Commissioners adjourned at 7:09PM, motion was made by Blake Gerber, seconded by Michael Vanover. Motion carried 3-0.

Wells County Commissioners

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President, Jeff Stringer Vice President, Michael K Vanover

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Member, Blake Gerber

Attest: _____
Lisa McCormick, Wells County Auditor