

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF WALSH COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
August 15, 2023

August 15, 2023 – 9:00 a.m.

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

At 9:00 am the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The meeting was called to order and bills were reviewed.

Commissioner Anderson moved to approve the August 1, 2023 minutes and monthly bills, seconded by Suda. All voted in favor; motion approved

Brent Nelson came before the commissioners during the employee time to report that Jessica Monette has resigned from her dispatch position and will be done the end of August. **Commissioner Brintnell made a motion to allow Brent to hire a new dispatcher to fill this open position; seconded by Commissioner Barta. All voted in favor; motion approved.** Brent voiced the concerns he had with the starting pay that will be offered. There are multiple vacant positions within the state, including in Pembina County, that are listing the starting pay higher than what he will be. Commissioner Brintnell recommended that Brent work closely with Tanya regarding his concerns.

Brent Nelson asked the commissioners if they felt that a burn ban was necessary. After a discussion it was decided to hold off on declaring one at this time.

Heidi Jensen from Agassiz Associates came before the board to give an update on the program. Heidi reported that on average 64% of the inmates participated in the program between March to June 2023. She was happy to report that they have seen great success with this program, with popularity continuing to grow. Agassiz Associates now has an office in Grafton, near the Veteran Services, and will provide 4 outpatient hours per week to the residents of Walsh County. Agassiz Associates is actively advertising their services at several places within Walsh County to encourage treatment for those in need. It was noted that at times they are still having connectivity issues during telehealth sessions. Sessions have to be rescheduled when connectivity issues are encountered, as well as when there is limited staffing within the correction center.

Haley Nielsen joined the meeting to discuss her new mobile coffee business. Haley has started a coffee shop, Fill Your Cup Coffee Company, out of a camper and intends to travel the county. After listening to her business plan **Commissioner Barta made a motion to allow Fill Your Cup Coffee Company to operate in Walsh County; seconded by Commissioner Suda. All voted in favor; motion approved.**

Sheriff Ron Jurgens appeared for the following:

- Ron reported that he has 2 open positions for jailers. After a discussion was had **Commissioner Anderson made a motion to approve the rehiring of two jailers; seconded by Commissioner Brintnell. All voted in favor; motion approved.**

- Ron then asked the commissioners for permission to have the annual employee appreciation party and, if granted, the correctional center has volunteered to organize it. The date, time, and location has yet to be determined but once approval is given the correctional center will start to look for a venue within the county. **Commissioner Suda made a motion to approve an employee appreciation party; seconded by Commissioner Anderson. All voted in favor; motion approved.**

Jason Johnston, Highway Superintendent, appeared for the following:

- Jason reviewed a permit for Mr. Zikmund with the commissioners. This permit is to allow clean-up on a ditch at the right away on County 19, where silt has built up. Jason reported that the water board approved the permit at their meeting. Jason stated that he does not see any issues with the requested permit and asked for the commissioners to sign off on it. **Commissioner Brintnell made a motion to approve the permit; seconded by Commissioner Barta. All voted in favor; motion approved.**
- Jason reviewed a utility permit for Nodak Electric Cooperative on County 19 between sections 22 & 27. Jason reported that he does not see any issues with this permit and asked for approval from the commissioners. **Commissioner Barta made a motion to approve the utility permit for Nodak Electric Cooperative; seconded by Commissioner Anderson. All voted in favor; motion approved.**
- Jason then brought before the commissioners five utility permits for Polar Communications. Jason stated that he does not have any issue with these permits but if approved, he will be including in the acceptance letter that they must stick to their map. **Commissioner Anderson made a motion to approve all five Polar Communication permits; seconded by Commissioner Suda. All voted in favor; motion approved.**
- Jason reported to the commissioners that he has filled his open position with one of the applicants that was interviewed last week. Jason asked the commissioners to approve the hiring of the second candidate so he would be fully staffed, plus one. Jason reported that both applicants were over qualified and with the possibility of retirements in the future, he would like to offer the second candidate a position. Commissioner Barta reported that the staff from the highway department brought up the idea of hiring this second candidate due to his qualifications. A lengthy discussion was had on not only the need for an additional person but also how this position would be funded. It was undetermined where the additional salary would come from but the work load would support it. Commissioner Brintnell felt that they should not be creating a new position without knowing how to pay for it strictly on having a qualified candidate. Commissioner Anderson would like Jason to come back with a plan on how to pay for it. Commissioner Barta said that Tanya has been contacted on this issue and was not against it. Chairman Skorheim felt that the highway department employees talk amongst themselves and are aware of the upcoming retirements and that is why they are requesting this candidate be hired. Commissioner Barta made a motion to create and hire a new Tech 2 position; seconded by Commissioner Anderson. **Roll call vote – Commissioner Anderson – Yes, Commissioner Suda – Yes, Commissioner Brintnell – No, Commissioner Barta – Yes, Chairman Skorheim – Yes; motion approved.**
- Jason updated the commissioners on the culverts on County 15 near Voss. Jason stated that Doug McCann came before the commissioners this past spring to put in a new 36” culvert through Walsh County Road 15 on the west side of Section 27/34.

Since then, he has hired an engineering firm for a hydraulic analysis and Jason presented the commissioners with documentation from Houston Engineering Inc. The culvert will have a flap on the south side and with a 5-year rain the flap will shut. Jason stated that the water board has signed off on this permit and he requested that the commissioners make a motion to allow Jason to sign off on the permit as well. With the road being paved it will have to be cut for this project. There was a discussion on the importance of ensuring that the road is packed properly and then repaired to its original condition. **Commissioner Anderson made a motion to approve Jason signing the permit for McCann Farms; seconded by Commissioner Barta. All voted in favor; motion approved.**

- Jason informed the commissioners that the manual jumping jack is no longer working. Jason would like approval to purchase a new one as he found one at Acme in Grand Forks for \$3,490, compared to the \$9,000 price tag elsewhere. Jason reported that he does not have it in his budget to make the purchase but he does have additional funds available from House Bill 1805. **Commissioner Brintnell made a motion to approve the purchase of the jumping jack from Acme; seconded by Commissioner Suda. All voted in favor; motion approved.**
- Jason reported to the commissioners that Park River Equipment has had a lot of mowers coming in on trade lately with a significant savings from buying brand new. The condition of the county's mowers are in bad shape and are breaking down all the time. Jason would like permission to purchase a used mower if one becomes available because they are selling right away. **Commissioner Suda made a motion to approve the purchase of a used mower up to \$16,500.00; seconded by Commissioner Anderson. All voted in favor; motion approved.**
- Jason informed the commissioners that Dean, Chad, and Jerry competed at a state competition recently and received 2nd place. Their project this year was an asphalt crevice device that is used with an air compressor to clean the asphalt cracks better.
- Jason reported that LoadPass is now live and the first three harvest permits were completed yesterday. Jason stated that all staff is set up for notification now. The Pembina County joint permit is not available on LoadPass because Pembina County is not utilizing it at this time.
- Jason updated the commissioners on the bridge on County #9. Unfortunately, the culverts that they had in mind for a temporary fix are not in the best condition. Jason stated that he should know if the patch will be possible this week. A discussion was had on the cost of the temporary patch and Jason estimated that it would be around \$250,000 to complete.

Commissioner Suda stated that Katie Thompson from the extension office was approached by First Care Health Center to see if they could use an area of the office to hold a fitness class twice a week for 10 weeks. The commissioners discussed it and felt that as long as Katie was ok with it, they would approve First Care Health Center utilizing the space for free. **Commissioner Suda made a motion to approve the use of the space for free; seconded by Commissioner Anderson. All voted in favor; motion approved.**

Commissioner Brintnell updated the commissioners on the department head meeting that was held recently. She stated that the discussion turned to the website and how the new site is hard to navigate. Ed Sevigny and Allen Anderson have been helping out after Angelle French resigned. Commissioner Brintnell recommended that they look into contracting out managing the website going forward due to its complexity. They will be looking into their options and it

will be presented to the commissioners before any changes are made. Commissioner Suda mentioned that now that JDA is contracted with Red River Regional Council, maybe that is something that they can assist with going forward. Chairman Skorheim stated that he felt it was important for a second commissioner to be at the department head meetings going forward.

Larry Tanke joined the commissioners to discuss the new contract that Oslo Region Joint Powers Board introduced at the last meeting. The water board would be interested in joining the board but are concerned about any future financial obligations that could be passed down. Larry does not have money in his budget for that and would be looking at the county for assistance if funds are needed. Larry stated that he was not against joining it and the water board would support what the commissioners would like done. A discussion was had and it was decided that once the plan is drawn up to have Kelley Cole look at it before the county signs.

Commissioner Barta reviewed an email he received from NDACo regarding ARPA fund. The email stated that there was an update on the ways ARPA funds can be used. The commissioners will review the email and discuss it at the next meeting.

Don Novak joined the meeting to discuss the junk condition in Veseleyville. Chairman Skorheim informed him that there will be a Planning and Zoning meeting this week and that is on the agenda to discuss. He welcomed Don Novak to attend the meeting if he would like. He stated that the commissioners are aware of the situation and are working on it.

Commissioner Barta informed the board that he received an email commending David Vaughn from Veteran Services on work that he has done.

Kristi Quibell stated that her office is in the process of preparing to send out estimated tax statements and the public budget hearing has to be included on them. It was decided that the meeting will be held at 8:30 am September 19th, which will be prior to the already scheduled commissioners meeting.

NDPHIT was then discussed. The auditor's office received an email from the insurance provider stating that the rate will increase by 13.77% next year with no policy change or 6.74% if the policy is adjusted. This is the second year of a double digit increase for the health insurance. Kristi Quibell stated that they are looking at other options through Farmers Union Insurance, who we have our supplemental insurance through. John met with the auditor's office and would like to present his findings to the commissioners at the September 19th meeting. John is confident that he will be able to lower the premiums without jeopardizing coverage. NDPERS has also been contacted to inquire on coverage through them. Kristi Quibell wanted the commissioners to know that they are looking into it and will keep them posted.

Kristi Quibell asked the commissioners to change the wording on the motion approving Kris Molde to work more than 8 hours per week at times. The previous motion that was approved was specific to 8 hours per week and there are times that Kris' help would be beneficial to the office if it was not capped. **Commissioner Suda made a motion to allow unlimited access, as needed, to assistance; seconded by Commissioner Anderson. All voted in favor; motion carried.**

Kristi Quibell brought back the Intergovernmental Review that was previously discussed. Kristi Quibell has been in contact with Brian Reilly from Walsh County Rural Water and the form is stating that Walsh County does not have any projects planned to tie the water lines together. **Commissioner Barta made a motion to approve the signature on the form; seconded by Commissioner Brintnell. All voted in favor; motion carried.**

It was noted that the commissioners received the pictures provided by Lawrence Burianek in regards to the Veseleyville and Nash properties.

Meeting adjourned at 11:30 am

Dennis Skorheim, Chair

Attest:

Kristi Quibell
Auditor