

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF WALSH COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
June 20, 2023

June 20, 2023 – 9:00 a.m.

Members present: Chairman Skorheim, Commissioners Anderson, Barta, Brintnell and Suda.

At 9:05 a.m. the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The meeting was called to order and bills were reviewed.

Commissioner Suda moved to approve the June 6, 2023 minutes, the final draft of the May 16, 2023 minutes, and monthly bills, seconded by Anderson. Motion approved

Commissioner Barta updated the board on the Novak drain. The Walsh County Water Board was informed by the State that they will not be making any decisions and are leaving it up to the County. This will be on the agenda for next week's water board meeting.

Commissioner Suda requested that Katie Thompson be formally named as the department head for credit card purposes. A short discussion was held on if the County is able to give her the title, but after consideration it was decided to name her the interim department head of the NDSU Extension Office to allow her use of the credit card for office supplies. **Barta made a motion to approve, seconded by Brintnell. Motion carried.**

Commissioner Brintnell brought before the board an employee request regarding closing the courthouse on Monday, July 3rd. A short discussion was held and all members agreed that since they decided in January 2022 to follow the holiday schedule set by the State, the courthouse will be open on July 3, 2023.

Auditor Quibell informed the board that an application for an ordinance variance/building permit was received by Otter Tail Power Company. The application and aerial map were forwarded to Luther Meberg for review. Mr. Meberg would be willing to go to the potential site in the upcoming week, without charging mileage, but he also recommended that a member of the P & Z Committee investigate as well. Commissioner Barta said that he would investigate and be in contact with Mr. Meberg. It was noted that Mr. Meberg's initial reaction to the request was that a special P & Z Committee meeting will have to be held, with Otter Tail attending.

Ron Jurgens, Sheriff, appeared for the following:

- Ron asked for the board's approval to hire one Deputy and one Jailer as there has been turnover in both positions. **Commissioner Brintnell made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Anderson. Motion carried.**
- Ron updated the board that he has hired a deputy from the academy for the Sheriff's Department. The deputy will be starting once training has been completed in August. With this new employee, the Sheriff's Department will still be one vacancy.

- Ron updated the board on the new jail project. Ron is waiting for a quote from Central Square, their computer program, on retrieving additional data that is being requested by Samuals Group. Samuals Group requested 10 years of data but the system will only provide from 2017 – current. Ron informed the board that he expects the quote to be received within the next day or two.

Jason Johnston, Highway Superintendent, appeared for the following:

- Wade Thompson, KLJ Engineer, joined Jason to update the commissioners on the NDDOT bridge bids. It was stated that the initial bid was \$1.9M but it has since rose to \$3.2M due to the rise in material, especially box culverts, since the initial bid was received. The additional funds that will be needed for this project will be funded by HB1505, which will leave little funds available for other projects. The three bridges that will be replaced are Bridge #136-07 on # 8, 1mile south of #9 and Bridge #139-16 on #6, 2 mile north of #15 these will be aluminum box culverts, Bridge #124-23 will be replaced west of Fordville on Hwy 19. Wade and Jason discussed the difference between going with aluminum instead of concrete. The difference in the price between the two was not significant enough to play a factor on choosing but it was noted that if they choose to go with the aluminum option the bridges would be finished this year whereas, if the commission decided to go with the concrete option, it would not be finished until next year. Wade explained that the State of Montana has been using aluminum for their bridges and they have found that they last as long as the concrete ones. **After a lengthy discussion Commissioner Anderson made a motion to approve to proceed with aluminum bridges, seconded by Commissioner Suda. Motion carried.** It was noted that the plan is to replace the one near Voss first, which should be done by mid-October, and the other two will be finished by the end of the year.
- Jason informed the commissioners that the County will be responsible for 100% of the engineering costs to oversee the projects. A brief discussion was had and it was determined that the commissioners felt that KLJ would be the best fit for that job.
- The discussion then turned to bridge inspections. The County has been receiving maintenance reports that they are acting on but never seeing any improvements at the next inspection. Jason feels that the inspectors are not putting the bridge deck or caps on the report to increase the load capacity. He used as an example a bridge that was rated for 33 tons 3 years ago and now it is only 4 tons. There is little help in determining what needs replacing to increase the capacity. There will be 7 bridges inspected in June and another 15 inspected in July. A lengthy discussion was then had regarding the surveyors that the State is currently using. Jason and the commissioners feel that a local engineering firm that knows the County would be a better fit for inspecting the bridges. Jason informed the commissioners that Brian is aware of the frustration but is unable to initiate any change. It was decided that Jason would look into setting up a meeting with Ron Henke, Grand Forks County, and Commissioner Barta to discuss in hopes of being able to use a local engineer going forward.
- Joelle VanderLinden, LoadPass Permits, then joined Jason to discuss the idea of Walsh County becoming a member of LoadPass Permits. Joelle provided the board with a comprehensive packet that she reviewed in detail with the board. LoadPass Permits is a uniform system for the permitting of non-divisible overweight and oversized

loads on participating county, township, and city roadways. The majority of the counties in western part of the state are participating in LoadPass Permits, with popularity growing on the eastern part. LoadPass Permits offers an electronic permit for each load regardless of the number of counties involved in the trip. LoadPass Permits stores all data that can be later retrieved through multiple reports that are offered. If Walsh County were to close a road, they would contact LoadPass Permits and they would update their system immediately. This has been a benefit for county roads during spring flooding, or even in the summertime when excess rain affects the roadways. Joelle informed the board that their system is integrated with the Law Enforcement Access Portal (LEAP) which allows law enforcement to verify permits by looking up the license plate number or by company name. Ron Jurgens commented to the board that he has knowledge of the system and felt that it would be a valuable tool. Commissioner Anderson commented that she has heard nothing but good things about the program. The initial cost is \$1,500.00, which includes training and an overview of the GIS system. If the county decided to joint their network it would take approximately 3-4 weeks, at most, for implementation. After the initial cost there is a yearly membership fee that is based on the number of permits sold. LoadPass Permits charges a 1.5% fee per permit sold, with the remaining fees collected being submitted to the county by ACH each month. **Commissioner Anderson made a motion to enroll in LoadPass Permits, seconded by Commissioner Barta. Motion carried.**

- Jason talked briefly about the biweekly meetings that he is having with the Shop Foreman in Park River. This week there will be a discussion with a landowner about the issues they are having with Hwy 32/Cty 1. Commissioner Barta and Chairman Skorheim plan to attend that meeting as well.

Tax Director Ed Sevigny presented the following:

- Ed presented the Annual Equalization Meeting information to the commissioners. The 2022 sales ratio with residential being at 88.6% and commercial at 100%. The average value per acre for agricultural land in Walsh County is \$987.81 which is up 4.91% from last year. Total true and full valuation for 2023 is \$1,260,657,425. An increase of \$64,371,403. Each township and city assessment sheet were reviewed for increases or decreases in local assessments. Many of the townships saw an increase in residential values, with the city of Grafton having the largest increase. With the increase in valuations the county mill will be worth approximately \$3,000 more per mill. Chairman Skorheim thanked both Ed and April Vaughn for the time it took to prepare the information that was presented to the commissioners. **Commissioner Barta made a motion to approve the values presented, seconded by Commissioner Anderson. Motion carried.**

The commissioners then discussed the salaries for 2024 budgeting purposes. The department heads are working on their preliminary budgets and need some guidance on what to pencil in for their salaries. Prior to the meeting Tanya Weiler provided the commissioners with a spreadsheet that displayed the monthly and annual cost associated with a COLA and Step for 2%, increasing in 0.50% increments, up to 4%. Tanya shared with the board that the current CPI index for May was 3.7% for the Midwest region, which is down from 6% in

January. Tanya recommended that some sort of COLA be added for 2024. After a lengthy discussion it was agreed that the commissioners would give a COLA and the Step but the percentage has yet to be determined. Commissioner Brintnell made a motion to approve a 2% COLA plus Step and a discussion was had on if it the county could offer a higher percentage than that. Chairman Skorheim stated that he would like to see a 3% increase, if the budget allows. Commissioner Anderson also felt that if there was room in the budget, she would be interested in increasing the 2% COLA. **Commissioner Brintnell made a motion to approve a 2% COLA with the possibility of it increasing, seconded by Commissioner Suda. Motion carried.**

Commissioners were provided a copy of the June Financial Report.

Report of county offices for fees collected during May: County Recorder \$5,382.50

Meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

Dennis Skorheim, Chair

Attest:

Kristi Quibell
Auditor