

WABASH COUNTY COUNCIL

The Wabash County Council met in session on Monday, March 20, 2023 in the Commissioner's meeting room of the Wabash County Courthouse. Chairman Kyle Bowman called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M. Council members present: Bowman, Matthew Mize, Barbara Pearson, Matt Dillon, Nick Kopkey, Sam Hann and Philip Dale. Pearson opened with a word of prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance. The proceedings of the meeting were recorded by County Auditor Marcie Shepherd.

Chairman Bowman requested that those present silence their cell phones and stated that all public comments regarding agenda and non-agenda items are permitted and encouraged.

First order of business was a review and approval of the minutes of the February 20, 2023 meeting. Dillon made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Hann seconded the motion; it passed by a 6-0 with Dale not present.

Director of Court Services/Chief Probation Officer Brian Swihart and Community Corrections Director/Assistant Chief Probation Officer Jeff Hobson made a presentation for a new work release facility. Swihart gave the council a general overview of the county's court services arrangement, of which the work release program is one part. Swihart stated the court services program currently has 29 employees, including 20 full-time and nine part-time with 1,435 clients currently on probation. Swihart made note that the county only pays for nine full-time and two part-time positions, while court services cover the rest with grants and fees collected. Swihart then presented a video depicting three individuals who had successfully gone through the county's work release program which gave the council a view of how it can positively affect lives in the community. Hobson then presented the general request regarding the work release facility. Hobson said the facility would be a stand-alone 8,300 square foot facility to be placed upon the already existing "pad" located near the new jail. The facility would include office space for staff and an additional six full-time and four part-time staff would be needed. The estimated cost to build the facility is \$2,179,450, and staffing would cost approximately \$326,962.42 to \$349,547.02 per year, according to the proposal. Hobson said one of the reasons for building the new facility near the jail is that proximity to the jail is important for the program, which has for years been housed inside the current jail building.

Following the presentation, council members asked a variety of questions to Swihart and Hobson regarding the proposal. Council member Philip Dale asked the two men about qualifications for the work release program. Hobson responded that they are limited to taking non-violent offenders. Hobson said based upon current space they are also limited in the number of participants they can take and they currently can only take male prisoners. Council member Sam Hann asked how the number of cases were trending in the county. At that point Wabash County Superior Court Judge Ben Vanderpool said that he sees many more non-violent offenses in his courtroom than violent offenders. He then added his support for continuation of the work release program, noting that the ability to keep people in treatment and working is a huge benefit. Wabash County Chief Public Defender Alan Zimmerman also spoke in favor of the program stating that the county needs work release as part of a "tool belt" to control crime in the county. He said that the number of cases he handles each year has maxed out and that failure to fund the work release program would in effect be defunding the criminal justice system in the county. Council member Barbara Pearson then asked the average number of prisoners participating in the work release program per month. Hobson said the numbers varies, but the average for 2022 was 7.39 at any given time. Pearson then asked about recidivism in the program and how many actually complete the program. Hobson said that the program's success rate is nearly 80 percent, but he noted that recidivism rates are a little different in that they look outward three years. He said that approximately 58 percent of offenders reoffend, but that this rate is significantly lower than the national average of 68-70 percent. Pearson then asked if the program might ever be self-sustaining, to which Swihart said the program up to the current point had been self-sustaining, as they had not requested the county to fund the program until now. Pearson said she had an issue with asking county taxpayers to take on additional employees and a new building project while the county is still trying to complete the jail building project. She said that the county was still not sure what the additional costs would be for the new jail, especially additional staffing costs, and that the jail should have been built 20 years ago and the council effectively approved the construction of the new jail because it had to do so. She suggested waiting until next year to see where the county is financially, adding that she did not feel it was the time or place to build another \$2 million building. The concept of delaying a decision was then briefly discussed, with Council

Chair Kyle Bowman stating it was his understanding that the decision before the council would be to proceed or that the program would cease to exist. Council member Matthew Mize said he was not concerned with the cost of building the facility, but more with the yearly cost for staff. He called into question the figures for staff presented by Swihart and Hobson saying that he felt with benefits the cost would actually be higher than the figure presented. Several members of the public also spoke in favor of the proposal preferring a method that focused on continuing to allow prisoners to be productive members of society as opposed to simply paying to house them in the jail. Bowman made a motion to approve \$2 million for construction of a work release facility, with additional funds for staffing the facility. Dale seconded the motion; it passed by a 5-2 vote with Pearson and Mize voting against.

Pat Lynn and Doug Bogart of the Wabash County Animal Shelter wanted to discuss their funding from the County. Pat Lynn, who serves on the board of directors for the shelter, said that while the shelter has made adjustments to deal with the cuts the council made last year, it has also had to reduce some services. Christine Randolph-Swango is now the new manager and Bogart is a part-time employee. Bowman said one of the reasons the funding was cut was because the council had not received financials for a number of years, and there was also a general dissatisfaction in the community regarding the services provided by the shelter. In reviewing financial figures provided for the meeting, Bowman added that he saw discrepancies in salaries paid to staff, noting that the figures do not match up appropriately. He said it gave him concern and he would need to see audited figures before he would be willing to consider more funding for the shelter, and subsequently asked for those numbers. Several representatives from Lagro referenced issues they have had with the services of the shelter and had questions about the County Ordinance. County Commissioner Jeff Dawes said one of the complaints he had received was from law enforcement regarding shelter staff not being available to transport animals. The Commissioners said they would review the Ordinance.

Mike Keaffaber with Wabash County Drug Prevention Steering Committee requested \$50,000 from the Opioid settlement. The request will be used for prevention in the schools as outlined in his proposal from February. Bowman made a motion to approve the \$50,000 from the Opioid fund. Dillon seconded the motion; it passed by a 7-0 vote.

Dan Gray with the AACTION committee requested that Council appoint him to review any requests for the Opioid settlement. Bowman tabled this for now until council has more time to look over options.

Next on the agenda were the requests for additional appropriations.

ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS
ORDINANCE #2023-85-02

WHEREAS, it has been determined that it is now necessary to appropriate more money than was appropriated in the annual budget; NOW, THEREFORE:

SEC. 1 Be it ordained by the Wabash County Council of Wabash County, Indiana, that for the expense of said county government and its institutions for the year ending December 31, 2023 the following additional sums of money are hereby appropriated and ordered set apart out of the several funds herein named and for the purposes herein specified, subject to the laws governing the same:

ADULT PROBATION USER FEE #2100				
	Requested	Appropriated	AYE	NAY
Group Health Insurance				
2100.17300.000.0000	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	7	0

Brian Swihart, Direct of Court Services; said this is a request to cover group health insurance. Dillon made a motion to approve the appropriation. Hann seconded the motion; it passed by a 7-0 vote

AACTION FUNDS # 1148				
	Requested	Appropriated	AYE	NAY
Aaction Funds				
1148.31030.000.0000	\$2,040.00	\$2,040.00	7	0
1148.31193.000.0000	\$5,660.00	\$5,660.00	7	0
1148.31160.000.0000	\$3,800.00	\$3,800.00	7	0
1148.30141.000.0000	\$4,000.00	\$4,000.00	7	0
1148.31191.000.0000	\$4,500.00	\$4,500.00	7	0
1148.30443.000.0000	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	7	0
1148.12200.000.0000	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	7	0
1148.31192.000.0000	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	7	0

Brian Swihart, Director of Court Services; said this is the appropriations requested by the Action committee. Dillon made a motion to approve the appropriation. Dale seconded the motion; it passed by a 7-0 vote.

Auditor Shepherd reported that during the abstract process she was informed that we need to change our LIT Credits, as the state has removed the qualified residential credit. Shepherd said she could have Darren Bates of Data Pit Stop come to the next meeting to go over the different options the county has and how it would affect taxes. Council asked to have him attend.

With no other business to come before the Council, Chairman Bowman adjourned the meeting. The next scheduled meeting of the Wabash County Council is March 20, 2023.

Items for Review:

- Auditor & Treasurer Financial Reports for January 2023
- Solid Waste Management District Income Statements for December 2022
- Wabash County Soil & Water Conservation Update – February 2023


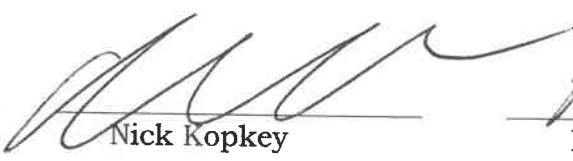

The following individuals also attended the County Council meeting:

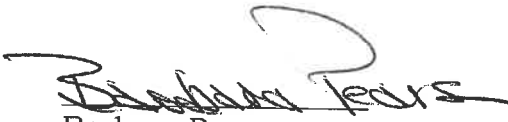
**If any names are spelled incorrectly, we apologize.*

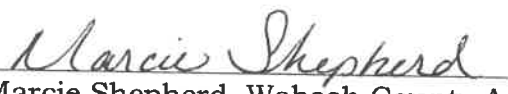
Chief Deputy Auditor Shelly Baucco, Brian Swihart, Kimberly Lundmark, Jeff Ravenscroft, Dawn Conley, Minda Parish, Deb Potempa, Joel Makin, Makenzie Hill, Alison Keppel, Scott Siders, Richard Monce, Samantha Fox, Andrew DeLong, Jim Dixon, Mike Keaffaber, Alan Zimmerman, Christine Randolph-Swango, Katelynn Hudson, Beth Gillespie, Gary Hrib, Dan Gray, Brooke Murphy, Ben Vanderpool, Alex Downard, and Tyler Guenin. Via Zoom: Amanda Redman, Danielle Gargiulo

WABASH COUNTY COUNCIL


 Kyle Bowman, Chairman
 
 Matthew Mize, Vice-Chairman
 
 Sam Hann


 Matt Dillon
 
 Nick Kopkey
 
 Philip Dale


 Barbara Pearson

Attest: 
 Marcie Shepherd, Wabash County Auditor