



BOARD MINUTES

BOARD OF WRIGHT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

DECEMBER 21, 2021

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

DATE APPROVED: DECEMBER 28, 2021

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

COUNTY BOARD MINUTES 12-09-2021 (2022 BUDGET AND CERTIFIED LEVY – 6:00 P.M.)

Commissioner Christine Husom moved to approve the minutes from Thursday, December 9, 2021. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mary Wetter and carried 5-0.

COUNTY BOARD MINUTES 12-14-21 MEETING

Wetter requested the minutes be changed to clarify that University of Minnesota Extension is hiring a Horticultural Specialist. Wetter is on the hiring committee.

Wetter moved to approve the minutes from Tuesday, December 14, 2021, with the above requested change. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mike Kaczmarek and carried 5-0.

AGENDA

Commissioner Darek Vetsch moved to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Kaczmarek and carried 5-0.

CONSENT AGENDA

Wetter requested to pull Item A1 for further discussion. Kaczmarek requested to pull Item B2, Item E1 and Item E2 for further discussion.

Kaczmarek moved to approve the Consent Agenda, removing Items A1, B2, E1 and E2 for further discussion. The motion was seconded by Wetter and carried 5-0.

*Items pulled from the consent agenda to be discussed

A. ADMINISTRATION

1. *Authorize Signatures On The 2022 Minnesota City Participation Program (MCP) Agreement
2. Approve Charitable Gambling Application, Form LG220, Silver Bullet Saddle Club, Gambling Premises: Silver Bullet Saddle Club Grounds, 17363 County Rd 7 NW, Clearwater, MN 55320, Date Of Activity: June 25, 2022
3. Approve Charitable Gambling Application, Form LG220, Silver Bullet Saddle Club, Gambling Premises: Silver Bullet Saddle Club Grounds, 17363 County Rd 7 NW, Clearwater, MN 55320, Date of Activity: August 21, 2022

B. ADMINISTRATION – FINANCE

1. Acknowledge Warrants Issued Between December 8, 2021 And December 14, 2021 (*See Below, Item IX. Warrants Issued*)
2. *Request Position Replacement For Office Tech II
3. Approve 2022 Tobacco Licenses For:
 - A. Hasty Truck Stop, Inc. DBA Olson's Truck Stop (Silver Creek Twp)
 - B. LGS Pawn & Repair, LLC DBA Buddha Glass (Monticello)
 - C. Westside Liquor Of Albertville, Inc. DBA Westside Liquor (Albertville)
 - D. AR Vapes, LLC DBA AR Vapes (Monticello)
4. Motion To Approve The Reimbursement Of The American Rescue Plan Act Funds (ARP) As Follows:

County ARP Funds:

Approval Of County Reimbursement Of \$6,364.72 From 01-099-493.6910 Transfer Out Into 01-100-493.5910 Transfer In As Follows:

\$ 225.08 For Administrative Expenses-Staff Costs

\$6,139.64 For 1.8 Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses - Emergency Paid Sick Leave

Approval Of Use Of ARP Funds From 01-099-493-8428.6261 And 01-099- 493-8400-6261

\$2,363.50 7.1 Administrative Expenses-Consultant Support

\$2,013.70 5.9 Clean Water

C. ADMINISTRATION - HUMAN RESOURCES

1. Request Approval And Authorization Of Signature Of A Memorandum Of Agreement (MOA) To Allow The Assistant Wright County Attorney Association To Donate Accrued Vacation Time To Sheriff Deputy Paul Fladung
2. Request Approval And Authorization Of Signature Of A Memorandum Of Agreement (MOA) To Allow Teamsters Local 320 (Courthouse) Members And Non-Union Employees To Donate Accrued PTO Time To Technical Support Specialist Brian Hilden

D. PARKS & RECREATION

1. Confirm Commissioner District 4 - Parks Commission Appointment Brad Danielson, Of Rockford MN, Effective January 1, 2022, Term Ends On December 31, 2025 (Three Year Term)

E. PLANNING & ZONING

1. *Authorization To Fill Office Manager - Planning And Zoning Position That Will Be Vacant Upon Retirement Of Terrie Piram
2. *Authorization To Fill Planner Position That Was Vacated On The Promotion Of Barry Rhineberger To Planning And Zoning Administrator

ITEMS PULLED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA TO BE DISCUSSED

A. ADMINISTRATION

1. Authorize Signatures On The 2022 Minnesota City Participation Program (MCP) Agreement

Wetter stated the county has participated in the MCP program since 2008. Wetter questioned if there have been any changes in utilization since last year. County Administrator Lee Kelly stated the program is no cost to the county. The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency distributes funds to participating entities for eligibility. First-time homebuyers looking for a better interest rate can contact qualified lenders. The county must authorize the program, but the county does not handle the funds. There is more demand for funds than what is available.

Wetter moved to approve Item A1. The motion was seconded by Vetsch and carried 5-0.

B. ADMINISTRATION – FINANCE

2. Request Position Replacement For Office Tech II

Kaczmarek questioned what step of the hiring process this position is in. Finance Director Lindsey Meyer stated the position has been posted but has not yet reached the closing date. Kaczmarek stated the request is for the county board to approve the replacement of the Office Tech II position. Kaczmarek added if the position is already posted, it seems someone has already approved it. Kaczmarek stated he believes positions should be approved by the county board before the hiring process starts.

Husom stated the positions previously were sent to the Personnel Committee for review. That process was eliminated due to the extra expense and time it took. Positions are created for need and the position is open. Commissioner Mark Daleiden stated positions have been posted and are still added to the Consent Agenda for county board approval. The county board can hold the position after it has been posted. The hiring process is time consuming, and this helps move the process along faster. Kaczmarek stated the county board meets frequently enough to review position requests prior to posting.

Vetsch added the county must adapt to today's labor market. Human Resources Director Schawn Johnson stated the hiring process typically takes six to eight weeks. Kaczmarek stated he feels the commissioners would be better filling their role if the positions are reviewed ahead of time.

Kaczmarek moved to approve Item B2. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0.

E. PLANNING & ZONING

1. Authorization To Fill Office Manager - Planning And Zoning Position That Will Be Vacant Upon Retirement Of Terrie Piram
2. Authorization To Fill Planner Position That Was Vacated On The Promotion Of Barry Rhineberger To Planning And Zoning Administrator

Kaczmarek stated organizational charts show the county board at the top. Kaczmarek added constituents question who is running the county: the county administrator, department heads, or the county board. The vacant Planning and Zoning Office Manager position was posted, and candidates are scheduled to be interviewed, but the commissioners have not approved the position yet. Vetsch added the Office Manager position is needed and someone must complete the duties of the position.

Kaczmarek stated the Compost Facility Manager is also listed on the Planning and Zoning organizational chart, however Facilities Director Alan Wilczek is currently managing the Compost Facility. Kaczmarek questioned if the commissioners need to review job titles and responsibilities. Vetsch added the duties of the Compost Facility Manager have not yet been determined. The position may be responsible for managing just the program or managing both the program and the facility. Husom stated the structure of Planning and Zoning was previously approved by the county board. Kaczmarek suggested scheduling a Committee of the Whole to further discuss the Planning and Zoning Department structure.

Kaczmarek added in speaking with Planning and Zoning Administrator Barry Rhineberger, there is potential for other shifts in the department's structure. Rhineberger stated there were previously three Planner positions, but now there are only two due to internal promotions. Rhineberger added there is potential to reorganize other positions relating to the Compost Facility.

Kaczmarek stated he would like the board to review position requests prior to starting the hiring process.

Kaczmarek moved to approve Items E1 and E2. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0.

Kaczmarek moved to schedule a Committee of the Whole Meeting at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday, December 28 to further discuss the Planning and Zoning Department's structure. The motion was seconded by Vetsch and carried 5-0.

TIMED AGENDA ITEMS

VIRGIL HAWKINS, HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

Approve Memo Of Understanding With The City Of Cokato, The City Of Albertville, The City Of Waverly And The Township Of Cokato For The Storage And/Or Purchase Of Salt For The 2021/2022 Snow/Ice Control Season

Vetsch moved to approve the Memo of Understanding with the City of Cokato, City of Albertville, City of Waverly, and the Township of Cokato for the storage and/or purchase of salt for the 2021/2022 snow/ice control season. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0.

GREG KRYZER, ATTORNEY

Approve Resolution To Authorize County Staff To Execute Documents On Multistate Opioid Settlement

Civil Division Chief Attorney Greg Kryzer presented a resolution authorizing county staff to execute all documents necessary to ensure county participation in the multistate opioid settlement relating to opioid distributors and manufacturers and the opioids state-subdivision memorandum of agreement. Kryzer added a confidential memorandum was distributed to the commissioners. The request is to enter into what is commonly known as the Johnson & Johnson settlement.

Husom moved to approve the resolution authorizing county staff to execute documents on the multistate opioid settlement. The motion was seconded by Wetter and carried 5-0, on a roll call vote.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

ADMINISTRATION

Schedule Closed Session Committee Of The Whole Meeting To Discuss The County Administrator's Performance Review

Kelly suggested scheduling the item on Thursday, January 6 as there is already a Committee of the Whole meeting scheduled that day.

Vetsch moved to add the item to the previously scheduled Committee of the Whole meeting at 10 a.m. Thursday, January 6, 2021. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0.

Approve Resolution Setting County Board Per Diems

Kelly reminded the commissioners that committee assignments will be determined at the Tuesday, January 4, 2021, County Board Meeting.

Kaczmarek questioned how many years the per diem has been \$50. Kelly responded the \$50 per diems started in 2015. Kaczmarek stated he would like to see the Planning Commission per diem raised to \$100, regardless of the meeting length. Kaczmarek added it is an evening meeting, the meetings require preparation, and the Planning Commission often deals with contentious issues. Vetsch stated the decisions carry a lot of weight and it can be difficult to find individuals to serve on the Planning Commission. Daleiden stated he does not agree with raising the per diem for the Planning Commission.

Husom moved to set the per diem for the approved committees at \$50. The motion was seconded by Vetsch and carried 4-1, on a roll call vote with Kaczmarek opposing.

Approve Resolution Setting Per Diems For Appointees To The County Board And Health & Human Services Board Committees, Boards And Commissions

Vetsch stated he would like to increase the per diem for the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment to \$120. Husom questioned if the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment are weighted the same. Rhineberger stated meetings are long and the weight of the decisions are equal. The Planning Commission generally deals with requests that are permanent, where the Board of Adjustment deals with individuals asking for exceptions.

Wetter questioned if site visits would receive a \$50 or \$120 per diem. Kryzer stated there are approximately two site visits per quarter. Those attending site visits get compensated for mileage as well. The commissioners determined meetings and site visits would be paid the same per diem.

Vetsch moved to set the per diems at \$120 for the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment, and \$50 for all other boards and commissions. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0, on a roll call vote.

COMMITTEE MINUTES

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (11-30-2021)

Kaczmarek moved to approve the minutes and recommendation from Tuesday, November 30, 2021. The motion was seconded by Vetsch and carried 5-0.

I. Introductions

II. Review Public Input/Comments received from Open House opportunities for consideration of extending the Local Option Sales Tax for transportation (LOST)

Public Input/Comments: We received a total of 27 comments at the three (3) Open House opportunities regarding the county board extending the Local Option Sales Tax for transportation (LOST). A spreadsheet is attached with the comments received.

- **74% favored extending the Local Option Sales Tax for transportation (LOST)**
- **20 commented that the board should extend the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST)**
- **7 commented that the board should not extend the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST)**

Summary of public input at each Open House opportunity:

- Open House at the South Shore Event Center in Howard Lake (October 12, 2021)
 - o Three people attended
 - o One comment received
- Open House at Highway Department Building in Buffalo (October 27, 2021)
 - o 14 people attended
 - o Four comments received
- Virtual Open House (online website from October 7 to November 4, 2021)
 - o 159 unique visitors viewed the website
 - o 22 comments received

Other input/feedback received from cities and townships:

- Six cities sent a Resolution of support to extend the LOST that were passed by each city's city council (resolutions attached)
- Three townships sent a Resolution of support to extend the Local Option Sales Tax that were passed by each township's board (resolutions attached)

Highway Staff Recommendation: Hausmann explained that the staff recommends that the county board extend the Local Option Sales Tax for transportation (LOST) to help address the approximate \$10 million annual county highway system funding gap identified by the Wright County Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

- The LOST is not a new tax (it was implemented in 2017) and it is intended to address needs on the 512-mile county highway system and the list of staff recommended projects (and associated map) is attached
- We recommend all LOST revenue go towards improvements to the 512-mile county highway system and based on the Staff Recommended LOST project list/map we anticipate the estimated LOST expenditures:
 - o 2022: \$9.9M construction + \$1.9M Soft costs = \$11.8M
 - o 2023: \$9.2M construction + \$1.25M Soft costs = \$10.5M
 - o 2024: \$8.9M construction + \$2M Soft costs = \$10.9M
 - o 2025: \$9.6M construction + \$1.9M Soft costs = \$11.5M
- Next steps to extend the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) include:
 - o Hold public hearing (at a future county board meeting)
 - o Pass a resolution extending the LOST, with updated list of projects (attached)
 - A list of specific projects is required to be included in the resolution

Hawkins went over a few of the comments more specifically, noting that they are on the spreadsheet handout provided. Hawkins directed the board to comments:

#8: If the LOST is continued, I believe it should be shared with the townships Not sure the appropriate basis as needs would need to be prioritized. I think specifically of the increased traffic on township roads to the Regional Park owned jointly by the country and Monticello city."

Hawkins noted that they had heard these types of comments before at the Township Officers meetings about sharing it with townships. Our staff response is, we recommend the lost revenue to go towards the needs on the county highway system. Only projects on the list are eligible to use the LOST revenue and township residents will receive benefit for the improved county highways within the townships. He also asked if LOST revenue is shared with the townships would it also have to be shared with the cities?

#22: I am in support of continuing to LOST tax. Would like to see Co Rd 7 from Clearwater to Annandale reconstructed with shoulders and better wide shoulder turn lanes.

Hawkins stated that as a highway engineer, he would love to see every mile of our highway system improved to meet current standards. The problem is to do all of our highways it would cost about \$800 million, and we know that is not feasible. The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) identifies and prioritized the list of what we should be working on, and that's what the LOST project list and map are based on. Highway 7 is identified as a preservation safety project on the staff recommend LOST project list. Projects in the LRTP are updated and prioritized periodically.

#24: Add School Blvd. to County roadway system and reconstruct roundabout -School/Cedar.

Hawkins explained that School Blvd is identified in the Long-Range Plan as a potential future jurisdictional change candidate. So that's something that could be looked at in the future, but that there need to be certain things done to School Blvd, to make that happen and fit county standards.

#25: Add roundabout Chelsea/39.

Hawkins said that this is in Monticello. This intersection is being monitored, and we will keep monitoring it, and if warranted, a roundabout can be considered in the future, but it currently doesn't meet warrants for improvement.

#27: 19 (St. Michael) More Intersection Control is needed for safety on CSAH 19 along with a Trail

Hawkins said that the Highway 19 Corridor is included on the LOST list, so that's something that we will certainly look at.

Discussions/Q & A

Kaczmarek: In looking at the map, could you explain the Green on the map provided, in regard to the northeast part of the county, is the proposed reconstruction which is a lot of more expensive than what's coded as pink, the proposed preservation. So, can you talk about the balance of spending and that philosophy of how that evens out around the county, if it does, and how it happens, that so much of the reconstruction is in that part of the county?

Hawkins: Sure, that's a good question. And again, this goes back to what the Long-Range Transportation Plan prioritizes. A lot of the recommended reconstructs in the long-range plan are due to expansion and growth, and those are in the NE part of the county which is where the county is experiencing population growth. That's why those projects are identified as reconstructs. The map of recommended LOST projects is different than our initial map in 2017, which didn't have much color at all in the western part of the county. We listened to input that we received from townships, and we are recommending using LOST revenue County wide now, and have identified needed pavement preservation and safety projects county wide.

Kaczmarek: Can you explain if there's any consideration as far as the tax being paid in certain parts of the county versus others, is there any calculation to that, as we know where there's more population there's potentially more being collected, but is there any consideration to that?

Hawkins: The only data we have as far as revenue sources is the University of Minnesota Extension Office study. The study shows that 25% of the LOST revenue generated is from outside the county.

Kaczmarek: The other question is about the township projects. Could you explain, you have an organized plan here, and what that will look like if we were to choose to include Township projects, that they would have to submit their own kind of project list and a prioritization that would take place.

Hawkins: Yes, quite frankly, with internal staff, we talked through this and we don't know what that would look like, we know our county highways need improvement and this LOST revenue would go towards those projects identified on the map and they're located in townships, county-wide.

Vetsch: I would say, it would be the same for cities and townships, for discussion sake, say every year a million dollars of the collective local option sales tax would be set aside, then after the first year, so in 2023, cities and townships will submit projects that the county board can use that million dollars for that project. And once we approve it then it goes to a public hearing, so it can go on the list for the next year.

Kaczmarek: said that the discretion falls on the board. For all of our benefit, he said, he wanted to know what was involved in that process.

Vetsch went on to explain that they cannot break funds up per city and township, because county roads go through cities and townships. Our county roads have far more traffic than township roads.

Wetter: The road between Buffalo and Monticello, State Highway 25. I realize it's not a county road. When you sent the MNDOT report, it talked about a roundabout at CR 113 and TH25, but they looked at the accident reports and they said it was mainly bumper to bumper crashes and all that was needed was turn lanes. So, when the county decides on a roundabout or not, do you look at the accidents in the area?

Hawkins: Yes, we do the same Intersection Analysis that MnDOT does on their highways.

Daleiden: I know we looked at changing the metrics about how we decided to do the project based off of safety, accident reduction, traffic flow, etc. I know there are some comments here that a lot of people don't like raising taxes and they want us to reduce costs, I don't know how you do that on highways.

Husom: This really came up initially because of the projects that we're facing on our roads, and the fact that we need to upgrade and do simple maintenance, and we have the choice of either raising people's property taxes, or we take this alternative. A lot of these people are able to stay in their home longer, are older, and are not necessarily the people that are driving a lot and beating up the road, they are also maybe not the people that need to do as much shopping. So, having items other than food and clothing taxed, so that was a choice that we faced. I personally didn't want raise people's property taxes to access to fix our roads, and 25% of the people coming into our county are paying for this, so they're also helping repair our roads, it's kind of far that they're paying their share.

Wetter: I guess what really bothers me about the Local Option Sales Tax is saying that it's not taxed on essential things. Well, it's taxed on your phone, your heating bill, your electric bill, all those things that I feel are very essential for living in Minnesota. I guess that's what really kind of burns me is the fact of what's considered essential and not. It just irks me to no end.

Vetsch: Two points to that, the first – statutorily the State determines what is essential. And secondly, if you are really upset about that, you should be upset about the Energy Deficit Tax that's on your energy and gas bills.

Wetter: We needed to put in a new furnace and a new roof, both of which were taxed. That is what really bothers me.

Vetsch: You have to look at it like, you replace a furnace once every 12 years, you replace a roof every 20 year. If we were to raise property taxes it would raise them like \$180 dollars every year or more to get the same amount of money in the period LOST generates.

Wetter: Well we did our calculations and we would have ben better off having paid the property taxes.

Daleiden: Paying the increase over a 12-year period?

Vetsch: Said that there's no way, because you don't pay those high-ticket items like a roof and furnace every year.

Wetter: From a local business man, he says at least he knows with the 1/2 percent, how much it's going cost to pay. If it were property tax it would vary from year to year.

Kaczmarek: Two questions, looking at your bill, is there any way to have clear language so people can recognize what the charge (LOST) is on their bill/receipt? And do we have any input in how our local businesses put that on receipts for tax payers?

Vetsch: You get software that can do it, and when collecting taxes, you have to state what you are collecting that taxes on. The wording doesn't have to be exact, but similar.

Kaczmarek: My second question, for the public hearing that is coming up, would that be an opportunity for cities and townships to bring forward a plan of their own sort, and that be a time for us to evaluate whether we want to divvy the funds up between the cities, townships and county?

Vetsch: Before you can do that, I think you are going to want to create a different metrics to it, so that when they're applying, you might say to the township that we're going to require a 25% match. We're doing the required that the road has to have X amount of traffic, or some types of requirements to help with it. Just throwing it out there ambiguously won't work.

Daleiden: I'd like to hear from the public and cities.

Steve Bot (City of St. Michael): There are plenty of projects. Certainly, divvying the funds would dilute it more, in our case at the city, we have plenty of county projects that we have a city share on, we would probably try to apply it to that, that comes out of what would be our local roads since we only get so much money for that, so that's where we would use it. At the end of the day, the city definitely thinks this needs to pass to get our county roads up to the standards that they need to, including safety and capacity, and the growth area is where a lot of that is coming, but it's also where a lot of the taxes are getting paid from also. I don't know that anybody would be against that, especially if this revenue starts going, but at the same time, I'm sure the county staff disagree to dilute the funds a little bit more and get less done probably in the long run, but if it's what helps makes it pass, then absolutely. Thank you for the opportunity to be here to speak.

Adam Flaherty (City of Otsego): The Otsego City Council passed a resolution of support to present to the board. As Steve (Bot) mentioned, we just appreciate the LOST funding source. From Otsego's perspective, we really liked the Long-Range Transportation Plan, and think that it was an important document for the county to undertake. The city has its own 10-year plan that we are looking at funding and financing for. As Steve mentioned, if money is diluted a little bit, it would help offset some of the city portion that we're planning on paying for with property taxes and other funds within our own cities.

Daleiden: Thank you gentlemen. Do the townships have anything?

Greg Eckblad (Rockford Township Board): When it comes to the funds that would be available, what do the townships need to submit? A feasibility study or complete set of plans?

Vetsch: Until they have a set of metrics to follow its hard to say just yet.

Eckblad: So future thoughts, something to work on?

Daleiden: yes, we are working on that.

John Uecker (Albion Township Board): For our township we suggest you keep it going. We would just like a little more pushed our way. For our township, we would have a hard time qualifying for LOST funds because we don't have any tar roads.

Don Schmidt (Buffalo Township Board): I think the county is doing a pretty good job of maintaining the roads. There's a lot of roads out there that they take care of and I think they're doing a good job. I think there should be some kind of sharing a little bit with this LOST funding. I have lived in Buffalo for 75 years, and I remember when our gravel roads only had two milk trucks, a mailman and a bus, that's all that went down the road in a day. If you go out there and take a look at some of our roads now, and we are one of the few townships that have mostly all black tops, you can look at the traffic on our roads – it's pretty unbelievable. The roads take a beating. We're trying to constantly stay on top of our roads. Probably the biggest part of the budget is the roads. I don't know what the answer is, but some sharing of the funds would be appreciated. I'd really like the board to consider it.

Terry Weese (Buffalo Township Board): I pretty much agree with what Don (Schmidt) said. My feeling is that it should be right across the board. Everyone pays.

Hawkins: I would just like to re-emphasize the county staff recommendation, and we understand the needs of the township, the cities, and the state, and the needs are far greater than what's available for transportation. We all know and understand that the intent of this tax when the county board adopted it in 2017 was to address the funding gap on the county highway system, and to repave a mile or pave a mile of township road is the same cost as paving a mile of County Highway 7. You get the biggest bang for your buck, and being the steward of taxpayer dollars, the traffic on our County

Highway system is three or four times what it would be on a township road, so that's why we recommended that it be used on the county road system.

Daleiden: Does MnDOT update the traffic volume counts every three years?

Hawkins: Its's a two-year cycle.

Daleiden: Now that information is available on the state website?

Hausmann: For traffic counts? yes. Our county system is on the GIS website. All the state highways and County State Aid Highways (CSAH's).

Hausmann: One thing I will say, is that one of the side benefits of this, is that we are able to design the roads to a 10-ton design, so we don't have to post the roads in the spring. So, our county roads, like this summer, county roads 100, 141, 142 in Cokato Township, we would typically do a 7-9-ton design, but now, when we talk about the truck traffic in the western half of the county, this allows us to take our lower volume county roads and design them to the 10-ton design. It makes a big difference in the longevity of the roads. It's another one of the benefits of the LOST funds.

Mattice: in 2017 when the LOST funds were first initiated I brought up the concept of putting aside some of the funds for regionally designated trails. For your consideration as you look at funds and staff projects and recommendations we would like you to keep it in your considerations to put a small amount aside so we have built in local match for those types of trails to designated regional trails within the county, where we cover those funds designated for grant funds in the future, rather than relying on our CIP.

Daleiden: Thanks Marc.

Daleiden: We don't need to decide today, but I do think we need to figure out what our next steps are.

Vetsch: Mr. Chair, I think we need to first pass a resolution to extend the LOST, whether it's a quarter percent, half a percent, whatever, and then once that resolution is passed, then we can have the discussion on how to proceed with how to disburse the LOST funds and have a public hearing.

Hawkins: Yes, the next step would be to have a public hearing and pass a resolution extending the LOST tax beyond December 2022. As part of that resolution, you have to have the list of projects, and we would like to remind the board, that at our last budgeting round, we lost a project at the 11th hour and we were directed to put it on the new LOST list, and that's the County Road 124 preservation project. So, there's some timing issues for us. In order for us to do that project in 2022, we need this to happen and get approved in early spring, otherwise the CR 124 project would be dropped. The current tax goes through the end of the 2022.

Hawkins: We intentionally did not identify a time frame for any of the projects on the list. The projects on the list means that LOST revenue can be used to do those projects, but it doesn't have to be used. There could be other funding sources that go towards those projects as well, and by not identifying short-term, long-term, or midterm timeframes for completion, it gives flexibility for when things change from year to year based on priorities or budgeting.

Wetter/Kelly: Kelly explained to Wetter on the side the timeline for renewing the LOST program and what happens if they don't.

Hawkins: (adding to Wetter and Kelly's conversation) The current local option sales tax would just expire if there's no action taken before the end of 2022. The current LOST resolution had a five-year sunset date and highway staff would recommend, for planning purposes due to the complexities of with right away and engineering that it could be, if it is extended, that it be extended for longer than five years, to 10 or 20 years. Many counties have their list of projects with no time frame on the LOST list when the projects on the list are completed. The LOST tax is no longer collected.

Kaczmarek: I recommend that we extend the local option sales tax for up to 10 years. I like having the sunset date. I don't think it's too painful to revisit.

There was discussion between the board about the process to proceed.

Recommendation:

The consensus of the board was to extend the Local Option Sales Tax for an additional 10 years and have a public hearing in February 2022 (date and time tbd) to extend the LOST tax.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (12-14-2021, 11:00 A.M.)

Vetsch requested a clarification that Wright County residents will spend \$3.62 billion on broadband services over a thirty-year period, rather than one year.

Vetsch moved to approve the minutes and recommendation from Tuesday, December 14, 2021, with the above listed change. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0.

I. PRESENTATION OF BROADBAND ASSESSMENT AND FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR WRIGHT COUNTY

Project Administrator Elizabeth Karels introduced Jack Maytum, Senior Design Analyst for Design Nine, Inc. – the firm hired by the county to conduct a comprehensive broadband assessment and feasibility study. Design Nine has conducted approximately 250 similar studies for counties and municipalities around the country. The purpose of the broadband study is to determine the technical assets available, what areas are unserved or underserved, and make recommendations on how to fill in those gaps.

The study focused on several factors, including a technical asset analysis, current use/service gap analysis, a broadband survey, connectivity solutions, preliminary design cost estimates, and potential infrastructure funding and grant opportunities. An enormous amount of money is available in the state and federal infrastructure plans. Maytum said Minnesota has been at the forefront of infrastructure funding for broadband and the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access has set lofty and aggressive goals for the state. This includes by 2025 to meet the federal standards of all homes and businesses to have access to 25 Mbps (Megabytes per second) download speed and 3 Mbps upload speeds. By 2028, those speeds should be up to 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload speeds. By 2031, those speeds should be up to 100 Mbps download and 50 Mbps upload speeds. Maytum said it may be difficult to reach the federal mandate standards and that many underserved areas have unacceptably low speeds.

Maytum provided the recommendations that came out of the study, including developing a countywide broadband strategy, reinforcing that county government will not get involved in the Internet provider business, the need to provide improved and affordable fiber and wireless access, develop partnerships with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs), seek grant funds, manage expectations and develop a long-term funding strategy. Maytum said broadband access has become as important to households as having electricity. He added that historically ISPs have taken grant funds and worked independently in their own best interests rather than working in partnerships with counties and municipalities and that needs to change because rural areas remain underserved because it isn't as financially profitable for ISPs to connect small, limited neighborhoods.

John Deitering of Rockford Township asked Maytum if he was familiar with the Blandin Foundation, which monitors all 87 Minnesota counties. He said that, according to the foundation's data, Wright County isn't on track to meet the federal requirement standards for 2025. Maytum responded that he is familiar with the Blandin Foundation and agrees with that assessment. Deitering added that there needs to be competition between good providers to be successful. Maytum responded that almost all counties will have difficulty meeting that standard, adding that if Wright County made the decision immediately to connect everyone in the county with access to fiber, it would take a minimum of five years to accomplish. He added that it's no reason not to start the process and the broadband study can serve as a guide to accomplish that goal.

Wright County currently has approximately 16 ISPs, which is an extremely high number compared to most counties. Many counties only have two or three ISPs. The smaller ISPs have shown more of an interest in providing broadband improvements because it is in their best interests to increase their scope than larger, established providers.

Much of the Design Nine study plan includes mapping of the county, incorporating points of interest (schools, police/fire departments, parks, hospitals, libraries, etc.), population density, percentage of population with low to moderate income, areas available for Housing & Urban Development (HUD) grants, existing cell tower locations, existing fiber routes, Internet service levels and voice/phone coverage areas. Maytum said the maps can be overlayed on one another to make connections where the different aspects of the maps meet.

Maytum provided tables that showed the available broadband technology in all Wright County cities, the cost per month provided by individual ISPs and telecom expenditures. According to the data, Wright County residents will spend \$3.62 billion on broadband services over a thirty-year period. Maytum said fixed wireless technology is improving every day and the technology is now on its fifth generation of service. Radio service is becoming more available on towers that can reach a distance of two to five miles of wireless service. Maytum added the focus of the broadband study is to prepare the county for the future. He added that larger business may need 1 gigabyte of available connectivity, which will require access to fiber.

Maytum provided results from the resident survey that was conducted over the summer. More than 11 percent of county residents responded to the survey – a very strong percentage compared to similar surveys around the country – and Maytum pointed out some of the results that Design Nine felt were important for the county board to know. 86 percent of respondents are interested in faster or more reliable Internet service, a number Maytum thought should be closer to 100 percent. 92 percent of respondents said they believe county government should help facilitate better broadband. 59 percent reported they have trouble using common Internet services. 41 percent responded they were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with current Internet speeds. 51 percent of residents have nine or more Internet-connected devices in their homes. 44 percent indicate that availability of broadband Internet is affecting where they choose to live. Maytum said most of the responses from Wright County mirrored those in similar studies around the country, but that he was surprised at the high number (44 percent) of people who said broadband availability is a priority of where they would choose to live. He was also surprised that 39 percent of respondents said they spend several hours a week gaming.

Commissioner Mike Kaczmarek questioned the survey question that stated 92 percent of respondents believe county government should help facilitate better broadband – asking if there was a breakdown of what people felt “facilitate” meant. Maytum said it was for county government to assist Internet providers, not actively get into the ISP business. How the county could accomplish that is to encourage shared broadband infrastructure. If the county is doing road construction, it could insist that the placement of conduit be installed that could later be used for fiber installation – something that could be accomplished for pennies on the dollar as opposed to installing conduit as a separate project.

Deitering asked how much money Wright County is willing to invest in broadband Internet service. The question was referred to Information Technology Director Matthew Fomby who said he didn’t want to give a specific number because the county is looking at the cost/benefit analysis of several options. He said the county has set aside millions of dollars in ARP (American Rescue Plan) funds for improving broadband access as well as looking to implement a Dig Once policy – which would tie in the laying of conduit with road construction projects. Fomby added that the “broadbandification” of the county will not be a once-and-done situation. The county is dedicated to assuring it is accomplished but is still at the options that can provide the most benefit for the money available. Commissioner Darek Vetsch said that over the next several years, the county is expected to invest \$7-12 million in broadband. Fomby said the money largely won’t be county funds – almost all of it coming from federal and state grant funds.

Vetsch asked what the speed limitations are between fixed wireless and in-ground fiber. Maytum said advantage to in-ground fiber would be akin to the difference between a fire hose and a sprinkler system. The amount of information that can be carried by fiber is literally unlimited. The latest information says that fiber lines can carry 314 terabytes (314,000

gigabytes). There are substantial improvements being made to fixed wireless, but most of those are limited to laboratory testing and not real-world application.

Lori Cocking of Waverly asked if ARP funds are dedicated for broadband projects. Commissioner Mark Daleiden said the funds are dedicated, but there remain many unknowns as the county begins the process of trying to partner with ISPs. The requirements from the federal and state levels remain unclear. Cocking said she serves on non-profit boards and often has to travel 45 minutes to an hour to get proper Internet access to virtually attend meetings. Daleiden said the county can only be as successful as the buy-in from ISPs. Cocking said the lack of connectivity has significantly hurt families during the period of distance learning for students. Vetsch said there is enough money available for ISPs to get involved, but with limited workforces, the final decision may be equipping those areas that can get most “bang for the buck,” adding that the process is more of a five-to-10-year process than a one-to-five-year process. He also said there are issues being dealt with concerning franchise agreements ISPs have with townships that effectively give them a monopoly in a township unless other franchise agreements are drawn up that meet the same standards.

Dean Eberhardt of Rockford Township said there were students that struggled badly during distance learning because they didn’t have the ability to keep video operational due to low Internet speeds. He said a wireless provider has advertised 50 Mbps Internet speed, but the actual number is far below that. He asked how the county can assure that state and federal requirements for 5G wireless minimum speeds are achieved. Maytum said most offers say “Up to” maximum speeds and that, at certain times, those speeds are achievable, but in high-usage times of the day, they clearly are not close to that. Maytum said Internet speeds are getting better and the technology is catching up quickly to increase speeds.

Maytum said the challenge is to get ISPs to work together instead of competing against one another, which has historically been the trend. The hope is the county can work in partnership with multiple ISPs and that competition would result in a better product at a lower cost to the consumer. Maytum said infrastructure improvements need to be an organic process that will likely take five to 10 years to see meaningful improvement.

Ann Bajari of French Lake Township asked if townships are going to be involved in the broadband expansion process and if discussions from township boards should be taking place now. Daleiden said those discussions will have to take place because of franchise agreements and the county will be working to get a template to make franchise agreements similar. Vetsch said Wright County townships have \$3.5 million in ARP funding that can be used toward local improvement of broadband infrastructure to partner with the county.

Maytum provided PowerPoint slides of data collected during the survey, including types of Internet used in homes, the number of Internet providers by percentage of the population, what the Internet is used for, the number of adults and students in a household and how much broadband services cost a household per month. The result is a detailed overlay map that shows the level of coverage and services available in all portions of the county. In the eastern portion of the county there are many more alternatives than are currently available to residents in the western portion.

Maytum provided a cost analysis to have eight towers in the western and northern portions of the county installed for fixed wireless with towers located in Maple Lake, Annandale, Southside Township, Albion Township, Corinna Township, Silver Creek Township and Clearwater Township. The current cost estimate for such a project would be \$1.7 million. He also discussed the funding options available to the county to access money from federal and state sources.

Commissioner Mary Wetter asked if the grant programs have matching fund requirements. Maytum said the rules have yet to be established, but the intention is to get as much money out of state and federal programs that will not require matching funds or minimal matching funds.

Sue Hedke of Monticello asked if there is a sense of urgency to get broadband improvements throughout the county. Fomby said there are issues dealing with implementation that slow the process, including franchise agreements and bureaucratic hurdles in place that impede progress. Vetsch added that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the

extent of the lack of broadband accessibility and this study is one piece of the process the county will be using moving forward. There is an immense amount of red tape in making meaningful progress because there are so many boxes that need to be checked to make projects eligible for grant funding.

Maytum said there is progress being made because the federal government has become aware of the inefficiencies in the current system and significant changes will be coming in the future. He added the best solution is competition among ISPs and getting ISPs engaged in assisting the process. He said that some areas of Wright County are significantly underserved, but other areas of the county are considerably worse than what Wright County is facing.

Kaczmarek asked about the respondents to the survey, specifically if there were any survey questions pertaining to the willingness for resident taxpayer dollars to be spent on broadband expansion. Maytum said the only question dealt with government collaborating with ISPs. Daleiden said the county board has no interest in getting involved aside from facilitating ISPs and local governments to assist the underserved areas.

Vetsch said that, while competition would be ideal, it's likely the rural areas of the county are only going to have a single ISP that is willing to invest in a particular area. Maytum said that if the county or municipalities get grant money, ISPs will be knocking on its door. At that point, the county will have to evaluate the plan. He said 10 years ago, ISPs would work to block any competition or expansion and that has changed significantly in the last couple years. ISPs are recognizing the importance having a robust broadband infrastructure, which is a change from the recent past. Maytum said that having a comprehensive plan in place puts Wright County in a better position than many other counties in the state to get the process moving and accessing more grant opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION: The consensus was to move forward with formulating/implementing a policy to include laying conduit in conjunction with future county road construction projects and finalize the draft of the broadband assessment and feasibility study for release to county residents for viewing.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (12-14-2021, 1:00 P.M.)

Vetsch moved to approve the minutes and recommendation from Tuesday, December 14, 2021. The motion was seconded by Husom and carried 5-0.

A. Legislative Discussion for 2022 Session

Commissioner Mark Daleiden welcomed those in attendance to the meeting. The County Commissioners introduced themselves and stated which areas of the county are represented by their districts. All other attendees also provided brief introductions.

Commissioner Darek Vetsch began discussing the issues the county is experiencing relating to Driver Vehicle Services (DVS) testing. Vetsch stated testing services were reopened in Buffalo on Tuesday, December 7, 2021. However, the facility is only open two days a week: Tuesdays for knowledge testing and Wednesdays for Class D road tests. Wright County has obtained the delegated authority to administer Class D written tests to help facilitate needs across the county but is limited to only four proctors and one administrator for the program. Vetsch added it would be beneficial to allow more staff the ability to proctor exams. Daleiden stated the county is currently struggling to hire transit drivers. If an individual is hired without a passenger endorsement, it would take approximately 60 days to earn the endorsement allowing them to begin work.

Commissioner Christine Husom stated there is space at the new Government Center to provide driver testing services. It would be a great service for constituents. Daleiden added the state was not interested in joining the county at the new Government Center. The state did not think the new Government Center site would be cost-effective due to the number of different requirements of the road test.

Representative Eric Lucero stated he introduced House File 1141. Currently, there are deputy registrars that can perform several functions such as renewing driver's licenses and transfers of titles. House File 1141 seeks to grant deputy registrars the ability to administer road tests. Lucero added he does not believe the state should have a monopoly on the administration of road tests.

Senator Scott Newman stated the Department of Public Safety closed 93 testing station across the state. In the last legislative session, the funds to open the testing stations was provided. Currently, there is an ongoing issue with hiring individuals to run the stations. Newman stated he is in favor of third-party testing. However, Newman stated he believes the Department of Public Safety will oppose third-party testing for Class D Licenses. Newman stated he is very aware of the issues and encouraged the commissioners to stay in touch with him regarding the issue.

Vetsch stated the Homestead Property Exclusion is another issue within Wright County. The market values of properties continue to increase at a rapid pace, diluting the homestead exclusion immensity. The makes it unaffordable for individuals, especially senior citizens, to stay in their homes. The commissioners support revisions to the formula outlined in 273.13 subd. 35. Lucero echoed support on the issue. Flaherty & Hood Shareholder Attorney Brad Peterson stated analysts at Flaherty & Hood are beginning to look at the issue and is hoping to have an update in the next few weeks. Peterson stated if the exclusion is adjusted, the value will be shifted from the levy.

Daleiden stated there have been many changes since Drainage and Ditch laws were first implemented. Recommended language was introduced last session by Representative Marion O'Neill. Vetsch discussed issues with Ditch 39 and Ditch 33. Ditch 39 runs into a natural creek, and that is where the county's jurisdiction ends. Vetsch added there has been movement on the issues with Ditch 33 and he is confident improvements will be made in the next 12-18 months.

Vetsch stated broadband is also an issue within Wright County. Funds have been made available, however there have been challenges as the county is competing with others to obtain federal and state grants. Vetsch stated using a different metric to disperse funds may make the program more efficient.

Project Administrator Elizabeth Karels stated there have been issues finalizing franchise agreements which have caused barriers to broadband projects. The state has the Office of Broadband Development, but there is no clear statewide goal or coordinated efforts. Additionally, certain Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have coverage in portions of the county, offering few internet services options for residents. The American Rescue Plan (ARP) and other federal funding sources have speed requirements. This limits the technology that can be used, especially in rural areas. Lucero added broadband availability is becoming a variable in deciding where people live.

Health and Human Services Director Jami Goodrum discussed the department's legislative priorities. Wright County seeks adequate and flexible funding for Public Health and continued statewide response to COVID-19, including vaccine distribution, community outreach, and education. Specifically seeking the continuation of the Local Public Health Grant as a critical source of flexible funding to local public health agencies that allows the county to address local needs. Additionally, the county would like to maintain billable virtual contact options for all programs which require face-to-face visits.

Wright County supports legislative efforts to ensure a speedy, equitable, and sustainable economic recovery that aims to alleviate stresses borne by individuals without work and without access to housing. Goodrum stated the county would like to address the statewide workforce's need for affordable and accessible childcare by making permanent the reprioritization of the Basic Sliding Fee wait list, exploring ways to reduce the challenges and burdens experienced by providers, increase the number of providers by investing in the provider training and the development of childcare facilities and strategically increasing State resources for childcare subsidies for low income working families. Wright County is projected to overspend the Basic Sliding Fee Child Care allocation by 129 percent resulting in spending in excess of the allocation by approximately \$260,000. Lastly, Goodrum supports updates to Minnesota statutes that promote county operational flexibility and modernization of local government publication requirements.

Daleiden thanked the legislators for allowing the use of Local Option Sales Tax (LOST). It has benefited the county and 25 percent of the funding comes from outside the county. Husom added there will be a bill in the House and Senate to support projects on Highway 55. The Highway 55 Corridor group is looking into bus rapid transit.

Public Health Director Sarah Grosshuesch is the county representative for the Opioid Epidemic Response Advisory Council created by House File 400. The Advisory Council has been working on developing an agreement for the Opioid Settlement Fund. Grosshuesch stated Public Health works with the Jail and Sheriff's Office on intervention opportunities.

The proposed settlement allows for 75 percent of funds to be allocated to local jurisdictions. The funds must be attributed to specific functions.

Wright County Economic Development Director Jolene Foss stressed the importance of affordable housing and childcare for residents. Tax credits are essential for developers to build low-income or workforce housing. Foss also stated the importance of funding from the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) programs.

RECOMMENDATION: Informational only.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE/ADVISORY BOARD UPDATES

Emergency Services Board (ESB). Kaczmarek met with the board last week and the group voted to extend the warranty for radio maintenance and defects for another year.

Safe Schools. Kaczmarek met with the group to discuss truancy. Disciplinary matters are returning to a normal pace but there are social media issues. The Sheriff's Office requested incidents be reported rather than dealing with issues on social media.

Mayor's Meeting. Presentation and update from Senator Bruce Anderson. There was discussion on the state surplus and how it should be spent at the Legislature. Additionally, the homestead exclusion and a variety of other topics were discussed.

Mentorship, Education, and Drug Awareness (MEADA). Husom stated the group is becoming members of the Minnesota Prevention Alliance, which will give the group more resources and broader information. Community action teams are working on marketing plans for campaigns to get more information out to parents and students. Lori Lockett will be presenting the *Dead on Arrival* documentary at schools. The group is looking for a forum to present the movie *Life After You*. Both Lockett and Rebecca Graham graduated the national coalition academy and may go to Washington DC for the graduation. Additionally, the group approved the mini-grant for Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Elementary School for an upcoming project.

State Health Committee. Husom attended the meeting. The committee discussed funding sources and trying to keep steady funding sources for Public Health. The group discussed getting the message out regarding the pandemic. There was a presentation from Minnesota Department of Health Director of Communications Mike Schommer. According to the presentation, the average American takes in 100,000 words per day which is 34 gigabytes of information, and our attention span is decreasing over time. There was a COVID-19 impact assessment discussion to further discuss lessons learned and compelling needs.

Department Consolidations. Daleiden and Vetsch met with Department Heads to discuss consolidations that were previously discussed at the board retreat. This is complicated and there will be ongoing discussions.

I-94 Coalition. The I-94/610 project received Transportation Economic Development (TED) funding in the amount of \$5 million, which is a third of what is needed. TED grants require the group to not apply for any other grant opportunities for one year, so the group is discussing next steps.

Wright County Economic Development Partnership (WCEDP). The Management Committee met to tour the new Government Center space. The group is working on creating a two-page synopsis of the strategic plan.

Wright County Community Action. Wetter attended the December 14 meeting. Headstart has been federally mandated to require COVID-19 vaccinations. There is potential of losing teachers and bus drivers.

South Fork One Watershed One Plan. Wetter attended the meeting. The McLeod Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) will be the fiscal agent and handle the day-to-day operations. Renville County will be the county lead. The officers were selected. The bylaws were reviewed, and changes need to be made. The group is in the process of hiring a consultant.

OSHA Rule. The stay has been lifted. Kelly stated the county is preparing for whatever may be coming.

The meeting adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

County Board Minutes submitted by Elizabeth Clow, Office Manager.