

Commissioners expect cost of truck bypass to increase significantly

Written by

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The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Wednesday, May 20 with all members present. The minutes of previous meetings, payroll and all claims were approved unanimously.

Board President Lana Sullivan announced that she has been in contact with representatives of the Indiana Department of Transportation in regards to the current status of land acquisition for the truck bypass east of Salem. According to Sullivan all properties except for four parcels of land (totaling approximately 26 acres) have been acquired. The price for those four parcels will be determined by litigation. Currently, the cost of land acquisition is near \$2.3 million, not including the four unresolved parcels. When the project began, it was estimated that Washington County's share of the cost to acquire the right of ways would be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$350,000. However, it now appears that the cost will rise to an amount in excess of \$500,000. The Commissioners agreed that some difficult decisions will have to be made in order to make up the expected increase in cost.

In other business, the Commissioners approved a request from Washington County Chamber of Commerce President Hank Jacoby for \$10,000 from the Economic Development Income Tax Fund (EDIT) to make up for an expected shortfall in operating revenue in 2009. Jacoby told the Commissioners that it is his and his board's intent for the organization to become self-sufficient by the end of the year. Jacoby said that part of the strategy to achieve that goal is to double the membership from the current 185; according to Jacoby there are some 1300 businesses in the county that could and should be members. Jacoby pointed to two specific financial problems facing the Chamber from a previous administration: the necessity to refund \$4600 related to a defunct historical book project and a withholding tax liability in excess of \$8100.

In a related topic, Commissioner David Brown asked Jacoby for an update on efforts by the Chamber, the Tourism Board and the Washington County Economic Growth Partnership in formulating an economic development plan for use of the 25% of EDIT monies earmarked for non-roadwork projects. Jacoby said that the three organizations have met and discussed the issue but nothing is ready to be presented at this time. Clearly disappointed, Brown said that he would think that two months should be enough time for the three organizations to come up with at least a general plan for how to use the money.

The Commissioners also dealt with the following items:

- Unanimous approval of a motion to enter into contract with a company to do an audit of telecommunications billings in hopes of realizing savings.
- Unanimous approval to pay invoices related to the Posey Township Water Project from grant funds earmarked for that project.
- Appointment of John Mishler as a member of the Board of Directors for Critical Assess Health Services.
- Discussion of a request by Washington County Treasurer Bob Woodward to initiate a mandatory automatic deposit program for the paychecks of all county employees.
- Request from members of the Livonia Town Board for any available funding to help pave streets in the town.
- Update on road paving progress from Highway Superintendent Rick Graves.
- Update on fairground improvements by Brown.

With no further business to conduct, the Commissioners adjourned until their next regularly schedule meeting on Wednesday, June 3