

Benton County Commissioners Meeting

October 17th, 2023

The Benton County Commissioners met at 8:15 a.m. at the Benton County Courthouse in Fowler, IN 47944. Those in attendance were Commissioners Bryan Berry, John Fields, Mike Freeland, County Attorney, Jacob Ahler and County Auditor, Audrey Freeland.

Others in attendance were: Evan Puetz, Colin Sullivan, Kelly Wallpe, Latisha Provo, Jason Fisher, Carole Hoff, Jonathan Devers, John Cox, Brayden Ely, Jennifer Greenberg, Samantha Smith and Phyllis Zickmund

Evan Puetz – Assistant Highway Supervisor

- Plows – getting everything ready for winter
- Recycle building – cement is poured, and they have reached out to builders
- Ditches – starting to cut and have about 6-7 miles of locates
- Vehicles – Commissioner Berry said that they will provide a list of authorized individuals to them for who are the only ones who can drive them.
- Kubota – lease comes up in March. Will need to review and decide then
- Staff – Commissioner Fields asked how it was going with the open positions – slow
- CDL's – one just passed; one will test this week. Kentland site is working out well

Kelly Wallpe – 4H extension

The board welcomed Kelly.

Kelly stated that the new 4H Educator would start on November 1, and his name is Nick Vitalone.

They will be hosting a Great Leaps board meeting, the annual meeting and will award the volunteer of the year and are reviewing the 3 yr. plan review.

Jon started a quarterly newsletter for A&R. Stacey has 3 BC students who have been interning through the Health & Human Sciences and she also hosted a suicide awareness class at the theatre.

4H program is open as of October 1st.

Safe place representative, Cherilynn Mundell has accomplished for 2023, reached a total 220 students and had 125 adults. She has gotten 14 sites throughout the county and sends out newsletter.

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Jason Fisher – DHS & EMA Director

- Grants – 2 HMEP
 - \$14,000 - Commodity flow study & training – the gas meter portion was not awarded in its entirety (\$11,400). He will address this at the next LEPC mtg because he believes to cover all of them it was going to be around \$19,000
- Trees – He feels they could remove the pine tree themselves but the one next to the building will remain. The board is ok with them removing the pine tree and Budreau will come and trim up the other one touching the building
- Equipment hopefully to be received by department – something similar was used at a couple of festivals and Jason has found a support trailer for them. There is one in good condition for \$6,500. After some discussion it was approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, John Fields and motion carried. It was approved to be paid as a pay at once with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, John Fields and motion carried. It will be paid for out of 4108 and other funds within Jason's budgeted funds. Let the record show that Commissioner, Bryan Berry did not vote.
- Graphics – hoping this will be completed today and then it can go into service
- Email issues – having issues getting stuff moved to the cloud but IT is working on them
- IT room remodel grant – if there is money left once completed, they could utilize those funds for other security concerns. Jason feels that the board should consider a complete rewire. Jason suggested a meeting between the board and Vertical Horizons. The group discussed that could be an option, maybe cameras and/or window tinting
- Repayment agreement – all signatures are in place
- Back up –
- Hazmat bill – Asked if Attorney Ahler could send a letter to them. Commissioner Berry asked how Ryder was even involved, Jason is not sure. Commissioner Fields said that they are liable. A letter will be sent to attempt to get it resolved or the board will discuss shutting them down
- LEPC/EMA – grant funds and other topics discussed. Countywide replacement project is still an ongoing issue to get new/replacement radios.

John Cox – Sheriff

- Trucks – issue with those hauling from Rose Acres, this should be resolved
- Thanks – big thank you to Jason and Verizon Horizons – the IT room at the jail looks wonderful
- LOW – LOVES the live view, he feels it is one of the best things and that it allows him to really know his budget and availability of funds
- K9 – New dog should be here next month and was paid for by donations by BC Foundation and BP. Also, the prosecutors office is paying for all of the outfitting. Officer Clements and the new K9 will go to training in December
- Air upgrades at jail – still ongoing. Dust is still an issue from the tuck pointing. The sheriff is keeping track of each time he has to pay for cleaning of the new units. Talked about the split unit going in through the ARPA grant funds

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- Air ducts – Stanley Steemer is on site today
- Culligan quote – water softener needs to be purchased, and Culligan will deliver the salt and John has the funding. The purchase was approved with a motion by Commissioner, John Fields, seconded by Commissioner, Mike Freeland and motion carried.
- Jail update – looking at a long-term plan for updates/maintenance for the stainless-steel toilets and showers
- Vehicles – total loss and needs to be replaced. Officer Ely's new vehicle is in. Will be looking to sell two vehicles (Fuehrer's old K9 and Deno's service vehicle) that will help offset the additional vehicle purchase. The board agreed and Sheriff Cox will start the decommissioning process. He will reach out to Alsop's to get a replacement vehicle. The vehicle will be purchased out of wind funds with a motion by Commissioner, Bryan Berry, seconded by Commissioner, Mike Freeland and motion carried. The insurance check, the amount received from selling the two vehicles will go towards covering the extra cost. Outfitting should be covered by Sheriff Cox out of 2024 budget.
- Uniforms – need to purchase winter coats for staff and has the funds to cover them
- Report – Commissioner Fields asked if the deputy on site at the accident could send a copy of the report to him for the fire department.

Jennifer Greenberg - Clerk

Jennifer is looking for approval to purchase a couple of desks, which she has the funds for. The old ones will need to be junked as they are not sturdy. The request was approved with a motion by Commissioner, John Fields, seconded by Commissioner, Mike Freeland and motion carried.

Jennifer then asked for approval to purchase checks which are also over the purchasing limit, and she also has the funding for those as well. The request was approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland and seconded by Commissioner, John Fields and motion carried.

Colin Sullivan – BF&S

Colin wanted to drop off the new maps, binder and thumbs drives to the board. He has already delivered copies to the highway

The RFP's are ongoing and David is answering questions as they are received.

Latisha Provo – Economic Development

Latisha provided an update on what has been going on as she gets acclimated in the new position. She has met with Greater Lafayette of Commerce; Ben with Warren County has been very helpful and a good resource. She will be attending a conference next week.

She then talked about a housing plan for READI 2.0 – it is to be completed by November 30th. She will prepare an outline and share with the board

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She provided an update on OCRA grants and what she will be watching for. She added that The Market is open now in Oxford and the new sign has been hung, she encouraged the board to stop by and check it out.

The group discussed grants and what the county has available for matching purposes.

Region 4 meeting provided the updated information and Benton County's unemployment rate is up 3% from 2022

Jake Adams was appointed by Holcomb to be a part of the Land Use Task Force and he is asking for suggestions from the countites for adding/cutting items out of legislation. The board said CO2.

Chamber of Commerce status and who she can reach out to find out more information. The board suggested Linda Brouillette, Mike Brewer and she could also ask Paul Jackson.

The board briefly closed their regular meeting to open the Drainage board meeting at 9:31 a.m. With business concluded the board closed the Drainage Board meeting at 9:41 and reopened the regularly scheduled meeting.

Phyllis Zickmund – taxpayer

She came before the board today to seek information on the carbon sequestration. She asked if the public has an option to say no. Commissioner Berry replied that it is up to the landowners, and it will take 70% of the landowners to say yes. Once that happens then the DNR will come in and take it by eminent domain. Phyllis asked if that was all landowners or just farmers. Commissioner Berry explained about the 9 square sections and the injection site.

The board is hopefully that it does not go through but explained that the governor could make changes with the legislators. She then asked about how they notify people about meetings. The meetings in Jasper and White County were shut down because of the controversy. Commissioner Freeland then spoke about the seismic testing and how they began without the county being aware of them coming in, so they were shut down by the county's building inspector. Unfortunately, since it is a utility, the county could not stop them from coming in so they set the permit fees high, but BP paid them without question.

Commissioner Berry said that biggest concern is because the governor announced that there is going to be a hydrogen plant in the Midwest someplace and it has been hinted that it will be in Whitening. Jasper and Newton County residents should be very concerned because they want ethanol and methane in order to make jet fuel out of the hydrogen. The biggest spot for methane is in both Newton and Jasper County where the dairies are set. He recommends everyone to read HB 1209. The county can only control where they put the well heads (somewhat), but the county cannot the pipeline, and if they get 70% of the landowners the county cannot stop it.

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Business:

The Commissioner meeting minutes from 10.03.2023 were approved with corrections, motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, John Fields and motion passed.

Pay at once claims were discussed and Commissioner Berry asked about a payment to VISA for fuel. Auditor Freeland said she would review the claim. They then approved the pay at once claims with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland seconded by Commissioner, John Fields and motion carried.

Payroll was approved as presented. It was approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland seconded by Commissioner, John Fields, motion carried.

The ordinance to update the use of county owned vehicles was tabled so the specific departments are listed.

The county home report was approved with a motion by Commissioner, John Fields, seconded by Commissioner, Mike Freeland and motion carried.

Commissioner Freeland asked if North Mechanical had sent a bill for the water repair at the county home, not as of today.

A resolution similar to the Town of Boswell's resolution for the Peer property to be gifted by the county was reviewed and approved with a motion by Commissioner, John Fields, seconded by Commissioner, Mike Freeland and motion carried.

The \$5,000 approved previously for 7 Hills dairy was amended to due the amount of dust to \$7,500. The amended amount was approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, John Fields and motion carried.

Commissioner Berry talked about HB 1209 and the county ordinance section 1 that was put into effect. He wanted to make sure that Wadena, Dunnington and Raub are covered within the 2-mile radius for the injection site. He asked the board members if they wanted to amend the ordinance to state both incorporated and un-incorporated towns. They then discussed section 6 as well in regard to the price per ton, which will be amended to state that an EDA needs to be in place before they can apply for a special exception (which was suggested by Jeff Cummings). The amendments were approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, John Fields and motion carried.

The board discussed their concerns on the HB1209 being reviewed and how some are trying to get the bill repealed. If it is repealed the county will not be able to stop it. The board does not want to see this happen. When you buy land, you are "owner" to the center of the earth. HB1209 is helpful but also detrimental at the same time. The board feels it should add something about a home rule in there so the counties would have had local control.

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There has not been too many rules by the DNR yet but to see if property owners are signed up, they will have to be given a permit by the DNR so the county should be notified and a time sensitive response time to inquire about it.

They (FB) are looking into what will happen if the DNR do take it over by eminent domain they have to pay 150% over the value.

Auditor Freeland asked where the Cornerstone Design for the new fairground building was to be paid from – ARPA funds.

Auditor Freeland provided the board with an update about the recent tax sale. She asked the board to review/approve the resolution for a certificate sale to be held on the unsold properties. After some discussion the board tabled making a decision until their November 7th meeting.

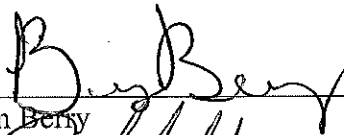
Auditor Freeland asked for clarification on where the board is paying their portion of the X-soft bill which is \$27,000.00. It will be paid for out of wind funds.

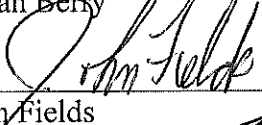
Auditor Freeland asked about advertising the County Home County Farm bids, go ahead and send for advertising.


Auditor Freeland asked if any of them wanted a printed copy of the broadband email from David Buck, no electronic is fine.

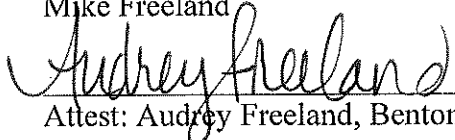
Commissioner Berry suggests that the decommissioning bond from Fowler Ridge #2 should not be approved since they have not signed the MOU.

With no further business the meeting adjourned at 10:24 a.m. with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, Bryan Berry.


Bryan Berry


John Fields


Mike Freeland


Attest: Audrey Freeland, Benton County Auditor