



## BOARD WORKSHOP MINUTES

### BOARD OF WRIGHT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

November 14, 2023

DATE APPROVED: November 21, 2023

|                   |            |
|-------------------|------------|
| Tina Diedrick     | District 1 |
| Darek Vetsch      | District 2 |
| Jeanne Holland    | District 3 |
| Nadine Schoen     | District 4 |
| Michael Kaczmarek | District 5 |

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| <b>Members Present:</b> | Darek Vetsch, Jeanne Holland, Nadine Schoen, Michael Kaczmarek                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Others Present:</b>  | Alan Wilczek, Clay Wilfahrt, Jim O'Dell, Lee Martie, Lindsey Meyer, Elizabeth Karels, Matt Detjen, Ross Demant, Greg Kryzer, Matt Fomby, Lee Kelly, Marc Mattice, Caitlin Chovan, Jami Goodrum, Sarah Grosshuesch, Tyler Webster, Barry Rhineberger, Schawn Johnson, Jolene Foss, Steve Jobe, Josh Kwolik, City of Buffalo Administrator Taylor Gronau, City of Buffalo Clerk Susan Johnson |

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Commissioner Darek Vetsch opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m.

#### **I. Schedule Meetings as Needed**

No meetings to schedule.

#### **II. Commissioner Updates**

##### Darek Vetsch

Vetsch stated that the City of Cokato did not approve the contract with the Wright County Sheriff's Office it failed on a 2-2 vote. Cokato is asking to renegotiate the contract and Vetsch has no interest. As of right now, policing will cease effective January 1, 2024. Assistant County Attorney Greg Kryzer stated that Administration should direct Cokato to start contingency plans for alternative law enforcement.

##### Central Mississippi Regional Partnership (CMRP)

Vetsch said CMRP is transitioning from a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) to a non-profit. The reason for the transition is CMRP is looking to move toward lobbying efforts instead of planning. Vetsch said that it will be brought forward to the Wright County Board at a later date for its participation.

#### **III. Reasonable Accommodation Policy**

Vetsch said this is a policy that was adopted in response to the American Disability Act (ADA). The policy was drafted to get better direction on how to deal with situations and parameters to comply with state and federal regulations. Commissioner Mike Kaczmarek asked about the Land Use Plan and how an establishment is exempt. Kryzer said that exemption is given due to disability and federal law states that a requestor must be provided with reasonable accommodations to the zoning regulations. Kaczmarek asked if there was any legal reason why county staff couldn't ask what an applicant's screening process is regarding criminal history. Kryzer said there is no reason the question can't be asked on an application, but the answer will not make an impact on whether an application is approved or denied. Kaczmarek asked if there was interest from other board members to add a background screening question to the application and consensus was to add a question relating to background screening.

Kaczmarek referred to a current property that was approved by the Board of Adjustment. He gave details on the home, stating that approval was given for nine unrelated people to occupy the home. The home is a four-bedroom, 1,400-square-foot home with two occupants per room. Kaczmarek asked if there was any interest in language change to lessen the number of people allowed in a house. Kryzer said the application was received and the Planning and Zoning Office checked all of the boxes, including the septic system accommodations and room requirements. Kaczmarek asked about

the requirements regarding staffing at the home, and Kryzer said that a staff member is required to be at the home anytime there is an occupant present. Director of Public Health Sarah Grosshuesch said that the staff is licensed by the Department of Human Services (DHS). Planning and Zoning Administrator Barry Rhineberger said that staff is not there 24 hours, but they do have to be there when the residents are there. Kaczmarek asked who does the follow-up to make sure that someone is there with the residents. Grosshuesch stated that DHS carried the licensing and would be the ones to follow through.

***RECOMMENDATION: Direct staff to add a reference related to background screening to the Planning and Zoning application.***

#### **IV. Election Precinct In County Government Center**

Election Manager Tyler Webster stated that the City of Buffalo is looking to designate the Wright County Government Center as one of its precincts. The Elections Office has worked with county staff to develop a logistic plan for parking areas, signage, etc. There was discussion of possibly charging a fee for facility use. Kryzer asked if the City of Buffalo was expanding or if this a proposed new precinct. Buffalo City Clerk Susan Johnson stated that the city will split a current precinct. Webster said that Wright County typically has larger precincts and by splitting the precincts Wright County would be able to service the voters better. Webster said that this precinct would be the most secure facility within the county. Commissioner Mike Kaczmarek asked what the rental agreement would look like for square feet or specific dates. Webster stated that it would be left to the discretion of the board. Assistant County Administrator Marc Mattice stated that the county policy for room guidelines and discussion was had regarding the county policy for room use and the consensus was to allow Buffalo to use the Government Center as a precinct without charge.

***RECOMMENDATION: Allow the City of Buffalo to use the Government Center as a precinct without charge.***

#### **V. Discuss License Application Packet Process**

Webster said that there were questions about how the tobacco license applications are being presented at board meetings and there have been some requests to provide more information. There were data practice issues with redaction of more information. During the renewal period, redaction can be challenging. Webster asked what information is needed from the board to make decisions on tobacco licenses. Webster presented a spreadsheet that was created for renewals that includes information that will identify the applicants, location, and violations within the last couple of years. Kaczmarek said the information provided on the spreadsheet gives enough detail. Consensus was to allow the spreadsheet to be submitted to the board instead of the full redacted application.

***RECOMMENDATION: Utilize the summarized spreadsheet in place of the full applications for tobacco license renewal requests going forward.***

#### **VI. Emerald Ash Borer Presentation (EAB) – Matt Detjen**

Agriculture and Drainage Coordinator Matt Detjen gave a brief presentation about Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). Detjen said that Wright County currently does not have a plan in place regarding EAB. EAB is an insect that attacks ash trees, but the larva form is the most destructive and EAB has almost a 100 percent mortality rate for ash trees. Wright County has a high volume of ash trees, especially in boulevard areas. There have not been a lot of ash tree surveys except for the parks systems. When ash trees die, they become harder to cut, are brittle and potentially hazardous.

There are more than 50,000 ash trees estimated in urban areas of Wright County. The Parks & Recreation Department currently surveys and checks the health of 651 ash trees in high-use areas. Parks had applied for a grant in the amount of \$488,750 and did not receive the full amount but did receive \$423,250 to cut and replace ash trees in parks. Parks surveyed 651 trees in high-use areas and would like to cut and replace about 250 trees. Vetsch asked about what the average cost is to cut and remove and Detjen said the estimated cost is about \$1,500 per tree depending on size and

location. There is no way to eliminate EAB but there are measures to take to slow the spread, proactively cutting ash trees and tree injections. Treatments are needed every one to two years and can cost up to \$200.

Detjen said that he would like to see what potential steps can be taken as a county. The county is not involved in going onto residential property, but the county does have a lot of rights-of-way (ROW), parks, and land that contains ash trees. Detjen summarized the potential steps that Wright County could take to be proactive with EAB.

Detjen said that there are a good number of cities in Wright County that have already taken steps to combat EAB. Kaczmarek asked what is done about private property or ROW that has a tree that died from oak wilt or Dutch elm disease. Detjen said he is not sure what The Highway Department does currently for ROW. Ash is different as there are trees that die and fall every day and is just high density that will need to be proactive with EAB because the trees die rapidly. Vetsch asked how quickly EAB spreads and how fast it progresses. Detjen said trees will start dying within three years and it will spread exponentially once EAB is introduced into an area.

Commissioner Jeanne Holland asked how ashwood is disposed. Detjen said that it is suggested to chip it twice or transport is allowed within a quarantine county, in which Wright County is. If transported to another site, there is potential to spread EAB to other areas that do not have EAB yet. There is conversation of a central disposal site to send people if the cities do not provide a disposal site. Mattice said that ash can be burned or chipped in one-by-one-inch squares. Mattice said that it is not recommended to stock and should be burned right way.

Commissioner Nadine Schoen said that instead of using resources to take down healthy trees is there the ability to help constituents with trees that are already infected and causing issues in ROW. Kaczmarek noted that he was not in favor of cutting down healthy trees as part of the EAB control plan. Vetsch suggested contacting residents who have trees that need attention in public ROW and doing a 50/50 match with the grant funds. Mattice said that the affected trees that have been monitored since 2018 are in mowed areas of parks and high-use areas. Director of Parks and Recreation Ross Demant said that Parks is looking to be proactive for public safety and the grant can't be applied to ROW or private property.

Kaczmarek asked what the expiration date is for spending the grant money. Detjen said 2027 is when the money needs to be spent. Vetsch said that he would like to hold onto the money and use it as part of a large-scale bid and hopefully get the price down per tree. Detjen said that the Highway Department does not have a tree-cutting budget and there is not current staffing to survey the ROW.

***RECOMMENDATION: Accept grant award for Shade Tree Grant and research other granting opportunities, potential budget impact, draft language for countywide EAB plan and potential ordinance.***

## **VII. Ditch Assessment Update**

Detjen said there is an assessment for one ditch and that will be brought to the board at the next meeting for approval and asked if the board would like to have a discussion on this before it is voted on. Discussion was had regarding the benefits of different interest rates and consensus was to set the interest rate at 3.75 for 2024. Finance Director Lindsey Meyer asked for confirmation from the board if the ditch assessments could be sent out and give proper notice. The board approved the ditch assessment notice to be sent out. Kaczmarek said that he would like to see a quicker turnaround for assessment notices and Meyer said it is challenging with the board meeting schedule, but it is possible to have them sent out by the first week in November.

***RECOMMENDATION: For future years, send ditch assessments out during the first week of November when possible. Approve 2024 interest rate of 3.75 percent for ditch loans.***

## **VIII. Strategic Plan**

### **I. Leadership Philosophy**

Mattice said there was a platform that was developed to get training and growth opportunities for potential leaders in Wright County in all positions. There was input from commissioners to add courtesy as one of the core values. Mattice said with the board's approval, Leadership would like to move forward with starting to develop some programs based on the platform. The consensus was to accept the Leadership philosophy.

***RECOMMENDATION: Accept the Leadership platform.***

## **II. Good Governance Strategic Initiative**

Assistant County Administrator Clay Wilfahrt said there was an initiative brought up and Leadership discussed how the county operates in comparison to other counties operate. In working with the projects team, a survey was sent to other counties throughout Minnesota and asking specific questions on how they operate. The surveys were reviewed and Wilfahrt summarized the similarities and differences between Wright County and similar counties. Discussion topics included how the budget is set, how committee meetings are scheduled, and how items are added to a board meeting.

***RECOMMENDATION: Formalize a policy on how citizens request an item to be placed on the board agenda.***

## **III. Engagement Survey**

Wilfahrt presented a draft survey and discussion was had regarding the survey's effectiveness and if it is appropriate for the cost. There is concern from the board about what action would be taken with the information collected. A suggestion was made to internally process data using lower-cost software and manually process data using current staff time.

***RECOMMENDATION: Revisit the survey strategy and bring back to the board.***

## **IX. Review Committee List**

The committee list was reviewed, and the following changes were made:

Vetsch joining Extension replacing Schoen.

Schoen joining Economic Development Partnership replacing Vetsch.

Holland and Kaczmarek joining the Revisors Committee.

***RECOMMENDATION: Update committee assignments as listed above, keep the remaining committee appointments the same as 2023.***

*The meeting adjourned at 12:25 p.m.*

*County Board Workshop minutes submitted by Jenn Eggersgluss, Administrative Specialist*