Est

Martin

County

THE MARTIN COUNTY COUNCIL

SPECIAL MEETING

September 16, 2024

MINUTES

The Martin County Council convened in a special session on Monday, September 16, 2024, in the Commissioners’ Room at the Courthouse located at 129 Main Street, Shoals, Indiana. Council members attending: Jordan Dant, Adam Greene, Warren Albright, Keith Gibson, Monty Gregory, Jim Hamby, and Sheri Bowling. Also attending was Auditor Michelle Norris.

President Jordan Dant called the meeting to order with the Pledge to the Flag at 5:30 pm. President Dant stated he wanted to make an opening statement; the meeting was scheduled for the Council to do final budget review to prepare for the budget adoption on October 7th. President Dant stated public input will be limited to five to six minutes due to time restraints.

**RE: TRANSFER REQUEST**

The following transfer request was submitted to the Council for approval from the Highway Department:

From: 1135.542.4000.14 Bridge Construction $40,000

To: 1135.542.3000.12 Contract Services $40,000

A motion was made by Adam Greene to approve the transfer request from the Highway Department, seconded by Monty Gregory. All in favor, motion passed.

Taxpayer Jason McCoy came before the Council to discuss the mid-states corridor and the need for the redevelopment commission to re-start the mid states corridor steering committee.

**RE: BUDGET REVIEW**

**Reassessment**

President Dant stated he had previously asked the Council to review all department requests and identify any areas of concern. Adam Greene stated in the reassessment fund for professional services there is $120,000 requested, $60,000 is budgeted in 2024; in recent years there has not been $60,000 spent. Adam Greene stated he would like to reduce the line back to $60,000 unless there is a planned expense for next year. Auditor Norris stated $70,000 has been spent from professional services so far this year, the Assessor did not have enough budgeted for 2024 and had to pencil transfer from another line.

Assessor Carolyn McGuire was contacted by phone, and she stated $72,000 is a fourth of what the appraiser could bill for this year. President Dant asked Assessor McGuire to explain the need for the increased budget in professional services. Assessor McGuire stated that is the way the appraiser expenses came in; the County has a four-year contract with the appraiser, he appraises a fourth of the county every year. Professional services also include the sales ratio study and data collecting. Assessor McGuire stated 35% of the amount due to the appraiser is withheld in escrow and periodically a partial withdraw is allowed from the escrow account.

President Dant asked if there is a cycle to spending because in 2018 there was $108,000 spent. Assessor McGuire stated it is a four-year cycle and the amount each year varies. Monty Gregory asked Assessor McGuire if she felt the $120,000 will be a consistent budget amount or if it was only for the 2025 budget. Assessor McGuire stated $60,000 for 2024 was not what she submitted; it was what the Council approved but it was much too low. Assessor McGuire states beyond 2025 she believes professional services will be around $120,000. Adam Greene asked if the appraiser bids on the contract and Assessor McGuire replied the State has a contract that they prescribe, and it was approved by the Commissioners. The Council decided to leave professional services at $120,000.

**Prosecutor**

President Dant stated in the Prosecutor’s budget there is a $2,000 bonus stipend added to the budget. Auditor Norris stated when the Prosecutor came to the department budget meeting it was stated that they found out during conference that they would pay a salary out of the county user fund it would be reimbursable. In 2024 the salary was paid out of the IV-D fund, in 2025 the salary will be paid out of the county user fee fund. Next year or the year after the salary will have to be moved back to the IV-D fund to let the county user fund build back up. Adam Greene stated in the county user fund, the claims clerk salary went from $9,400 to $19,800. Auditor Norris stated that is because that salary is paid out of the county user fund instead of the incentive fund. Auditor Norris stated the Council did not receive a budget for the incentive fund because the Prosecutor did not submit the budget, but that fund does not require Council approval because it is incentive funds. The Council left the budget as presented.

**Extension**

President Dant asked the Council to look at Extension’s budgeted amount for contractual services. President Dant stated he is of the understanding that is a new position which would facilitate a new program, but the Alliance is also kicking off a similar leadership program. President Dant stated he is inclined to leave the budget as it has been in previous years. Auditor Norris stated for 2025, the minimum amount set by Purdue for the contractual services is $23,580. The Council cut the contractual services line from $99,150 to $23,580.

**Probation**

Jim Hamby stated there are two new positions being requested in the probation budget along with the part-time case manager position that was approved by the Council until the end of 2024. Deputy Auditor Teresa Wininger stated the probation officers have State mandated wage amounts which are based on years of experience, education, and who they supervise. President Dant stated historically the Council has gone by what the State has mandated. Auditor Norris stated the probation administrative assistant is currently being paid out of the supplemental adult probation fund; probation has requested this position be moved to the general fund. Auditor Norris stated there are two new positions in the general fund, the probation officer with the budget request of $66,641 and the case manager with the request of $43,680.

Auditor Norris stated the Council approved $15,000 from the general fund and $5,000 from the supplemental adult probation fund for the case manager in 2024. Auditor Norris stated the same case manager has also been budgeted in the supplemental adult probation fund; if it were a part-time position, the position could be paid out of supplemental, but the primary request was for a full-time position out of the general fund. The Council agreed to leave the case manager position in the budget for 2025 as a part-time position out of the supplemental adult probation fund in the amount of $34,944 and remove the position request of $43,680 from the general fund.

President Dant stated the other line they need to address is the additional probation officer for $66,641 in the general fund. The Council agreed to remove the additional probation officer request of $66,641 from the general fund. President Dant stated they need to address the raise amounts in this budget. The raise amounts received by Probation were based on the Indiana Probation Officers Association recommendation, but those amounts do not align with the amount the State has mandated. President Dant stated he recommends the Council align with the State mandated salary amounts. Warren Albright stated the probation officers do not get the percentage raise on top of the mandated salary amount; the State determines the salary increase based on how the employee is classified.

Warren Albright stated there is talk on the Council level across the State in trying to get the State to pay for probation positions because the State mandates the salaries. President Dant stated based on his research, court cases statewide are going through the roof, which effects probation.

**Coroner**

Adam Greene asked for clarification regarding the autopsy and lab request; Jim Hamby stated the law had been if a death occurred in a hospital, the hospital covered the autopsy. This has recently changed to the person’s county of residence is required to pay for the autopsy. The cost of an autopsy varies from $1,400 to $3,500. Adam Greene asked why travel has increased from $700 to $1,400. Jim Hamby stated there is training twice a year and more than normal is expected for next year. Monty Gregory asked if mileage is paid to the deputy coroners. Jim Hamby stated he has never turned in mileage. Monty Gregory asked if mileage was paid to transport for autopsies. Jim Hamby stated that if there is a death in the County and the body must be transported to a out of county morgue, there is a company contracted to transport the body if the Martin County Ambulance Service does not have a crew available.

Adam Greene stated the coroner salary and chief deputy coroner salaries have a 10% increase in the budget request and asked if those salaries would follow the percentage set by the Council. Jim Hamby stated those salaries would follow the guideline.

**Treasurer**

Jim Hamby stated there is $7,000 requested by the Treasurer for equipment repairs and the most they have spent in the last six years is $1,464. Auditor Norris stated the Treasurer made a request at the department budget meeting for a new copier in 2025. Warren Albright stated the line needs to be adjusted to say equipment and repairs. Monty Gregory asked if the County owns the machine, or is it leased. Warren Albright stated the County owns the machine, but there is a maintenance agreement with a per click cost which includes toner replacement.

**Surveyor**

President Dant asked Surveyor Nathan Hoffman to come forward to speak regarding his budget. President Dant stated the Assessor approved for $15,000 of the deputy surveyor’s salary to be paid from the reassessment fund. Surveyor Hoffman stated if the mid-state corridor comes through there will be splits on every property affected along the corridor because the State will be buying right of way. Surveyor Hoffman stated he is not for the corridor, but he watched I-69 go through Greene County. President Dant asked how Surveyor Hoffman will be involvement in the project. Surveyor Hoffman stated he and the deputy surveyor review and approve every deed and split before the transfer is processed by the Auditor’s office.

President Dant stated there needs to be forty hours of work to support the deputy surveyor position. Surveyor Hoffman stated there are forty hours of work for the deputy surveyor. Auditor Norris stated the Surveyor and deputy surveyor are both licensed surveyors who look at every single deed that comes through her office. Deputy Auditor Wininger stated the Auditor’s office might get a deed which has a hundred acres over five parcels, that deed might be six or seven pages long and not broken out parcel by parcel. The deed may start out describing two hundred acres with excepting descriptions out of the parcel and those exceptions can be in any one of those parcels. When the Auditor’s office tries to look at that deed it is way above the level of what the office can do. Surveyor Hoffman stated both he and the deputy surveyor are able to help with those types of issues. Surveyor Hoffman stated the quality of the deed does depend on the attorney who prepared the deed. Deputy Auditor Wininger stated the County has a real advantage in having two licensed surveyors on staff.

President Dant stated several months ago he and the Surveyor had a conversation, to which Surveyor Hoffman stated when that conversation happened, he did not see the value in him and the whole dynamic has changed. He and the deputy surveyor are constantly getting questions from the Assessor and Auditor’s offices regarding deeds. Surveyor Hoffman stated he requests to keep the deputy surveyor. Warren Albright recommended the budget be left as is and they need to consider how to better handle the position. President Dant stated they do need confirmation on the amount of time spent in mapping. Jim Hamby asked if the deputy surveyor kept track of how much time is spent mapping and doing work in the Surveyor’s office. Deputy Auditor Wininger stated his time is split between mapping and surveyor work. Sheri Bowling asked for the deputy surveyor to do a time study of how he spends his time.

**Sheriff**

Monty Gregory stated the animal control officer has been brought up to him by taxpayers. President Dant stated in 2024 the Commissioners have gave $17,000 to the Humane Society and $9,000 was budgeted toward the animal control officer from the public safety fund. Auditor Norris stated in the 2025 budget there was zero requested for the animal control officer in the public safety fund and $17,000 requested for the Humane Society. President Dant stated the City of Loogootee is trying to make provisions to get something back in place for the Humane Society and could potentially come to the Council. President Dant asked if they were leaving the $17,000 in the budget for 2025. The Council agreed to leave it in the budget in hopes the City will make provisions.

**Veterans Service Officer**

Jim Hamby asked about the significant raise for the veterans service officer, $11,958 was budgeted for 2024 and $20,000 has been requested for 2025. Warren Albright stated the VSO was hired in at $11,958 for 2024 without the promise of a significant increase. Sheri Bowling stated every line in the VSO budget has increased. Auditor Norris stated the VSO has used all the office supply budget for 2024 and the rest of the budget was minimal. President Dant stated the Commissioners have struggled to keep someone in that role and the VSO is essentially working in a janitor’s closet. Auditor Norris stated the VSO is making about $10 per hour right now and the last two VSOs stated the job was more work than expected. Warren Albright stated most may believe the job is not particularly involved, but he believes it does get involved in a lot of cases. President Dant stated there are a lot more mental health discussions than anything and it could happen at all hours of the day. Jim Hamby stated VSO Ryan Persinger has agreed to come to both Legions for an hour or two every few weeks to talk with veterans because everyone cannot get off work during VSO office hours.

**Ambulance Service**

President Dant stated contractual services for the ambulance could increase for 2025 because the billing company we have now does not do collections and that is not included in this budget. Director Osborn is currently investigating collection agencies. Monty Gregory asked if a collection agency works for a percentage. President Dant stated most do, Warren Albright stated it will be at least 30%.

President Dant asked if there was a fourth ambulance purchase in the budget for 2025. Auditor Norris stated there is $105,000 budgeted for equipment. Adam Greene stated it was discussed that a used ambulance could be purchased and equipped. Adam Greene stated he believes the other used ambulances the County purchased were around $40,000 each, but Director Osborn had to go to New York to purchase the vehicles. Adam Greene stated it may be a good idea to at least purchase a truck. Jim Hamby stated right now the service has two trucks doing runs and the third is doing transfers. Adam Greene stated if one ambulance breaks down, they will not be able to do any transfers, it would depend on if the transfers are making money. Sheri Bowling stated she knows they are making money on the transfers but is it worth buying a $105,000 ambulance when the County already has three. President Dant stated he wanted to be clear, the ambulance service is not making money.

Auditor Norris stated the reasoning for the fourth vehicle was if a vehicle broke down, they would be unable to buy another one right away. Jim Hamby asked how many ambulance employees were part-time. Correspondence was later received from Director Jeramey Osborn that there are eight part-time employees and eight full-time employees. Auditor Norris stated the ambulance service is applying for grants. Warren Albright stated an additional appropriation can be done if Director Osborn has something that needs to be purchased. Adam Greene stated the Council needs to have a conversation with Director Osborn. The Council agreed to reduce the equipment line in the ambulance budget from $105,000 to $5,000.

**Court**

Adam Greene stated he would like to look at the raises requested for the court reporters and asked if they would be following the same percentage as the rest of the County. President Dant stated last year they received the same percentage as everyone. Auditor Norris stated the Judge commented in the department budget meeting that she was trying to raise the court reporters’ salaries to what other nearby courts were paying. Warren Albright stated the Court was losing court reporters due to salary. The Council decided the court reporters would follow the same percentage as the rest of the County.

Adam Greene stated the furniture and equipment request for 2025 is $6,000, up from $5,500 in 2024. Sheri Bowling stated there will be remodeling done in the Courtroom. Auditor Norris stated as of June 30th, 2024, $3,200 has been spent on furniture and equipment, which includes new jury seating. Auditor Norris stated with the remodeling there will be additional purchases needed, such as attorney desks. Adam Greene stated with the remodel there will be increased purchases but for 2026 it should go back down to normal, President Dant agreed it should.

**Raises**

President Dant stated the last thing they need to determine is percentage of raises. In the budgets there are varying requests ranging from zero to 12%. President Dant stated last year the Council kept the raises consistent across the board but keep in mind there is $132,000 in the Commissioners budget for opt out plus the budgets are doubled up with the $4,000 per employee in each department. President Dant stated budget still works even before any cuts that were made. President Dant asked if FSG should be asked if a larger raise can be given. Sheri Bowling stated it would be great if they could.

Monty Gregory stated he feels if the Sheriff’s Department is losing people because of wage amounts the Council should look at the Sheriff’s Department harder than other departments. Monty Gregory stated the Sheriff’s Department is losing employees to other counties; Martin County is putting money into training. President Dant asked if anyone knows for sure if the reason they are losing people is because of the wages, is HR doing exit interviews? President Dant stated the HR director would not be part of the department so an exiting employee would be freer to speak and confide with her as to why they are truly leaving.

Taxpayer Stephen Shout stated he has spoken to officers, and they all work second jobs so it is the money, they cannot pay the bills. Sheri Bowling stated when you look at what all County employees make, she can understand why anyone who works for the County has a second job. President Dant stated the officers in the Sheriff’s Department have historically always worked side security jobs because it is good money. Warren Albright stated the Sheriff’s Department has covered the training and then the officer is able to fill those side positions. Warren Albright stated in the past, the school was paying $30-$35 per hour for an officer. Shoals School Board member Janell Hoffman was in the audience and stated the school does not pay an outside officer anymore, the school has its own security officer this year. Warren Albright suggested the Council go with an across the board raise and the Council will deal with the other as needed; the State has changed the dynamic due to the large raises it gave last year to it’s officers.

President Dant asked Auditor Norris to send FSG the updated budgets and to ask if raises of either five percent or seven percent could be sustainable. Monty Gregory stated the Commissioners need to decide what they are going to do with opt out, that is the biggest issue right now. Warren Albright asked for clarification, if FSG comes back and states that 7% will work is the Council doing 7%, is that the direction to the Auditor? Warren Albright stated the Auditor needs to complete the paperwork for the budget adoption before the meeting on October 7th. Warren Albright stated the raises will affect multiple lines in every budget and it will be a large amount of data input for the Auditor.

Warren Albright asked if the Council would appoint three members to have the authority to approve the raise amount up to 7% based on what FSG recommends. Warren Albright stated the Council can not vote by email or phone so he recommends the Council decide now to approve up to 7% and the three appointed members will make the final decision based upon the recommendation of FSG. President Dant stated they can vote on it now, but he requests Auditor Norris check with the county attorney that this is allowable. A motion was made by Warren Albright to approve raises up to 7% pending a review by FSG with 5% being the lowest, with a committee of three Council members approving the final amount, seconded by Jim Hamby. All in favor, motion passed. The Council decided to appoint President Dant, Monty Gregory, and Warren Albright to the committee.

Taxpayer Buck Stiles asked how much health insurance is going up next year. Deputy Auditor Wininger stated we do not know yet, Auditor Norris stated it was budgeted for a 7% increase. Mr. Stiles stated if the insurance goes up 20% and then raises of 5% are given employees are essentially receiving 25% raises so why would the Council not work with the 5% and not increase by another 2% unless they must. President Dant stated he understands the sentiment, but the issue is the employees of Martin County are underpaid. Mr. Stiles stated they have been for years, and everyone knows that. President Dant stated if there is an opportunity to where the employees can get an additional 2% where they otherwise would not have it, he personally would like to do that if the budget allows. President Dant stated they already know the Sheriff’s Department is still losing employees probably because of money. President Dant stated if the cost of insurance goes up the employee will pay more because the employee also pays a percentage of the premium. Mr. Stiles stated Martin County has an aging population and a population who is on a fixed income, there are needs and wants, we cannot have all the wants at once. President Dant stated he did not think that is what the Council is suggesting, how are people going to be attracted to Martin County if we can not pay them.

**RE: EMS LIT**

President Dant stated he would like to discuss the EMS LIT rate. President Dant stated by reappropriating the .20% in LIT and moving it to EMS it would generate $127,180 in additional EMS revenue. President Dant stated there would be no tax change, it would be moving .20% from EDIT to EMS LIT. Sheri Bowling stated the Council is not raising taxes. President Dant stated what is does is reduces the City of Loogootee’s EDIT income by $88,574, reduces Town of Crane’s EDIT by $6,979, and reduces the Town of Shoals’ EDIT by $31,627.

President Dant stated he has had conversations with a couple of individuals at the City of Loogootee and he stated they could look at the reduction in EDIT as their contribution to the ambulance service. Jim Hamby asked if the County’s edit fund would also be reduced. Warren Albright stated it would, but ambulance salaries are already being paid out of the County’s EDIT fund.

President Dant asked if the Council were okay with FSG and the county attorney going ahead and starting the process to change the LIT rates, the new LIT rates would not go into effect until 2026. Warren Albright stated the process could be started anytime. Adam Greene asked if it made sense to do this now when it would not go into effect until 2026. President Dant stated his opinion is the Council should move forward on changing the LIT rate and they should have done it a year ago. Auditor Norris stated the Council needs to give the towns and city notice of the change and more time to prepare. A motion was made by Monty Gregory to move ahead with the process to change the LIT rate, seconded by Sheri Bowling. All in favor, motion passed.

**RE: BANK LEASE**

Adam Greene stated he would like to talk about leasing the building to a bank. Sheri Bowling asked if he had banks who are interested in leasing the building. Adam Greene stated it would be open to anyone once the price was set and there are no banks tied down, but some have requested lease prices. Jim Hamby asked if the Commissioners set the lease price and President Dant responded the Commissioners need to be present for the conversation. President Dant stated there needs to be a conversation if the Commissioners want to own a building and get into the rental business whereas there could be other options discussed. Auditor Norris stated she received communication from Commissioner Cody Roush that the Commissioners will discuss it at their meeting tomorrow night.

Mr. Shout stated while he is all for trying to get employees to a better wage, the County will most likely never be able to pay employees what they are worth. Mr. Shout stated everyone nationwide is taking a huge hit right now with inflation. Mr. Shout stated he is concerned about the County leasing the former Old National building instead of selling it, all things owned are a liability. President Dant stated he agrees and that is why he previously stated he does not know if the County needs to be getting into the rental/leasing business, there are other options to pursue. Mr. Stiles asked if the building is leased, who pays the property taxes, to which President Dant and Adam Greene stated there are no property taxes since it is County owned. Mr. Stiles stated if it were sold, someone would be paying property taxes on the building.

There was discussion at the end of the meeting regarding the proposed housing project within the limits of the City of Loogootee.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:49 pm with a motion made by Sheri Bowling and seconded by Keith Gibson, all were in favor and the motion passed. The next regular Council meeting and budget adoption will be held Monday, October 7, 2024, at 6:00 pm.

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Jordan Dant Adam Greene

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Warren D. Albright J. Keith Gibson

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Monty Gregory Jim Hamby

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Sheri Bowling

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Michelle Norris, Martin County Auditor