

Gibson County Council Regular Session Meeting January 14, 2025

The Gibson County Council met in a regular session on January 14, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. at the Southwest Annex Meeting Room.

Members Present: President Jeremy Overton, Vice President, Derek McGraw, Council Members: Jay Riley, Craig Schafer, Robert Schleter, Michael Stilwell, and Hannah Whitehead
Also present were Auditor Mike Watkins, 1st Deputy to Auditor, Kristy York, and 2nd Deputy to Auditor, Logan Vickers

The Council opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Election of Officers – Councilman Riley motioned to retain the 2024 officers, seconded by Councilman Schleter. The vote was 7-0.

Approval of Minutes: The December 10th regular session and December 30th, 2024, special session minutes were both approved as written.

Acknowledgement of Treasurer/Clerk Reports – Council acknowledged these reports.

Prosecutor's Office Payroll & Job Descriptions – Prosecutor Cochren thanked the Council for their new office space and invited all to see. He requests that the salary ordinance be changed from two "secretaries" to two "paralegal's" as that is what these people do. He also requests this salary be equal to the Public Defender's paralegal. He offered to allow his Fund 2502 Deferral User Fee Fund to pay for this if there is no other way. Councilman Overton asked if they have any certifications; Prosecutor Cochran is not certain of this, he feels these employees could walk into his office without schooling and attain the job. Councilman Overton feels the Public Defender's employee had a degree or certification. Prosecutor Cochran explained that he does not feel there is a specific statute saying they must be certified as paralegals. The Prosecutor's Office employees are non-union employees. Council Member McGraw asked that the salary ordinance be amended to equal the Public Defender's Paralegal, but he will check with Public Defender Moody on her paralegal's degree, seconded by Council Member Riley. The vote was 7-0. Councilman Overton feels there should be a compensation committee, outside of the County Council, to review these areas at budget time.

Council Appointments – The Council made appointments for 2025. Derek McGraw will serve on the Community Corrections Board; Mike Stilwell will serve on the Gibson County Solid Waste Board; Hannah Whitehead will serve on the Safety Committee; Jeremy Overton and Jay Riley will serve on the Sheriff's Pension Board; Hannah Whitehead will be the Ex-Officio member of the Chamber of Commerce; Jeremy Overton, Jay Riley, & Robert Schleter will serve as the Council's Finance Committee; Robert Schleter will serve on the Regional Economic Development Board; Robert Schleter will serve on the Gibson County Development Board; Phil Young & Bruce McIntosh will serve on the Gibson County Redevelopment; Derek McGraw will serve on the Gibson County Economic Development Board; and Mike Stilwell will serve on the Gibson County Advisory Planning Commission.

Department Reports

EMA – EMA Director McKinney informed Council of all the grants she has applied and received. She has received \$290,453.61 in grants including \$51,653 of salary reimbursements, which runs in arrears. \$149,661 has been received for radio grants. Director McKinney also acts as the flood plain

administrator; she presented the Council with her job description. She requests an increase in her budget's part-time line so she can employ a part-time person for the entire year. She also requests a raise for herself to match the pay rates of the EMS Director and Highway Department Superintendent. She requests that they move her to a salaried amount, instead of hourly so she does not have to keep up with compensatory time and overtime. She informed the Council that some counties have used the new LIT public safety tax to supplement the EMA. Councilman McGraw feels she should have an overtime line. The Council will take this under advisement, and she will make a request to be on the next agenda. The Council jumped into the Galea Springs item so Baker Tilly could attend via phone.

Health Department – Administrator Shade gave Council the monthly reports; there were no questions. She provided a Health First Report showing their partnerships and the county's score card. The score card shows the county has a high rate of suicide, adult obesity, and tobacco use. They are partnering with a lot of different agencies to try to combat these issues, including Purdue Extension. She directed everyone to follow their facebook page for upcoming dates and times for all their health initiatives.

Chief Deputy Ballard presented the Sheriff's Commissary expenditures to the Council, which they are required to present twice per year. They had 117 deer killed in the roads in Gibson County; this is only the portion worked by the Sheriff's Department and does not include deer accidents other agencies worked. There were six fatalities in the county. Chief Ballard presented other interesting data. They are using the donated drone for many things; they have four licensed pilots. Community Corrections has had a change, the board appointed Chief Deputy Ballard as their director because the state law prohibits the elected officials from this position. Parker Excavating will be working on the sewer problem for the new jail; the sewer issue has delayed the opening date. The project is 98% done. The old jail should be torn down as it is becoming costly to operate.

The meeting moved to the Surveyor item on the agenda.

OLD BUSINESS

Galea Springs Reclamation Solar Project – This item was moved up on the agenda so Matt Eckerle of Baker Tilly could attend the meeting. Bill and Clint are present and represent the developer. Kyle Resetarits is the Dentons Firm attorney representing Reclamation Solar; he is in attendance via telephone. Attorney Resetarits explained at the last meeting, they had open items regarding the economic development agreement. Reclamation Solar is a 150-megawatt solar project in Barton Township, requesting a five-year, 100% abatement on real property improvement and personal property. The economic development has been revised for an increase in these payments. Attorney Resetarits feels that all comments/questions from the Assessor have been addressed and confirmed; Attorney Spindler has authority from Assessor Beadle as she has given him the green light. They are proposing economic development payments totaling \$3,600,000 with three buckets. The first bucket contains payments to the county totaling \$3,250,000; the county will receive five payments of \$400,000 plus five payments of \$250,000. The next bucket will contain \$50,000 and be given in five payments of \$10,000 for economic development specifically for Barton Township. The third bucket will contain \$300,000 for Barton Township Fire Territory; they will be paid \$30,000 per year over a ten-year period. Payments will begin once the project achieves commercial operations. They feel these payments will give back approximately 45-50% over the life of the abatement. Attorney Resetarits thanked Attorney Spindler and the Council for their consideration of the abatement and collaborative approach to communication with the project. Today, Reclamation Solar requests approval of the Economic Revitalization Area; the five-year, 100% abatement; the Economic Development Agreement; and the Statement of Benefit Forms. Councilman Schleter confirmed with Bill and Clint that none of the paperwork had been approved by Commissioners. Councilman Schleter then suggested the council wait until Commissioners approve. Attorney Spindler explained that the resolution says it is contingent upon the Commissioners' approval and an Economic Development Agreement being executed. Attorney Spindler and Resetarits had previously discussed that if the Council approves and signs today, contingent upon Commissioners approval, Attorney Spindler will

hold it in escrow until the Commissioners act. Attorney Spindler anticipates a vote at the next commissioner meeting. Larry Michel feels the Commissioners should decide on this first. He feels that if the Council votes today negotiations are over. He does not feel you can base the abatement on the mega watts of the project. He likes the location of this being on reclaimed ground. He feels there should be a declining scale of abatement, not 100%. He has been through a field fire that consumed 20 acres in August. He does not feel the economic development agreement is enough because a fire in this area could soon turn into \$1,000,000 per minute. Matt Eckerle explained that the estimated savings to the solar farm for this project with a 5-yr/100% abatement is \$7.9 million, which is based on the investment information provided by the company earlier in the summer. The total taxable investment amount of the project is \$280,000,000; \$266,000,000 is for the utility panels/equipment. \$14,000,000 is allocated to real estate improvements associated with the project. Attorney Resetarits clarified that the economic development agreement payments of \$3.6 million applied to the \$7.9 million in savings equal the give back percentage of 45%. Matt Eckerle pointed out that the tax rate in Barton Township has decreased; the pay 2024 property tax rate was \$1.62, the pay 2025 rate will be \$1.53. He also explained that the TIF expiration was not considered in the estimates, they kept numbers constant to stay conservative. Attorney Resetarits then addressed the public comment regarding the other solar EDA's. He said they have estimated both project's give back and Elliot Solar came in at 30%, while Gibson's give back came in at 34%. Reclamation Solar is paying a fixed amount regardless of what happens to tax rates. Mark Fehrenbacher asked if this was a 10-year abatement; it is a 5-year abatement, economic development payments are paid out over ten years with payments commencing on year one of operations. Mr. Fehrenbacher wonders if there is a claw back for the county if the project fails while under construction. Attorney Resetarits explained that the project will not receive abatement during construction. Matt Eckerle explained that the abatements are all prescribed state guidelines, and the county cannot deviate from the guidelines. The farm ground will increase when the assessor changes the use code in their assessment, usually when the construction begins, which will cause an immediate growth in assessment. They are estimating the difference in assessed value at approximately \$4.5 million. Larry Michel had more questions/concerns about the tax rates. He was also concerned about getting money for Barton Township Fire Territory. The Council told him the territory is included in the Economic Development payments. Councilman McGraw motioned to approve the resolution, which encompasses the abatement; the EDA; the ERA; and three Statement of Benefit Forms (SB-1 Forms). Councilman Schleter asked if the Commissioners could change things after this is agreed upon by the Council. Attorney Spindler and Resetarits feel that if there are changes requested by the Commissioners, they would have to departure from this document and a new document would be created. Councilman Schleter is not ready to accept something the Commissioners have not approved. Attorney Resetarits explained the project was scheduled to go to the Commissioners meeting before coming to the Council, but the meeting was postponed due to weather. As explained earlier, the Council could vote, and the documents could be escrowed until after the Commissioner meeting. Councilman Stilwell motioned to approve the resolution as presented, contingent upon commissioners' approval, seconded by Councilman McGraw. Councilman Schleter asked about the values on the SB1's and the continual change. Mr. Eckerle explained that SB 1's are a minimum expectation so when this council reviews the project annually, they can ensure the project has met the minimum requirements. Councilman Schleter asked for clarification on the employees of the project and whether they would be residents of Gibson County; this has not been decided. The Statement of Benefits estimates two to four full-time employees once the project is complete. The motion and second to the motion on the table was voted on 5-2 with Councilmen Schleter and Schafer voting nay. The meeting went back to department reports.

County Surveyor Salary/Budget – Surveyor Martin feels there was a miscommunication during budget meetings. He requests that his 1202 budget lines for personal services be zeroed out and these amounts get added into the surveyor's general fund budget. He would like his Fund 1202 services/charges to be increased to \$35,000. This will have to be advertised as an additional and a reduction. Also, the GIS position is funded, but they do not have anyone employed, however they are still looking for someone to

fill this position. Until they hire someone, he would like to contract this work to Wessler Engineering on an as needed basis. He has a professional service line, and he feels he can make out of series transfers from the GIS line to cover this cost.

Council Member McGraw made a motion to approve advertising the additional appropriations, seconded by Council Member Riley. The vote was 7-0.

NEW BUSINESS

2025 Salary Schedule Amendment #2 – Logan Vickers explained the amendment contains some corrections, part-time positions were raised by \$1, and wording was added that will allow part-time employees working in communications, corrections, tier I sheriff deputies, paramedics, and EMTs be linked to their full-time counterpart and paid at the same rate of pay. These new rates are effective on January 1, 2025. Councilman McGraw motioned to approve this amendment, seconded by Councilman Schleiter. The vote was 7-0.

Personal Service & Out of Series Transfer Requests effective date of: 12/31/2024

Fund Desc: General	Prosecuting Attorney Loc: 0009	
from 1000	12307 Group Insurance	
into 1000	10401 FICA / Medicare	\$657.00
	Clerk Of Circuit Court Loc: 0001	
from 1000	11200 1st Deputy	
into 1000	11401 Child Support Clerk	\$3,473.66

Council Member Riley made a motion to approve all transfer requests, seconded by Council Member Stilwell. The vote was 7-0.

Public Comments: Mark Fehrenbacher, Ft. Branch wanted to comment on the public safety tax and some of the comments he heard during the debate. He heard in that meeting that it is hard to attract and retain employees. He suggested that the County think about giving property tax exemptions or discounts to their employees as incentives.

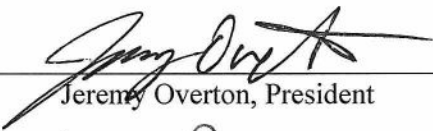
Commissioner Lewis gave an update on the EMS building. A progress meeting has been held with contractors and EMS to discuss the different building stages. In that meeting he learned that insulation and dry-wall materials would soon be delivered. There was no flagpole included in the original build specifications, so they are getting quotes on this. Last night at the redevelopment commission meeting, Attorney McDonald requested that all change orders involving county projects be approved by Commissioners prior to it going to the RDC.

Gibson County Chamber Director Vanoven reported there will be a ribbon cutting on Friday at 4:30 for Habitat for Humanity; they will debut their first house in Oakland City.

Phylis Earnst, Patoka Township Trustee asked if any decisions have been made on the distribution of the LIT Public Safety tax. Auditor Watkins feels that the trustees must apply for this tax, but he does not feel the distribution can be changed this year. Councilman Overton explained that entities must apply prior to July 1st; no one has cited exceptions for the first year.

Councilman McGraw motioned to adjourn the meeting.

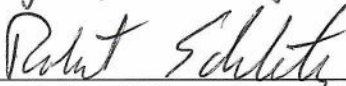
Minutes from January 14, 2025, meeting



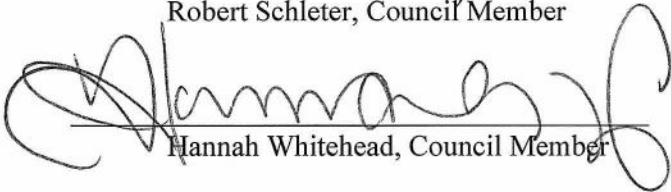
Jeremy Overton, President



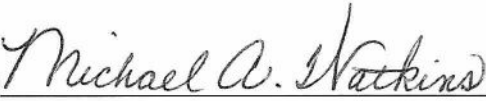
Jay Riley, Council Member



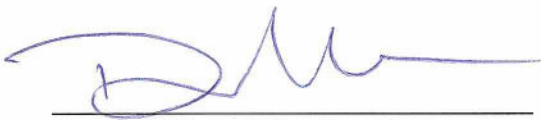
Robert Schleter, Council Member



Hannah Whitehead, Council Member

Attest: 

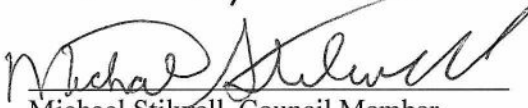
Michael A. Watkins, Gibson County Auditor



Derek McGraw, Vice- President



Craig Schafer, Council Member



Michael Stilwell, Council Member

