



BOARD MINUTES

BOARD OF WRIGHT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

TUESDAY, AUGUST 2, 2022

DATE APPROVED: AUGUST 16, 2022

Christine Husom	District 1
Darek Vetsch	District 2
Mark Daleiden	District 3
Mary Wetter	District 4
Michael Kaczmarek	District 5

The Wright County Board met in regular session at 9:00 A.M. with Husom, Vetsch, Wetter, and Kaczmarek present.

COUNTY BOARD MINUTES 7/26/2022

Commissioner Christine Husom said in the Advisory Committee and Advisory Board Updates section, she would like the phrase “youth presence” to be changed to “increased utilization.”

Commissioner Darek Vetsch moved to approve the County Board minutes from Tuesday, July 26, 2022 with the recommended change. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mary Wetter. The motion carried 4-0, Commissioner Mark Daleiden being absent.

AGENDA

Commissioner Michael Kaczmarek moved to approve the Agenda. The motion was seconded by Vetsch. The motion carried 4-0.

CONSENT AGENDA

Vetsch moved to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Kaczmarek. The motion carried 4-0.

A. ADMINISTRATION – FINANCE

1. Acknowledge Warrants Issued Between July 20, 2022 And July 26, 2022
2. Motion To Approve The Reimbursement Of The American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) Funds As Follows:
Approval Of Use Of ARP Funds From 01-099-493-8428-6261
\$75.00 7.1 Administrative Expenses-Consultant Support

B. ADMINISTRATION - PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

1. Approve The SHIP Mental Well-Being Program Request.

C. PLANNING & ZONING

1. Accept The Findings And Recommendations Of The Planning Commission For The Following Request To Rezone:

I. PATTY KNESE - (Silver Creek Twp.) Commission Unanimously Recommends Approval Of The Request To Rezone From AG General Agriculture To A/R Agricultural-Residential

TIMED AGENDA ITEMS

MARC MATTICE, ADMINISTRATION

Proposed Fire Assessment Concerns Discussion Requested By Albion Township Board Of Supervisors.

The Chairman of Albion Township Board of Supervisors Bob Neumann said he had questions about the \$2.15 tax assessment being charged in addition to the parcel assessment for fire service. He said the township’s issue was that Wright County had added a fee to put the fire assessment on the tax statements. He said the assessment was only put on parcels with homestead. He said for decades this fee had been waived. Neumann described the fire assessment as a pass-through. Wright County put the assessment on the tax statement, which was then collected by Albion Township and passed directly onto the Albion Township Fire Department. He said unlike road projects which made improvements utilized by all Albion Township residents the fire assessment collected went only to the Fire Department. He said that he spoke with Director of Finance Lindsey Meyer, and she had informed him that with new management staff the county had changed the policy of not charging a fee for adding the assessment to only certain parcels. This created labor intensive work for the county. Meyer suggested to Neumann that Albion Township could levy fees out of the township funds to pay for the Fire Department’s protection service. She gave the example of a farm worth \$1 million and a smaller house worth \$200,000, the farm would pay more than the house as it had a greater value. Neumann said the Albion Township Board discussed this response and disagreed with the county’s statement. He asked why if a farm had, for example, 40 acres of only fields, would that farm pay fire protection on only dirt. Neumann argued that charging different amounts based on home value made the situation

unequitable. He said whether the house is worth \$100,000 or \$1 million the owner would want the same amount of protection, speed and efficiency.

Neumann said Albion Township is an agricultural township with many million-dollar farms, but the value of the buildings may be nothing more than a residential structure. Neumann said on a levy system, that million-dollar farm would pay more than the house. He said that by having the assessment per building site there would be much more of a sense of community among the homeowners.

Neumann said he knew the board had waived the fee for 2023 but asked the board to wave the fee beyond 2023 and do away with it for good. Vetsch said he agreed that the township should have the ability to choose to parcel assess or levy assess the fees. He said this discussion was about the fire assessment fee of \$2.15 charged because the township chose to do a per parcel assessment and the process was labor intensive. Vetsch said that in the past there were some inconsistencies within the county's fee schedule as the county was charging the assessing fee to some entities and not to others. The scope of the impact to the townships potentially ranged from \$1,800 to \$8,000. Vetsch said the county had sent a letter out saying it was not going to charge for 2023 due to the late notice but would charge starting in 2024. He said the notice was also in part to give the township boards ample time to meet and decide whether they wanted to include the per parcel fee into the assessment or switch to the levy assessment. Vetsch said that the townships would want to have the fee charged because it meant that the county would also be able to charge the watershed districts, lake districts and the cities that levy for road projects. He said a levy assessment was the same whether it was for a road, a low impact development (LID), or a fire department. The end user would pay for the service rendered. He said it was more for an equality factor. Husom said The Finance Department had discovered that these fees were not being charged to some townships and cities. She said she understood it seemed like it was unexpected and invited Meyer to address the change in policy. Meyer said the Finance Department found all special assessments were not being treated equitably across the county and sought to correct the oversight. She said the decision was made to waive the special assessment fee for 2023 and address it in the future. This allowed the cities and townships to be able to address the fee and figure out what assessment worked best in their particular situation. Meyer did not encourage cities or townships to go in either direction but gave each city or township the information regarding each option including the repercussions of either.

Albion Township Supervisor John Uecker asked about the Clearwater Watershed District which was assessed on some property in Albion Township. He asked who paid for the fire assessment. Meyer responded that the fee would be part of the special assessment as indicated in the invoices. Husom asked if that meant that Clearwater Watershed District had already been paying the special assessment. Meyer replied that it did. Vetsch said he believed the cities would want the parcel assessment and would find a way to build it into the fee. Vetsch said the township now had time to come up with the extra funds if it chose to go with the special assessment.

Albion Township Supervisor Dwight Hammer said the fire assessment fee was for emergency services and asked if there was going to be a surcharge for Sheriff's Office service as well. Vetsch said he understood the perspective, but believed it was similar to the repaving of roads, which was an essential service. He said that anything part of an essential assessment was an essential service, the reason it was delineated in the county was so that cities and townships could choose how they wanted the fees assessed.

Kaczmarek said the amount of water and time to put out a fire could vary greatly for a \$200,000 house versus a \$1 million house and wondered if both actually pay the same assessment. He said he could see the argument for a separation for the value and size of the home. Vetsch said that this was not in the purview of the county. The decision to parcel assess or levy assess was up to the township itself. Kaczmarek asked to delineate between bare land and a building. Meyer said if the property were to be levied, the assessment would be spread evenly between all land despite its size and whether there was a building present. If the township chose to special assess, the township would then select which property to charge. In the case of Albion Township, it chose to only assess the properties with a building on it. He said the Fire Department was a separate entity and fell under a different assessment not like the Sheriff's Office.

Vetsch said the \$2.15 being assessed for labor covered the time the county needed to do the paperwork required to separate the assessments from properties not being charged. Vetsch said the fee being charged was only to cover the county employees' time.

Kaczmarek and Meyer discussed the differences in value and size of homes related to the fee charged. Uecker said the township hires its own private assessor and wants to know why it was charged \$400. Neumann said the new assessor had

some licenses that needed to be taken care of which was split between the two townships he assessed for. Vetsch said this was not in the county's purview as it was up to the county on how it chose to collect funds.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

COMMITTEE MINUTES

BROADBAND COMMITTEE (07/25/2022)

Vetsch said the Broadband Committee discussed the Requests For Information (RFI) for fixed wireless and traditional fiber. The fixed wireless response that was presented was not cost effective and the three fiber responses would be held off as the Border-to-Border grants came out. He said the grant for Buffalo was awarded. Wetter asked about the cost differential between the towers for wireless and the fiber. Vetsch said the cost for wireless towers would have been in the range of \$10 million and not in the best interest of the county, especially now with the Border-to-Border state money available to possibly cover this cost. Wetter asked if, after the Border-to-Border grants had paid for fiber to be installed, the county could revisit the possibility of installing wireless towers by utilizing the fiber paid for by the Border-to-Border grants. Vetsch said this could be considered.

Vetsch moved to approve the Broadband Committee minutes from Monday, July 25. The motion was seconded by Wetter. The motion carried 4-0.

I. Request For Information (RFI) Responses and Recommendations

a. Wireless

Project Administrator Elizabeth Karels recapped the 10 county grants approved, totaling \$1.7 million. She said the county had received one response from the RFI for fixed wireless. The company's proposal showed the cost to install towers for wireless was more than the cost to install fiber. The company said it may be able to find alternative funding to help alleviate the cost of the towers.

b. Fiber

Karels said there were three RFI responses for installing fiber. Karels recommended to pause the evaluation until after Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grants were awarded. Commissioner Mark Daleiden asked if the companies that had submitted responses had asked for letters of support or matching grants. Karels said they had received requests and part of the committee meeting would be to determine if the county wanted to contribute matching funds using American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds.

County Commissioner Darek Vetsch said the decision to pause until after the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grants were awarded was an easy one to make due to the cost difference and his concern that wireless gave residents only limited access and inconsistent speed. Karels said the wireless company claimed it could provide consistent speed and coverage. Vetsch said wireless would only work if there were limited hinderances.

RECOMMENDATION: To pause evaluation until after Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grants are awarded.

II. City of Buffalo Grant Application

Karels said the broadband grant for Buffalo had been put on hold until there could be a conversation with the Highway Department regarding updates planned for Braddock Avenue. She asked Business Analyst Zach Breyen to update the committee on what had been done since the last meeting. Breyen said the grant to Buffalo was ready to be awarded since highway had confirmed its schedule to update Braddock Avenue. He said the concern that put the awarding of the Buffalo grant on hold was that the Highway Department would do work down Braddock without the fiber being put in. He said that the planned update of Braddock Avenue now included the addition of laying fiber. Karels said the price tag on this project had not changed. Breyen said that houses on the north side of Constance Lake would not receive service initially but would be part of future planned updates. Karels said this would be brought to The Wright County Board of Commissioners for approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Approve the grant for Buffalo to Buffalo Fiber.

III. Border-to- Border Grant Updates

Karels said the last item on the agenda was the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant recommendations. Karels said that applications were due Thursday, August 4. She said the recommendation to the board would be to provide letters of support and/or a pledge of financial support as requested. Karels said a local match of 2 percent to 3 percent of the project or \$150-\$200 per passing with a cap per project was recommended. Karels gave the examples of TDS Telecom project #1 and Charter Communications Project A showing how the match would work dollar wise.

Daleiden and Vetsch expressed interest in seeing how the TDS Telecom project was progressing. Karels said one of the TDS projects was approximately 1,500 addresses. Assistant Information Technology (IT) Director Mark Kellogg said he would like to see an emergency redundant fiber loop to the Sheriff's Office Training Center. Vetsch and Daleiden expressed concern and questioned why the area around Maple Lake did not have any interest from broadband companies yet. Karels said the broadband team would look into the RFIs to see if any company had addressed Maple Lake. Daleiden asked when the grants would be awarded. Breyen said sometime in the fall of 2022. Breyen said the biggest expense in the fiber project were the handholes going to each property.

IT Director Matthew Fomby asked how much money had been committed. Karels said \$1.7 million in ARP funds had been allocated. Vetsch said if any money was not used it could be reallocated.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Write letters of support and offer local contributions of 1 percent total cost and \$100 per passing.

PERSONNEL AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS COMMITTEE (07/27/2022)

Vetsch said the Personnel Committee discussed the future of Taxpayer Services with Elections and the organizational structure within the county. The discussion was whether it was appropriate to maintain the current organizational structure or whether it would be time to change the organizational structure. There had been many organizational charts discussed. The consensus was to create a Tax Administrator role, but where that role would sit in the county structure was still to be determined. Vetsch said the sooner the county could get this posted the better as the position was needed. He said a future Personnel Committee of the Whole would be needed. Husom said this was a large decision and needed the full committee. County Administrator Lee Kelly said Administration could send recommendations to the board for possible times to develop the position. Kaczmarek said he was in favor of combining this position with another existing position in order to consolidate jobs, responsibilities and salaries.

Kaczmarek moved to approve the Personnel and Employee Relations Committee minutes and develop a job description for a property tax worker. The motion was seconded by Wetter. The motion carried 4-0.

Vetsch moved to set a Personnel Committee of the Whole meeting for 10 a.m. Monday, August 15. The motion was seconded by Wetter. The motion carried 4-0.

I. Taxpayer Services And Election Organization Future

Assistant County Administrator Mark Mattice said that Information Technology Solutions Architect ConnieMae Cooper facilitated the conversation with Taxpayer Services, Assessor's Office, Recorder's Office, and Finance. With Assistant Finance Director Tammi Vaith resigning, it was thought this was a good time to look at functions, roles and responsibilities to see where processes were viewed as broken. Cooper said this gave her an opportunity to start mapping and talking about how different departments interact with business strategies, growth opportunities, gaining the understanding of process, workflows, roles and responsibilities. She looked at ways to build efficiencies and to see how the county worked to empower staff. Cooper also wanted to see if there was advancement within the organization. Some weaknesses in the current structure were communication, workflow processes, decision-making, advancement opportunities and the knowledge loss when individuals leave the county. Mattice said employees have commitment to excellence and provide great service to customers. When looking at a variety of different options of distributing functions, these items were considered. Distribution of functions, decision-making authority, building geography, reporting structure, workflow and processes, efficiencies, staff vs tasks, relationships between functions and seeing the county as "One County." Mattice said the goal was not to review the structure of Taxpayer Services but to look through a wider lens. Reviewing and looking to improve functions of one does not show the entire landscape. Many aspects of Wright County are heavily interconnected; this was the case between Recorder, Taxpayer Service, Assessor, Finance, Surveyor, and Elections. What impacts one department will have effects on another.

Cooper said she wanted to look at this as a holistic approach. This was not just a reassignment of people or supervisors, it

was really about what would make the most sense for true efficiency. During her meeting with Taxpayer Services, Assessor's Office, Recorder's Office, and Finance they talked about where employees physically sit, who they report to, and whether it had to remain that way. Currently there are a lot of processes that are not directly related to taxation like elections, License Bureau, and receptionist. There were a lot of variables that had come into play on what the end solution would be. Mattice said so far there were three options and the Personnel Committee needed to decide which one best met the strategic direction of the County. Options were shown on a chart by color, pink, blue or orange. Pink kept responsibilities more equal and alleviated the workflow which fell under the election and taxation managers. This would be Elections Manager Tyler Webster and Finance Director Lindsey Meyer. The Taxation Manager would be a new role. In either situation, under pink or blue this could be an advancement opportunity for an existing employee or it could be a new position.

Commissioner Darek Vetsch said he was guessing this would be graded as 14 or 15 in the positional point system but this had not been approved or discussed yet. There was discussion on how the role would be applied. Mattice said the orange model showed more task efficiency. Taxpayer Services would move into the Recorder's office and the biggest conflict would be the Office Technician II with how they report and the functionality together. Their relationship with land records and Taxpayer Services is very relevant. Elections would stay under Meyer in Finance.

Vetsch asked County Recorder Tanya West, Meyer, and County Assessor Tony Rasmuson which of the three options they saw having the best long-term efficiencies. Rasmuson said orange, because no matter what the county was looking at whether it be a restructure or land recorder, land records and taxation makes sense together. Switchboard and Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) make more sense under centralized services. Meyer said her comment to this was that the statutory responsibilities of taxation and elections were under the Auditor/ Treasurer together and currently that is her role. She said she wasn't sure if it mattered if the county separated those. She said her situation currently was that 14 members had covid issues, if it continued this way, she was going to have to use permanent staffing to support the election. She thought the last time the county used departmental staff sharing was in 2020. Meyer said if the county was to do this again it would need rules in place to know who she could use, and could it be union employees intermixed with non-union employees. Human Resources (HR) Assistant Director Lori Pawelk suggested cross training within departments. HR Director Schawn Johnson said he would agree with Vetsch that this position would most likely be 14 or 15 on the point scale for the Property Tax Administrator Position. HR would first need to draft a job description and then get reclassification before the Personnel Committee could make a recommendation to the board.

Vetsch said he wanted to see more information to understand and articulate taxpayer impact. Previously for budgeting and forecasting there were discrepancies. Whichever model of these would better help the county get best information to taxpayers with the impacts he was in favor of. There was discussion about the new systems that were being put in place to help the communication between divisions to create more accurate information. West said she would like to see this position filled as soon as possible and that there was room for flexibility. Her division was not sure yet how daily tasks and functions would change at this time but said the county needs to be able to change as it moves forward. Meyer said splitting Taxpayer Services would be a concern for Webster because he oversees switchboard, mail, liquor and tobacco licenses and elections. His ability to do this during elections without OT II staff would make it difficult for him to do his job well because tax season needed to be his focus. Johnson said thankfully this was all one union, making this less complex. Vetsch said pink would be a headache. He felt that orange solves headaches. The blue looked to accomplish the same as pink but maintained the office efficiency. Commissioner Mark Daleiden said he needed more information. Once new technology is implemented this will change again. Meyer said what the county needed was a highly skilled property tax person from Minnesota. Cooper said it would be really hard to have someone train that wasn't fully vested in this process, you would have to have someone train that was committed to the process.

Meyer did not fully agree with the plan of orange. She understood why orange was the preferred route but wanted to point out that having staff reporting to two different directors in the same office would be difficult. Vetsch suggested waiting till after tax season and Meyer pointed out that that would not be best practice because the workload was not over when tax season ended, during and after elections there were taxpayer name and address changes throughout the year and letters to be sent related to taxes, which is done by Taxpayer Process Specialists (TPS) team and the OT II team. West said she received three staff members, only one was an OT II. Everyone was the same and did the same work. Others were being cross trained on daily processes and transfers with the goal being to have everyone doing everything from start to finish. Meyer said as of today, blue or pink make more sense purely because she knows the details and intricacies and workload done by each. West said tax and elections together looked to be problematic during tax season because the focus goes towards tax. Meyer said the Property Tax Administrator would report through West, which meant all of the underlying staff

would also report through West. She said it would be best to have a permanent person to fill this position as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop the position for Property Tax Administrator and put together details on roles and functions of taxpayer elections.

ADMINISTRATION - PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

Approve The Following Broadband Grant Application: BB-002-11 Buffalo Fiber, City Of Buffalo And Buffalo Township (\$185,138)

Vetsch moved to approve the following broadband grant application: Buffalo Fiber, city of Buffalo and Buffalo Township. The motion was seconded by Kaczmarek. The motion carried 4-0.

Approve Funding Commitments From The County Using ARP Funds.

Kaczmarek moved to approve the following broadband grant application: Buffalo Fiber, City Of Buffalo And Buffalo Township. The motion was seconded by Vetsch. The motion carried 4-0.

Sign Letters Of Support For State Border-To-Border Grant Applications: TDS Enfield, TDS Monticello, Charter Project 1, Charter Project 2, Charter Project 3, Charter Project 4, and Frontier Clearwater.

Vetsch moved to approve the signing of the letters of support for state Border-to-Border Grant applications for the following applicants: TDS Enfield, TDS Monticello, Charter Project 1, Charter Project 2, Charter Project 3, Charter Project 4, and Frontier Clearwater. The motion was seconded by Wetter. The motion carried 4-0.

ADMINISTRATION

Topics For Discussion At The County Board Workshop On Tuesday, August 9.

Kelly presented the following topics:

- I. Schedule Meetings as Needed
- II. Dental Clinic Update
- III. License Center Update
- IV. Government Center Café Space
- V. Compost Facility Updates

Kelly added two discussion topics. The first was the reclassification process and the second was the Solid Waste Ordinance.

Kaczmarek moved to approve the topics for discussion at the County Board Workshop on Tuesday, August 9 along with the two additional topics for discussion. The motion was seconded by Wetter. The motion carried 4-0.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE / ADVISORY BOARD UPDATES

County Administrator Lee Kelly

Kelly said there had been a number of activities that came out of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) meeting. The fall conference would take place Wednesday, September 14 through Friday, September 16. Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust (MCIT) was hosting a seminar titled "Navigating Key Land Use Issues 2022," Wednesday, September 14 in St. Cloud. The county received an allocation of funds in the amount of \$281,000 from MCIT unexpectedly in addition to the dividends. The All-Safe Schools meeting was scheduled for the afternoon of Wednesday, August 10.

Commissioner Michael Kaczmarek

Kaczmarek said the County Fair Board met. The board discovered that funds made from the 2022 fair had increased, but attendance had slightly decreased. The Fair was successful and had been a positive event for Wright County.

Commissioner Mary Wetter

On Wednesday, July 27 Wetter attended an open house in St. Michael regarding CSAH 35. The open house discussed the proposal to widen CSAH 35 to three lanes until the road split. The proposal included three to four roundabouts and one trail. The construction would be from May 2023 to October 2023.

Thursday, July 28 Wetter attended the Central Minnesota Council on Aging (CMCOA). The council looked at the operating budget and approved a number of financial transfers for 2023. Since the Covid-19 Pandemic, it discovered that home delivered meals were more important than the congregant meals. Some of the Title 3 funds were transferred to Senior Linkage which was

also getting \$100,000 from the state. The operating budget was an increase in revenue and expenses of 2.2 percent. More funding would be going toward program development and coordination. Saturday, August 6 would be Hanover Harvest Festival with a parade and many activities for the family.

Commissioner Darek Vetsch

Vetsch said he was in Fergus Falls for the Energy Transition meeting. He said he had toured the Otter Tail Power Company's Hoot Lake Plant which was in the process of being repurposed. He saw the three different hydroelectric plants and the solar fields that would be taking over the space left open from the loss of the coal plant. He said they had a presentation from Executive Director of the Midwestern Governors Association (MGA) Jessie Heier. He said Director of Regional Government Affairs at Xcel Energy Rick Evans presented some of the programs it offers for economic development. The Department of Revenue (DOR) presented the ins and outs of state-assessed property, what taxes it paid, and how it was paid from the different entities, whether wind, solar, coal, or nuclear. Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership (CMRP) met to discuss the changes needed to enter into a Tier One Pell, which would provide more options rather than going through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. He said CMRP would be issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for purpose and needs requirements, specifically for a consultant to help it get into the Tier One process.

Commissioner Christine Husom

Husom attended the Midwest Regional Forensic Laboratory (MRFL) Advisory Committee meeting which met for the first time since being fully staffed. She said the Latent Prints Scientist was just signed off for case work. The case work was down from 2021 but the committee felt it would even out by the end of the year. Husom said there was a good discussion about the new marijuana gummy law. She said the lab could not test for the presence of marijuana in gummies due to inconsistencies in the batches. The budget was passed with a 6.84 percent increase, consistent with the rise in population. The lab was one of the top labs in the country and it continued to excel.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.

County Board Minutes submitted by Philip Hodges, Administrative Specialist.