

Wabaunsee County Commission
Wabaunsee County Courthouse, Alma, KS
Regular Meeting Minutes September 11, 2023

The Board of County Commissioners meeting in session Monday, September 11, 2023. Commissioners conduct the meeting in person and over ZOOM. Members attending were Nancy L. Hier, Rodney L. Allen and Jim MacGregor. Commissioner Hier called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance. Road & Bridge Supervisor Josh Hinch, Zoning Administrator Noel Sylvester, Sheriff Rob Hoskins, Terry Martin, School Resource Officer Steve Bundy, Richard Orton, Suzanne Simon, David Stuewe, Ervan Stuewe, Mel Stout, Jacqueline Brown, Thomas Brown, Jolanta Thompson, Nathan Anderson, Rick Kolde, Kaleb Johnson, Linda Highland, Ron Highland, Michael Patterson, Rachelle Routh, Jennifer Savage, Jerry Haahr, Rebekah Bloomfield, George Hund, Wilfred Hund, Johnathan Ringel, County Attorney Tim Liesmann and County Clerk Abby Amick were in attendance in person, others joined via zoom.

Road & Bridge Update

Road & Bridge Supervisor Josh Hinch reported that the two projects that he had submitted for state grant awards were not selected for funding. Hinch will continue to pursue grant funding. There is a one year deadline to remove underground fuel tanks once they are no longer in use. The initial quote to remove the old tanks was \$15,000, however there are programs available to assist with the cost. Hinch reported that the chip seal projects are complete on Carlson, Keene-Eskridge and Miller Roads. There was damage reported on Miller Road that will be inspected and addressed later this week. Commissioner Allen thanked Hinch for assisting Wilmington Township with a recent project.

Other Business

Commissioner Hier moved to appoint Greg Dekat as Kaw Township Clerk, based on the recommendation from the current Kaw Township officers; Commissioner Allen seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Commissioners reviewed and signed a letter to the Kansas Attorney General confirming their understanding of the Kansas Open Meetings Act and the required procedures for Executive Session. Commissioners discussed the Budget Worksheet Template and agreed to use the template that reports the full detail of the real estate tax rebates being issued through Neighborhood Revitalization and the Rural Housing Incentive District.

Commissioner MacGregor moved to approve the 2023 Cereal Malt Beverage Permit for the Little Munchkins Pumpkin Patch and Farm Activities LLC; Commissioner Allen seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Sheriff Rob Hoskins announced that the Paxico Blues Fest is this weekend, the Sheriff Department will have additional presence at the event. Hoskins provided an update on the Alma City Marshall's resignation. He will be working with the City of Alma to develop a contract for temporary assistance until they get a new City Marshall.

Commissioner Allen moved to approve the minutes of the August 28th Commission Meeting; Commissioner MacGregor seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Commissioners reviewed and signed expenses for August 23 – September 6, 2023 and abatement 2022-AB35 in the amount of \$18.00. Chairman Hier reviewed and signed the Daily Statements for August 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, September 1, 5, 6 and 7, 2023.

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Conditional Use Permit Hearing

At 9:30 AM Commissioner Hier called the Conditional Use Permit Hearing to order. Zoning Administrator Noel Sylvester presented CUP renewal #265 filed by Curtis Capoun agent for Ronald & Sikle Arand and Carolyn Arand for a establishing a ledge rock quarry at 00000 Paxico Road, Paxico KS. Sylvester reported that this will be year 7 & 8 for this quarry, they are finishing up and starting reclamation. The CUP passed the Planning Commission 13-0; all fees and taxes are paid in full.

Commissioner Hier moved to adopt Resolution 2023-34 a Resolution for the renewal of a conditional use permit filed by Curtis Capoun agent for Ronald & Sikle Arand and Carolyn Arand for a establishing a ledge rock quarry at 00000 Paxico Road, Paxico KS; Commissioner MacGregor seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Sylvester provided an update on his recent attendance to the Kansas Flood Plain Manager's Conference. Commissioner Hier reviewed a letter submitted by Mel Stout regarding his interest in serving on the Planning Commission. Stout was in attendance and introduced himself to the Commission.

Revenue Neutral Rate Hearing

At 10:00 AM Commissioner Hier called the Revenue Neutral Rate Hearing to order. Commissioner MacGregor explained the accounting method used for tracking the Federal Funds received in 2020, 2021 and 2022; because the dollars were not spent in the year they were received there was an artificial bubble in the General Fund cash carryover that caused the budget to appear to have excess cash, allowing the mill levy to be artificially low in 2022 and 2023. A handout was provided detailing the year over year levy and tax dollars collected comparing three scenarios over six years. All three scenarios end with property owners paying the same amount of tax over the six-year time period; however the amount collected each year fluctuates more dramatically when the Federal Funds are included in the General Fund budget.

Commissioner Hier opened the floor for Public Comment. Ervan Stuewe asked what the Municipalities Fight Addiction Fund is; County Attorney Liesmann explained that the National Opioid Lawsuits have directed settlement dollars to local governments, the money is required to be spent on opioid and addiction abatement. Suzanne Simon asked for more information on Employee Benefit, Library and Transportation budgets. Commissioners cited the estimates for insurance costs and payroll taxes as the reason for an increase in Employee Benefit. Commissioner MacGregor reported that the Regional Library has maintained low wages for several years and is budgeting an increase to be able to offer cost of living increases for employees. County Clerk Abby Amick provided background on the Wabaunsee County General Public Transportation program. The program is 80% grant funded and 20% locally funded; the total Ad Valorem Tax for the program in 2024 is \$6,894. The program is required to follow all of the requirements set by KDOT to continue receiving funding. The program is required to be first come first serve. The schedulers do their best to combine riders and trips to be more efficient with time and resources. The cost to ride is \$7.00 for a destination in Wabaunsee County or a neighboring county, and \$30.00 for a destination further away; evenings and weekends are \$45.00 if there is a driver available. Rider fees generate about \$7,000 per year.

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Jennifer Savage asked for clarification on the Pandemic Funds and who is responsible for monitoring this in the future. Commissioner MacGregor responded that several scenarios have been reviewed with the County's professional advisors (accountant and auditor), however, we cannot change the past. The Commissioners indicated that everyone has learned a lot from this experience and will continue to monitor the budget closely. Jacquelyn Brown read aloud her concern with the budget increases across multiple entities, stating that her estimated tax increase is 6.5% for property located in Alma Township. Brown suggested that greater efficiencies could be found in consolidation when looking at the cost of road maintenance and fire protection across the county. Rick Kolde shared concerns for the rate that valuations have increased since he bought his property. Jolanta Thompson stated that Miss Brown addressed everything that she had concerns with.

Nathan Anderson asked how much Pandemic Funding was received by the County. Commissioner MacGregor stated that nearly \$3 Million came through the county accounting process, the majority of which was appropriated to Fire Districts, Ambulance District #2, Rural Water Districts, Cities and broadband infrastructure. Anderson asked if the County gives departments incentives to keep their spending low? Sheriff Hoskins responded that his department uses the remaining budget at the end of the year to pay of vehicle notes early. Commissioners explained that while not all Departments spend all of their budget, there are unforeseen expenses that have to be managed as well. The Willard Bridge project was supposed to be mostly grant funded with the county share being \$300,000 and KDOT's share \$1 million. By the time the project was let the cost of the bridge had increased putting the county's share at nearly \$1 million. The county chose to move forward with the project, accepting the grant funding and cover the remainder of the cost, preserving the County's standing with KDOT for future grant applications. Engineer estimates indicate that the county is on a path to have a \$30 million deficit in bridge funding over the next 25 years. Wabaunsee County has 178 state inspected bridges (over 20 foot in length), there are 1,400 culverts (everything smaller than 20 foot long); of those about 50 culverts need replaced immediately.

Michael Patterson shared his concern for the significant increase in property taxes since 2003. Linda Highland asked about long-range planning and if there is a plan to bring businesses to Wabaunsee County? Highland stated that three businesses have left the county from her area. Commissioners responded that a housing study was recently done indicating that there is a need for additional housing in all areas of the county. One challenge to locating a business in the area is that there are not houses available for employees to locate here as well. Commissioner MacGregor explained the distribution of taxes between residential, commercial and ag land. In order to relieve the burden on residential, the county will have to embrace commercial development at some level. Sales Tax dollars also contribute to relieving the property tax burden, but Wabaunsee County consistently falls last in the state for pull factor. Development along I-70 could help boost Sales Tax revenues and relieve property tax burdens as well.

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Rachelle Routh asked how much it cost to repave Old K-10? Josh Hinch responded that the first 5 miles recently received a 2 inch overlay and chip seal at a cost of \$550,000. There is a 10 year plan for ongoing maintenance on paved roads, they are on a 17 mile rotation where they get chip seal every 3 years. Routh shared concern for the amount of traffic on Wabaunsee Road and Wells Creek Road. Routh asked about the zoning regulations for adding houses on 40 acres. Noel Sylvester answered that 2 houses can be built on 40 acres without a variance, each house is required to have at least 3 acres.

Commissioners thanked everyone for their time, attendance and concern.

Commissioner Allen moved to adopt Resolution 2023-35 A Resolution for Wabaunsee County to levy a property tax rate exceeding the revenue neutral rate of 51.408 for budget year 2024; Commissioner MacGregor seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Commissioner MacGregor moved to adopt Resolution 2023-36 A Resolution to levy a property tax rate exceeding the revenue neutral rate of 7.935 for Fire District #3, 5.299 for Fire District #4, 4.659 for Fire District #5, 4.899 for Fire District #6, 3.230 for Fire District #7, 4.595 for Fire District #8, and 4.598 for Ambulance District #2 for Budget Year 2024; Commissioner Allen seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Suzanne Simon asked why the Fire District Budget Hearings are being held by the County Commission. It was explained that the Fire Districts were formed by the County Commission and are governed by the County as a whole, they do not have individual elected boards, therefore the County Commission is the elected body with the authority to adopt a budget and levy taxes. The fire districts each submit a budget for consideration by the County Commission. Commissioners agreed that the Fire Districts will be expected to send a representative to the Budget Hearing as a requirement in the future.

At 11:32 AM the Revenue Neutral Rate Hearing was closed.

At 11:33 AM Commissioner Hier called the Budget Hearing to order.

Commissioner Allen moved to approve the Ambulance District #2 budget for 5 mills as published; Commissioner MacGregor seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Commissioner Allen moved to approve Fire District #3 at 8.163 mills, Fire District #4 at 5.755 mills, Fire District #5 at 4.990 mills, Fire District #6 at 5.391 mills, Fire District #7 at 3.647 mills and Fire District #8 at 5.000 mills as published; Commissioner Hier seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Commissioner Hier expressed interest in reducing the appropriation to Wabaunsee County Extension based on a vacancy in staffing for the last 3 months of 2023 and into 2024. Commissioner MacGregor responded that no other appropriation or department is adjusted based on staffing currently. Extension Agent Bernadette Trieb joined via zoom to discuss the staffing needs to cover the office until a new agent is hired. Commissioners agreed to appropriate Extension with their full budget request, and will review the second half disbursement in 2024 with regard to salaries and benefits.

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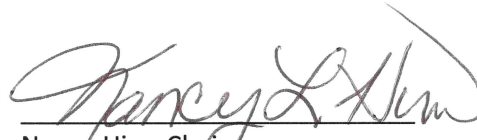
Commissioner MacGregor shared concerns for the County's cash position going into 2024, recommending departments conserve spending in the 4th quarter of 2023.

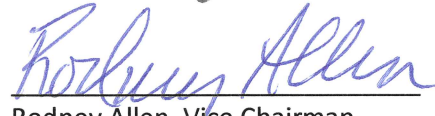
Commissioner Allen moved to approve the Wabaunsee County 2024 Budget at 54.643 mills; Commissioner MacGregor seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

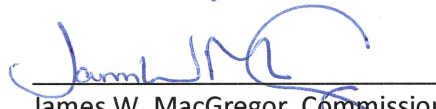
At 12:09 PM the Budget Hearing was closed.

At 12:10 PM Commissioner Allen moved to adjourn until Monday, September 18th at 9:00 AM; Commissioner MacGregor seconded. Motion carried 3-0.


Minutes approved this 18th day of September 2023.


Nancy Hier, Chairman


Rodney Allen, Vice Chairman


James W. MacGregor, Commissioner

Attest:


Abby L. Amick
Wabaunsee County Clerk

