

?Board of Commissioners propose to make Madge Lyles full time assistant in Veterans' Affairs Office

Written by

Friday, 24 October 2008 00:00 - Last Updated Friday, 24 October 2008 07:22

? The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Wednesday afternoon, October 15, with all members present. The Commissioners unanimously approved the minutes of previous meetings, all claims and payroll requests.

In a far more civil environment than what was experienced by the County Council on the evening of October 10, the Commissioners engaged in meaningful discussion with supporters of Madge Lyles. The 30-40 supporters listened as Board President, Lana Sullivan, outlined a plan that would place Madge Lyles in the part-time position as Veterans Affairs Office (VAO) Assistant, working two days a week. After hearing why Lyles was too valuable to the needs of veterans to work only part time, the Commissioners agreed that the funding was available within the VAO approved budget to pay for a full time assistant.

On Friday evening, October 10, the County Council voted not to fund the position of Emergency Management Office (EMO) Assistant position that Lyles has held for seven years. Lyles split her time between VAO and EMO even though her pay and job description were exclusive to the EMO. As a first step in reorganizing the EMO and as a cost cutting move, the position held by Lyles was eliminated. Confusion over how Lyles has been paid and what her official duties have been still seemed evident even after the Commissioners proposed to have her work in and exclusively paid through the VAO. Questions as to the legality of a government employee being paid through one agency but working for another were only briefly addressed during the meeting. If this proposed plan is implemented as of the first of the year, those questions and concerns will no longer be of issue.

The Commissioners will present their proposal to the County Council and the issue should be resolved at the November 3 Council meeting. An informal telephone survey of several County Council members conducted on Thursday, October 16, indicates that the Commissioners' proposal should meet with acceptance and will, in all likelihood, be approved. Several of the Council members interviewed emphasized that Lyles' work with veterans is important and should continue but only if she is paid out of the VAO approved budget as per the Commissioners' proposal.

In other business, the Commissioners heard from Laura Dixon regarding grant applications for and updates on the Posey Water Project. Dixon requested the Commissioners approve the grant applications for approximately \$147,000, contingent on signatures of the Posey Township Board members. The Commissioners unanimously approved Dixon's request.

Additionally, the Commissioners received bids from two local automobile dealerships for three pickup trucks to be used by the three Highway Department District Foremen. After reviews of the bids by County Attorney, Thomas Scifres, and County Highway Superintendent, Rick Graves, the Commissioners voted 2-1 to accept the low bid of \$54,003 for three 2008 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 trucks from John Jones. Commissioner Byron Green explained his "ney" vote by saying he agrees that the trucks are needed but that he would feel more comfortable waiting until after the first of the year once the state of Indiana has approved the 2009 budget. Payment for the new trucks will not be required until after the first of the year.

Graves informed the Commissioners that over \$100,000 has been spent thus far by the County Highway Department on clean up efforts resulting from the September 14 hurricane. According to Graves, he is hopeful that most, if not all, of that expense will be reimbursed through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Information was provided to the Commissioners by Emergency Management Director, Kristy Vernon, regarding a grant application to the Department of Homeland Security in the amount of \$221,422. The grant money will be targeted at reimbursement for preparedness exercises,

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development of an improvement plan, equipment, and specifically, a mobile communication system for all key personnel to use that operates on the same frequency. The grant requires no local matching funds. The Commissioners approved the grant application.

The Commissioners also approved the purchase of a new brush cutter in the 2nd District and requested Graves to assemble specifications in preparation for the purchase of new dump trucks later in 2009.

When asked how long the Highway Department will continue to work 4-day weeks, Grave said that he plans to resume a winter schedule sometime around the end of October. He and Green discussed the possibility of starting the workday later during the winter but no decision was made.

Commissioner Mike Goering informed his fellow Commissioners that Christopher B. Burke Engineering will need to make changes to the Environment Assessment Report for the proposed truck bypass. According to Goering the changes will require approximately 100 additional billed hours for a total of \$5200. The Commissioners approved an addendum to the contract with the engineering firm.

With no further business to conduct, the Commissioners adjourned until their next regularly scheduled meeting on Wednesday, November 5.