? The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in regular session for the last time in 2008 on Wednesday, December 17. All members were present, unanimously approving minutes of previous meetings, all claims, and payroll.

Stating that the fairgrounds horse arena generates more revenue for the county than most people realize, Commissioner Byron Green, along with Commissioners Mike Goering and Lana Sullivan agreed to encumber $11,448 from the 2008 Fairgrounds Fund to be used in 2009 for the construction of a new building at the arena.

According to advocates for the project, the estimated cost for the new building will be in excess of the encumbered amount. However, both the Commissioners and the project proponents agreed that the final decision should be made by the new Board of Commissioners taking office in 2009.

On another subject, the Commissioners heard from Salem City Attorney, Drew Wright, and signed a joint resolution with the City of Salem Common Council to transfer title of the “old cheese factory” from the county to the city. In addition the resolution spells out financial responsibility for demolition of the dilapidated structure. The estimated cost of demolition is approximately $50,000, of which, the county will pay up to $25,000 in addition to allowing a maximum of 100 tons of debris to be put in the county land fill at no charge to the contractor. Plans call for the property to be turned into a public space once the demolition is completed.

In other action, the Commissioners awarded contracts for Highway Department materials for next year. It was agreed to accept all bids for stone so that, depending on the location of the job site in the county, transportation costs could be minimized. So too, was it decided to accept all bids for fuel. Culverts Plus received the contract for culverts. Temple and Temple along with Cathcart received the bids for asphalt.

Representatives for Knapp, Miller, Brown Insurance addressed the Commissioners with information on insurance rates for county automobiles, property, and liability. According to Steve Miller, rates for the county have declined nearly $65,000 over the last five years. Miller pointed to one area that has potential savings for the county; auto insurance. Apparently, county vehicles have been involved in more accidents than what has been expected in the last few years. Miller suggested that a rate reduction might be possible with a safe driving course offered to all county employees and hopefully, a decrease in the number of accidents. Miller went on to say he was not implying that county employees were bad drivers but that the number of accidents was greater that would normally be expected for the size of the fleet being insured.

In other business:

- Laura Dixon spoke to the Commissioners and received approval for a grant application to cover the painting costs for a water tower which is part of the Posey Water Project. The cost of painting the structure is $56,400.
- Washington County Assessor, Jason Cockerill informed the Commissioners that his office will begin to advertise for bids to perform the property assessment in the county. Due to a change in the law, commonly referred to as the “circuit breaker”, the positions of township assessors are being eliminated and companies specializing in the process will be hired. The Commissioners and Cockerill agreed that he would come back to the Board with a recommendation after he has reviewed any bids received. Cockerill said that he expected as many as six companies to be bidding.

- The Commissioners recognized Colton Roach for his volunteer work at the archeological dig site east of Salem. Roach, a student at Salem High School, worked last summer as part of the dig team excavating Native American artifacts from the right of way for the new truck bypass. Roach plans to study archeology and history in college, hoping to be a archeologist or museum curator.

Highway Department Superintendent, Rick Graves, told the Commissioners that his crews worked extended hours during the ice storm to keep county roads safe. According to Graves, county trucks spread over 400 tons of salt and sand on icy roads.

As a final piece of business, Board President Sullivan recognized Goering and Green for their service to the county. Goering is ending his tenure on the Board after two terms and Green after one. They will be replaced by John Mishler and Dave Brown respectively.

With no further business to conduct, the Board adjourned until their next regularly schedule meeting on January 7.