

WABASH COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

The Wabash County Council met in session on Monday, March 27, 2017 in the Commissioner's Meeting Room of the Wabash County Courthouse. Chairman Jeff Dawes called the meeting to order at 5:00 P.M. Seven Council members were present: Dawes, Randy Curless, Matt Dillon, Kyle Bowman, Lorissa Sweet, Philip Dale, and Matthew Mize. Bowman opened with a word of prayer and Dawes led in the Pledge of Allegiance. The proceedings of the meeting were recorded by the County Auditor's office.

Chairman Dawes requested that those present silence their cell phones and stated that all public comments regarding agenda and non-agenda items are permitted and encouraged.

The first order of business was to approve the minutes of the February 27, 2017 meeting. Dale made a motion to approve the minutes. Dillon seconded the motion and it passed by a 7-0 vote.

County Extension Director and Health & Human Sciences Educator, Teresa Witkowske was present to introduce the department's staff members and explain the configuration and activities of the extension office. Witkowske stated that the County Extension office is much more than a 4-H program and explained that the staff educates the community through a variety of programs and classes and has all the resources of Purdue University specialists at their disposal to answer questions from the public. The staff includes Curt Campbell, Agriculture & Natural Resources, Angela Christopher, 4-H Youth Development (absent due to illness), Susy Jennings, Multi-County Community Wellness Coordinator, and Vicki Shafer, Multi-County Nutrition Education Program who are all Purdue University educators. Also part of the staff are Tammy Unger, Administrative Assistant, Sidney Reed, Part-time Secretary, Jessi Cox, Summer Assistant, and Claire Crum, Summer Intern. Each staff member briefly explained their responsibilities.

Present for this part of the meeting were several citizens of the community and Glen and Sheila Butcher, spokespersons for those concerned about the 33 mile bike trail and individual property rights. Butcher stated that they are not in opposition to bike riders or economic development and are not "anti-trail" but rather, are concerned about how the Wabash River Trail (WRT) has gone about the development of the project and the lack of oversight by Wabash County elected officials. He stated that there has been no official plan, no official public input in the project and no adherence to the state and local laws from the beginning. He explained the violations of the WRT while installing the boat ramp in Lagro and a retaining wall under power lines as part of the project. Concerns included the effects on eagles and other wildlife, changes and restrictions on hunting activity, a variety of safety issues and criminal activity on the trail, the access to the trail by emergency services, trail maintenance

and liability issues. Butcher thanked the Regional Development Authority (RDA) Board for passing a resolution in March saying it won't seek eminent domain to acquire land for the trail but he expressed concern about other state agencies possibly doing so, should funding be sought in the future. Mr. Butcher stated that no permission from the utility company, Duke Energy for the use of easements has been applied for by the WRT and that some of the work already completed is in violation of the utility easement right-of-way. He also explained the liability issues that currently exist regarding the county's responsibility for floodplain management. Mr. Butcher stated that opponents to the trail project would like to see a "stop work order" in place by county and state officials and a proper plan presented by the WRT to the public and the landowners involved. Sheila Butcher called for an official plan for this project and public input. She called for promotion and support of the 100 miles of already existing bike trails within Wabash County and support of our existing reservoirs and the state and local laws that protect the river. Mr. Butcher stated that Duke Energy has said that no easement access has been granted for this project. He also stated that the DNR is currently focused on the project and will be thoroughly reviewing any permit applications.

Other citizens expressed opposition to the Wabash River Trail. Mike Shumaker was concerned about easements and flood zones and habitat destruction. Pat Schumaker expressed concern about wild animal attacks and other safety issues. Rob Bakehorn was concerned about livestock, specifically as an owner of bison. Councilman Mize stated that he had attended other meetings and wanted to know if there is anyone present who is "for the trail". No one present spoke in favor. Mr. Butcher stated that he contacted the WRT and requested a meeting, but to date, nothing has been scheduled. Miami County landowner, Elaine Anderson asked what the responsibilities of county officials are in this situation. Council President Dawes stated that the WRT requested CEDIT funds from Council last year but no funds were approved and that the WRT has not addressed the Council or the Commissioners since then. Dawes thanked the opposition group for their input but stated, at the present time, there is nothing that the Council can do other than to consider the concerns expressed if the WRT committee approaches the Council in the future.

Present and next on the agenda were Wabash County Economic Development Group (EDC) Executive Director, Keith Gillenwater, CEO of the Northeast Indiana Regional Development Authority, John Sampson and North Manchester Town Council President, Jim Smith. Gillenwater introduced Sampson who explained that the greatest challenge to the State of Indiana is the loss of population and skilled labor employment which resulted in the original creation of the "Regional Cities Initiative". He stated that the "Initiative" needed to set up the Regional Development Authority (RDA) within all eleven counties and all counties did so in 2016. The Regional Cities Initiative through a tax amnesty program took an innovative approach and set up a plan and submitted it to the State called "The Road to One Million". The state required

that not more than 20% of each project be given as a grant and that each project needed to be supported by 20% public funding and 60% private funding. He handed out a summary of all projects to date. Dawes asked, of all eleven counties requested to join the RDA, were there any counties not in approval? Sampson stated that all counties agreed to create and join the RDA.

Gillenwater explained a handout of statistics that show a -3% population decline in Wabash County. He stated that the net domestic migration (people who lived in Wabash County one year and then moved out of the county the next year) and the adjusted net income are both negative. People that are leaving the county are taking higher wages with them versus those coming into the county to replace those wages. Statistics include the population estimate projections from 2020 to 2050 with population decreasing in various age categories but by 2030, there is a decline in all age categories. The largest decline is in the category of the 45-64 year old people that make up skilled labor; those who own property and are the highest wage earners. Gillenwater stated that this is a “scary” situation and crucially important to increase the population with skilled workers so the community can benefit from good paying jobs. He also explained projected school enrollment which is not sustainable. Gillenwater stated that the Regional Development Authority is an opportunity to use private funding grant money to fund projects to keep the population from leaving Wabash County.

Present to address one of projects that was funded by the Wabash County RDA was North Manchester Town Council President and Manchester Learning Center spokesperson, Jim Smith. Smith stated that only the last 20% of the Manchester Learning Center was funded by the RDA which traditionally is the most difficult to raise. He explained that if they had not received the last 20% which totaled \$520,000, we would not have “broken ground”. He stated that eminent domain was never a part of the project and no part of the Learning Center is owned by the RDA. He stated that he and those involved with the Learning Center project consider the RDA funding one of the best economic development tools available for small communities. He also recalled his experience serving on Council from 1992 through 1998 with the implementation of the county economic development income tax (CEDIT) and how much pressure from influential community members came to bear on him to vote against the tax. He encouraged elected officials to not listen to the “loudest voice” but to vote for what is best for the county.

Gillenwater next presented statistics if the population would not decline in Wabash County. Councilman Dillon asked why the population is declining so badly. Sampson and Gillenwater explained that 10 years ago, building access and infrastructure was important for the location of new business but currently, the demand is for a skilled labor workforce. The job climate has changed and the amenities that support the labor force has had to change. Dillon stated that he doesn't understand why “outside money” and

regionalization was needed to help build population in the area. N. Manchester Town Council President Jim Smith responded by stating that there are all kinds of projects that we have had the ability to receive grants from the state, from OCRA and through other agencies. “As a local community, we could never have afforded to have financed our downtown façade program that we were awarded a grant to complete two or three years ago”. Sampson added that the RDA assists counties that are operating on limited resources since communities cannot raise enough public funds for these projects. The Region needs to work across area boundaries for resources and community benefits. Councilman Dawes asked about what the State has planned for another round of grants. Sampson stated that there is no plan for another round at this time so we should take advantage of this current grant funding.

Councilman Curless stated that he’s talked to several residents that don’t want certain projects to be funded, rather, they want funding that creates jobs. Some businesses have had to employ workers from other counties to get a skilled workforce. Gillenwater stated the importance of having skilled workers in place and other amenities established before companies want to invest and people want to locate in Wabash County. Sampson explained that this is the number one problem in this region. He explained that in 2009, during the past recession, this region came out of this faster than most. The unemployment rate in this region continues to be one of the lowest. The purpose of the Regional Development Authority is to band together to address the workforce problem and plan for the future.

Council member Dillon asked: In determining the economic climate, are tax rates and regulations seen as a deterrent to economic growth? Sampson responded by stating that fifteen years ago, the State of Indiana struggled but has excelled in the last several years with less regulation in order to promote development. He stated that the skilled labor force issue now needs to be addressed and that is what the RDA is trying to do.

Mike Ridenour, former County Council member asked Mr. Sampson how many County Council votes were in opposition to creating the Wabash County Regional Development Authority (RDA) at the time of the approved ordinance in May, 2015. Mr. Sampson stated that there were three “nay” votes among the Wabash County Council. Ridenour asked about the protocol for repealing the Wabash County Regional Authority ordinance. County Attorney Steve Downs stated that approval and repeal of any ordinance would be subject to statutory requirements. He stated that this ordinance includes a statement that the County shall be a member of the Regional Authority until June 30, 2023. Ridenour encouraged the competition for the regional authority funds.

Fort Wayne City Councilman, Jason Arp was present and stated his dissatisfaction with a Fort Wayne City RDA project award. He stated that a developer, Great Lakes Capital with just one single owner received funding

from the Allen County RDA for a housing project and that the “Regional Cities” is out of money because of this project. Allen County RDA asked the city of Fort Wayne Income Tax Council to approve using the CEDIT tax to fund other projects. Arp stated that he, as a property owner, didn’t want to see a neighbor getting public money for his own personal contracted development project when other individuals could not receive this same funding. Gillenwater stated that Wabash County chose three projects that were considered important to economic development and job creation. Sampson stated that Allen County projects are determined by that county and the City of Fort Wayne and those projects all have consequences, but also, hopefully, benefits to the community. He stated that the benefit of having an RDA doesn’t benefit the “Region”, it will only benefit the specific communities and that there is no way that Wabash County is competing with Allen County for funding of these projects.

Council member Sweet asked, based on Wabash County’s population, if Wabash County is getting its “fair share” from being in the RDA and from the distribution of the \$42 million regional authority funding, especially if the funding for one of Wabash County’s projects could be jeopardized because of the lack of approved permits. Mr. Sampson explained that the money was not intended to be evenly dispersed across the 11 counties and not politically, but competitively disbursed. He stated that when the process is done, 10 of 11 counties will have applied and received grants all initiated on their own, all projects important to them, all projects privately funded in the majority and all having some kind of local government match. The total count is now 23 projects, 15 of which are outside Allen County. The money will be disbursed at approximately 60% to Allen County and the City of Fort Wayne and 40% outside Allen County.

Councilman Dillon asked how long it would be before the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority and the Northeast Indiana Development authority would be uniform and the laws applied equally? Sampson answered by stating that these authorities are under different laws and the goals and purposes of each region are very different. There is no movement currently to change this. Northwest Indiana Region actually own projects, the Northeast Indiana Region doesn’t want to own any project.

The next order of business was to address the Transfer of funds requests.

TRANSFER RESOLUTION 2017-85-02

Whereas, it has been determined that it is now necessary to appropriate more money than was appropriated in the annual budget; NOW, THEREFORE:

SEC. 1 Be it ordained by the Wabash County Council of Wabash County Indiana, that for the expense of said county government and its institutions for the year ending December 31, 2017, the following sums of money are hereby transferred and ordered set apart out of the several funds herein named and for the purposes herein specified, subject to the laws governing the same:

SEC. 2 WHEREAS, it has been shown that certain existing appropriations now have unobligated balances which will not be needed for the purposes for which appropriated, it is further resolved that the following existing appropriations be reduced in the following amounts.

DECREASE: GENERAL FUND #1000

Superior Court Security Officer Supplies #1000-22600.000.0036	Amount Requested	Amt. Approved	AYE	NAY
	7.40	7.40	7	0

INCREASE: GENERAL FUND #1000

Superior Court – Law Enforcement Equipment #1000-40432.000.0036	Amount Requested	Amt. Approved	AYE	NAY
	7.40	7.40	7	0

Explanation submitted by Judge Christopher Goff: The freight charge of \$7.40 was not included in the original quote for radios so need to transfer funds from another account to pay the entire invoice.

Dale made a motion to approve the request for a transfer of funds. Curless seconded the motion and it passed by a 7-0 vote.

Presented to the Wabash County Council, read in full and adopted this 27th day of March, 2017 by the above aye and nay vote.

The next order of business was to address the Additional Appropriation request: Present was Probation Officer Trisha Hanes.

ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS
ORDINANCE #2017-02

WHEREAS, it has been determined that it is now necessary to appropriate more money than was appropriated in the annual budget; NOW, THEREFORE:

SEC. 1 Be it ordained by the Wabash County Council of Wabash County, Indiana, that for the expense of said county government and its institutions for the year ending December 31, 2017 the following additional sums of money are hereby appropriated and ordered set apart out of the several funds herein named and for the purposes herein specified, subject to the laws governing the same:

DRUG FREE COMMUNITY FUND – AACTION PROGRAM

	Requested	Appropriated	AYE	NAY
Prevention & Education	9,250.00	9,250.00	7	0
Treatment & Intervention	7,500.00	7,500.00	7	0
Justice	10,579.00	10,579.00	7	0
TOTAL:	\$27,329.00	\$27,329.00		

Explanation: The 2017 grants for programs that were approved by the AACTION organization with at least 33% within each category. For appropriation into the Drug-Free Community Fund so the money can be distributed to each grant recipient.

Dillon made a motion to approve the amount requested for Prevention and Education, seconded by Dale and it passed by a 7-0 vote. Dillon made a motion to approve the amount requested for Treatment and Intervention, seconded by

Curless and it passed by a 7-0 vote. Dale made a motion to approve the amount requested for Justice, seconded by Dillon and it passed by a 7-0 vote.

Presented to the Wabash County Council, read in full and adopted this 27rd day of March, 2017 by the above aye and nay vote. The Auditor was directed to present the above additional appropriation to the Department of Local Government Finance for approval as provided by law.

Council reviewed:

February 2017 Auditor & Treasurer Financial Reports

February 2017 Solid Waste Management District Income & Expense Statement

Council member Matt Dillon asked to address the members of the County Council and he stated:

“When I ran for County Council in 2014, I ran mainly on a platform of limited government and federalism. I wanted to protect private property rights and fight for economic liberty. Today, I am given the opportunity to do both. What I heard from the many people that I talked to was that the county needed fresh, new ideas. Seeing as how we have five members with less than two years of experience, I don’t think that I was the exception. I believe all of Wabash County is looking at us for new ideas. I think we ought to try freedom. For a decade, we have been told that we need to leverage public funding to create jobs. We used as much as we could and created a very beautiful downtown area. Over the past few years, we were told that we needed to seek out state and federal funding to create jobs and more quality of life projects. Now we are told that we need to leverage the abilities of the Northeast Indiana region to stop population decline. Bill Konyha used say (and I paraphrase) that “we were tearing down grain solos and building sand boxes”. As much as I respect Mr. Konyha, I believe that is the wrong approach. Every autumn, fields of gold are put into those silos. For centuries, agriculture, manufacturing and small business built up wealth enough for us to be able to leverage some of their capital towards completing some of these projects. What we have today is a direct result of their charity and the pooling of community funds.”

“I reject the notion that we need stolen capital from the federal, state and regional governments to take care of ourselves. In fact, I believe that it sets a bad precedent. If we continue sticking our hands out in want, we will never find a way to compete in anything but welfare. That is an unacceptable scenario to me. I represent the idea that we need to stop taxing the incomes of people who work here so that they have the capital to reinvest in their businesses. I represent the idea that we should stop taxing every farmer and manufacturer for the equipment that they own, and not just picking who gets the benefit and who doesn’t. I represent the idea that we are bloated enough here and that we have the capacity to scale back our local government reach and put more money in people’s pockets.”

“So I ask the council today, when are we going to start being responsible for ourselves and stop asking for handouts? Let us lead from a place of strength and reject the free cheese in this mousetrap.”

Dillon made a motion to repeal Ordinance #2015-85-05; an ordinance establishing the Northeast Indiana Regional Development Authority in Wabash County. The motion died for a lack of a second to the motion.

With no other business to come before the Wabash County Council, the meeting was adjourned. The next meeting is scheduled for April 24, 2017.

The following individuals also attended the February 27rd Council meeting:

**If any names are spelled incorrectly, we apologize.*

Deputy Auditor B.J. Grube, County Commissioner Brian Hauptert, Barry Eppley and Scott Givens, Sheriff Bob Land, County Coordinator Jim Dils, Attorney Steve Downs, Attorney Mark Frantz, Wabash Plain Dealer reporter Mackenzie Klemann, and The Paper reporter Emma Rausch. Also present were Bud & Bonnie Pressler, Tom Deweer, Glen and Sheila Butcher, Michael Vicar, Scott Greiner, Vonell & Louella Krom, Lena and William Gray, Jason Arp, Kent Dyson, Mike Ridenour, Amanda Rice, Robert Callo, Jim Dixon, Dewayne Boggs, Ronald Bakehorn, Elaine Anderson, Tamara Ney, Terri Cox, Amanda Ney, David Roe, Kristie Bone, Jason Callahan, and Mike Galbrith.