

Benton County Commissioner Meeting December 6th, 2024

The Benton County Commissioners met at 8:15 a.m. in the Commissioners Room at the Benton County Courthouse. Those in attendance were Commissioners Bryan Berry, Mike Freeland, Shawn Leuck, County Attorney, Jacob Ahler and Auditor, Audrey Freeland.

Others in attendance were: Phil McGinnis, John Gick, Penny Titus, Dwight Snethen, Noah Nobbe, Tommy Klecker, Latisha Provo, Joy Loflin, Evan Puetz, Amy Wilkinson, Colin Sullivan, Linda Brouillette, Matt Hull, Jason Fisher, Ron Shoup, Jon Charlesworth, Emily Albaugh, Samantha Smith, Derek Fuehrer, Jessica Shoriak, Brian Greer, and Justin Arnett

Evan Puetz – Assistant Highway Superintendent

- Bridge markers – they are about 75% done
- Brush – they are still out cutting brush and the 4 trees by the jail have been removed
- Dump truck – should receive Friday
- Pipe – Nick’s crew and some of the guys from the highway got the pipe installed and they had it built in 2 days on 300. The road will open later today
- Dairies – they have calculated the amount of additional stone placed on the roads 2022-2024. Evan asked the board to review the amounts calculated and said there is not a big price difference on except for when the cement stabilization was done. Commissioner Leuck asked why the Benton Dairy is always so much higher. It is 2 ½ miles while the others are all under 1 mile. Commissioner Berry talked about not having any shoulders on the road and it should have maybe been built up more when they started and did the cement stabilization.
- Ditch – Evan said that there was a farmer that did not want the ditch by his field cleared so they pulled off.
- Stop sign – Commissioner Leuck asked if there was any discussion or requests to replace the stop sign by Sparenberg, no because that is a state road. Evan will reach out to them about it.
- Stone – Evan will have Michelle send the board the breakdowns and cost sheets. Commissioner Berry said that anything above is in the contract that they will pay for the stone.

Jason Fisher & Linda Brouillette – Town of Fowler

They came today to talk about the Quantum corridor project that will be coming through Fowler. They need a location to place their hub site. The town is here today to ask about the possibility of gaining some of the ground back that they signed over to the county over behind the highway department. They are looking to erect a 200 X 100 industrial building. It would be developed and maintained by a company affiliated with Purdue Dept of Defense. They would be the main two users. High speed internet research, department of defense, and AI. Linda told the board about a video that will enlighten them more on the project. They are still in the developmental stage. The hope is to widen and improve the access to the location and not interfere with the

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highway access. Linda added that the location is very advantageous to them because they want to run the line down US 52. The group asked if a letter of intent for survey would be granted so they can get the area surveyed and draw up plans. Commissioner, Mike Freeland motioned to approve the letter of intent request, and it was seconded by Commissioner, Shawn Leuck and motion carried. Commissioner Freeland asked Auditor Freeland to reach out to Attorney Ahler to get something drafted.

Jason Fisher – EMA / DHS Director

- Electric – still waiting on quotes. Commissioner Leuck asked about the panel and said that the current one will not support a 200 amp. Jason said that he is open to whatever. Commissioner Leuck and him will go down and look at it.
- Salary reimbursement – Jason got approval for the salary reimbursable grant for salaries and was once again awarded the max for the size of our county.
- Boswell meeting – Jason will try after the first of the year to try and get a meeting scheduled with them

Business:

Minutes were presented and approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, Shawn Leuck and carried motion.

Commissioner Berry spoke about the previously denied mileage claims for the Purdue extension office and said that he spoke with Jon Charlesworth and the miles claimed for travel to the Warren County fair will not be paid. The remainder of the claim should be paid. The board was ok with that.

Commissioner Freeland asked about the republic's claims. Auditor Freeland stated that per advisement of the county attorney, if they are being used, we should pay the claim. He has sent two letters of cancellation to them. Auditor Freeland said that the one behind the old jail is full. Commissioner Berry said when it is dumped, they will have the highway move out until it is picked up. Monthly claims were approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland and seconded by Commissioner, Bryan Berry and motion carried

Pay at once Claims from the previous meeting for the visa claim and the current pay at once claims were reviewed and approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, Shawn Leuck and motion carried

Payroll were presented and then approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, Shawn Leuck and motion carried.

Jon Charlesworth – Purdue Extension

Commissioner Berry reiterated what was decided with the mileage claims. There was a computer lease claim and Jon asked if it was paid or not. If the claim has not been paid Jon asked for approval for it to be paid as a pay at once so it can come out of the 2024 budget. It

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was approved to be paid as a pay at once with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, Bryan Berry and motion carried.

Jon then presented the 2025 CED contractual agreement. After some discussion on the topic, it was tabled until further notice. At this time there has not been anyone hired for this position.

Jon asked if there was anything that could be sent stating that the 2025 budget is the official budget for 2025. Auditor Freeland stated that if it was enough she could draft a letter on the auditor letterhead. Jon will find out if that will suffice and let her know.

The group then discussed the part time clerical for the extension office. For the remainder of the 2024 year, they will be paid out of Purdue funds since they have expended all of the budgeted funds from the county. The group discussed that they will not clock in for the remainder of the year but will resume doing so as of January 1, 2025. Commissioner, Bryan Berry motioned to approve this temporary change for the next two payrolls, seconded by Commissioner, Mike Freeland and motion carried.

Jon wrapped up by asking if there was anything decided on the switching of the two offices. The topic will be revisited after the first of the year.

Business continued:

The safety deposit boxes at Fowler State Bank were discussed and it was approved to list the following as authorized users; Beth Budreau, Shawn Leuck and Kelly Balensiefer. The following individuals will be removed, Audrey Freeland and Bryan Berry. This was approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, Shawn Leuck and motion carried.

The resolution to donate a property not sold at the 2024 tax sale to the Town of Earl Park was adopted with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, Shawn Leuck and motion carried.

There was an appointment for the Otterbein Public library that was briefly discussed and then the topic was tabled.

Commissioner Berry said that Next ERA is not coming today for the RUA, EDA or the decommissioning plan because there are some changes he would like to see. Rick Hall did respond to the EDA, but he would like Attorney Ahler to review for the EDA. The RUA was more about the gravel, Evan feels it should be 73's to cap instead of 52's after the cement stabilizing. On the decommissioning, Bryan would like section 1.3 to reflect the current ordinance since it has changed. He also wants it to state that the county has first right of refusal. Commissioner Berry said he thinks there needs to be a new ordinance stating that the county will also hold a decommissioning bond, letter of credit or a bond for all projects. He will contact Attorney Ahler to get something drafted.

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Auditor Freeland presented a couple of invoices on behalf of the clerk from the election that she just received. She has the funds in this year's budget but will not in next years budget to cover and would like permission to pay them as a pay at once. The request was approved with a motion by Commissioners, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, Bryan Berry and motion carried.

Auditor Freeland asked if the new non-reverting fund for the Templeton Wind project needs to be tabled.

Emily Albaugh – KIRPC

Emily came before the board today for the public hearing regarding the old Oxford school project. Emily reviewed the documents that need the board to approve and sign.

1. Radon policy – the property is exempt from radon testing since it will be demolished.
2. Modified the flood plains this year (HUD made this change)
3. CBGD signature form – site control/local match
4. Applicant disclosures form – this one will be done twice

Emily discussed the project and the steps that will come next. Emily told the group that she welcomes letters from the public and others regarding the project and they can be emailed to her directly. She shared her contact information. The board asked if there were any questions or concerns from the public sector. Hearing none, the public hearing was closed at 9:23 a.m.

The board of Commissioners approved the resolution regarding the local match with a motion by Commissioner, Shawn Leuck, seconded by Commissioner, Mike Freeland and motion carried. The resolution for the blight designation was approved with a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, seconded by Commissioner, Shawn Leuck and motion carried.

Commissioner Berry said that he also had another comment to Next ERA for the decommissioning that the county wants everything to match what we have here in Benton County not Tippecanoe. He said that they put in a collector line, but Berry feels that should be removed since it is a private contract between the landowner and them, the county should not be involved. Commissioner Leuck asked about having the roads and small structures reviewed by BF&S. Commissioner Berry asked the board if they had any questions about what Rick had for the EDA. Commissioner Freeland said no he felt they were good.

Another wind turbine ordinance should be created stating that they need to use SMPT to transport the blades instead of going through the property. This would eliminate parts of the drainage agreement and a portion of the RUA. The board was in full agreement.

The board temporarily closed their regular meeting at 9:30 a.m. so they could hold the drainage board meeting, and they reopened at 9:37 a.m.

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Noah Nobbe and Tommy Klecker – Indiana Landmarks


They came today to discuss the status of the old jail and the current discussion about having it demolished. They stated that they have taken a recent tour with Dwight and feel that it is worth taking a look at preserving it instead of demolishing it. They can offer to look at the assessment and then present it to the board.

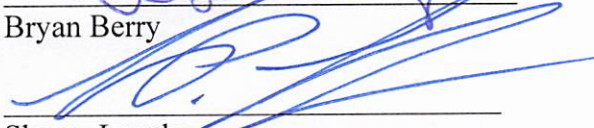
Commissioner Leuck asked what the county would do with the building if it was left up then and Commissioner Freeland asked who is going to pay for all of it. They said that one option would be to sell it to a private buyer and then it would be back on the positive tax rolls. They spoke about various grants and a local non-profit organization that they work with could apply for some grants if access is provided. They are asking for time to assess the structure at no cost to the county. The ground is what the county is needing/wanting, and the proximity is ideal.

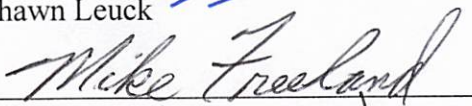
Commissioner Freeland asked if they would assume all liability for those entering the building. The response was that they would ensure that everyone entering the building would be supplied with masks. They then discussed when the bids would be received and how quickly they would be able to get the assessment. They will quickly work to get a couple of estimates to present to the board at a later date. They will not have the study done by December 17th and asked if bids are received so that they do not move forward until they can have time to present their findings.

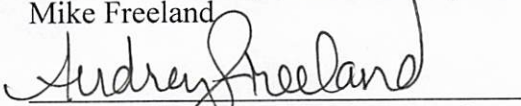
There was some discussion on how much interest there would be in the purchase of the building. Justin Arnett stated that there was plenty, and he is one of them, with some conditions. Dwight added that the Prairie Preservation would be willing to assist in saving the building even if not financially. After further discussion the board stated that they were ok with them moving forward with the assessment since it was at no cost to the county, but they do not guarantee anything at this time.

With no further business the meeting was adjourned at 9:54 a.m. With a motion by Commissioner, Mike Freeland, second by Commissioner, Shawn Leuck, motion carried.


Bryan Berry


Shawn Leuck


Mike Freeland


Attest: Audrey Freeland, Benton County Auditor

