

WHITLEY COUNTY COUNCIL

May 6, 2025

The Whitley County Council met in regular session at 8:00 am on Tuesday, May 6, 2025, in the Commissioner's Room located on the first floor of the Whitley County Government Center. The members in attendance were Chair Thor Hodges, Thomas Warner, Kim Wheeler, Joan Western, and Timothy Longenbaugh with Vice Chair Nicholas Brewer and John Barrett absent. Others in attendance Commissioner Baysinger, Commissioner Schuman, Chief Deputy Auditor Tamela Tinchler, Commissioners' Assistant Cami Hippenhammer, HR Director Jennifer Shinabery, Recorder Rosemary Brown, Engineer Brad Allen, Highway Director Ryan Getts, Community Corrections Director Paula Worden, Mayor Ryan Daniel, Assessor Kim Erdly, Probation Director Edward Beber, Probation Officer Jennifer Christie, Clerk Cindy Doolittle, EMA Director Edward Scott, Judge Garza, Judge Rentschler, Amy Bechtold with Superior Court, Township Trustee Bill Brice, Stacey Dhell with Easterseals, and Cindy Strack.

Chairman Hodges called the meeting to order and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

DEPARTMENT UPDATE: Councilman Hodges began the meeting by calling on each department head to give a quick update on their department.

CITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Mayor Daniel was present to let Council know the city will be re-establishing the City EDC. This ordinance was passed in 1977, but over the past several years they have not had a need for it, so the appointments expired. This needs to be done to create a new economic development area by Walmart and then go through the potential TIF process. The City EDC is made up of 3 members. The Mayor, City Council, and County Council each appoint one member. David Smith has stated that he is interested in serving on the Commission. This appointment is held annually and will only meet a few times this year and not again until needed. Hodges also spoke with David Smith and is comfortable appointing him for the rest of the year and revisiting the appointment in January when they look at the rest of the appointments. Warner made a motion to appoint David Smith from the time of getting sworn in until the end of the year, seconded by Wheeler, passing with a 5/0 vote.

EASTERSEALS NORTHERN INDIANA UPDATE: Stacey Dhell from Easterseals was present to give Council an update. They have increased the programs they offer as well as career advancement programs. Anyone can attend the career programs, and they have some scholarships for participants to apply for as well. They have internships available for High School students. Easterseals are struggling with being understaffed in Whitley County and are at about a 50% employment vacancy but are working on getting those filled. Easterseals has 3 group home settings and 4 supported living settings in the Columbia City area.

EDC DIRECTOR DALE BUUCK VIDEO: Councilwoman Western shared a video of Dale Buuck the director of the Whitley County Economic Development.

PEABODY PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD APPOINTMENT: Micheal Ashby from Peabody Library was present to request an appointment to the board. Mark Parker's appointment is coming up and he is looking for a re-appointment to the Peabody Public Library Board. Hodges stated 3 people have expressed their interest, the current appointment Mark Parker, Jill Mort and Carrie Hinman. Councilwoman Western stated she had been reached out to by a few community members requesting they select Jill Mort, Councilwoman Western nominated Jill Mort. Councilman Hodges thinks Mark Parker does a good job and that they should go with Micheal Ashby's recommendation. Councilman Hodges nominated Mark Parker. Councilman Longenbaugh made a motion to close nominations, seconded by Warner, passing with a 5/0 vote. Council took a vote to decide between Jill Mort and Mark Parker. Councilwoman Western and Councilman Warner voted to appoint Jill Mort. Councilman Hodges, Wheeler, and Longenbaugh voted to re-appoint Mark Parker. Councilman Wheeler made a motion to re-appoint Mark Parker to the library board, seconded by Longenbaugh, passing with a 3/2 vote with Joan Western and Tom Warner against.

LONGEVITY ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS: Councilman Hodges presented the 2025 longevity additional appropriation requests from last months approval of increasing longevity. Councilman Longenbaugh made a motion to approve all the additional requests, seconded by Hodges. Councilwoman Western stated her concern for the upcoming tax bill changes. Councilman Warner echoed what Western's concerns were along with concerns of where we will be after the possibility of buying a new building. Councilman Wheeler also echoed Westerns concerns. Councilman Hodges withdrew his second and stated they would look at this again at their next meeting when all members are present.

- 1170.11800.000.0179 \$19,450.00
- 1159.11800.000.0214 \$5,500.00
- 1159.17200.000.0214 \$620.00
- 1122.11800.000.0311 \$21,000.00
- 1176.11800.000.0176 \$15,750.00

- 4176.11800.000.0176 \$4,550.00
- 1222.11800.000.1222 \$3,000.00
- 1000.11800.000.0130 \$65,250.00

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- Whitley County resident Cynthia Strack came to express her concerns regarding the plans from INDOT around her property. Loves truck stop has expressed their interest in purchasing Strack's property to add a truck stop, however Strack stated Loves Truck Stop was told by INDOT that there will be a cul-de-sac in a couple years in front of their property and they would be unable to add a truck stop at that location.
- Thorncreek Township Trustee Bill Brice came to ask the Council to start looking at replacing taxes as they start looking at next year's budget with bill SB1 taking effect. He would like the townships to partner with the County to make sure they are continuing to provide fire and safety for the residents.

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMMISSIONER'S REPORT: Commissioner Baysinger gave the Council a Commissioner's report.

- The broadband equity access grant money preliminary results came out. There are still two more rounds left that providers will be looking at applying for. Our County was one of the top Counties to receive funds. Commissioner Baysinger shared a picture showing Whitley County is almost completely covered.
- In one of the department meetings it was stated that they would like to recognize certain employees who go above and beyond their normal duties. Commissioner Baysinger has reached out to other counties to see how they handle this in their counties. It has not been decided how to run the program, but Baysinger hopes to discuss it more at the next department head meeting.
- The Commissioners are looking into purchasing the old Bowen Center building for the Probation Department. The Bowen Center did come down on price, but work will need to be done for them to utilize the building. Commissioner Baysinger feels this would be the best option and would like to hold a special public meeting asap to bring a purchase agreement with the Bowen Center.

IN THE MATTER OF MINUTES: The Council reviewed the April 8, 2025, regular meeting minutes, Councilman Wheeler made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Western, passing with a 5/0 vote.

OTHER BUSINESS: Judge Rentschler has been working with the Probation Department and Commissioners to get them into another building. Rentschler had Chief Probation Officer Ed Beber type up a list of concerns which Rentschler forwarded to the Commissioners and Council along with an email of support from Judge Rentschler and Judge Garza to come up with an expedient solution.

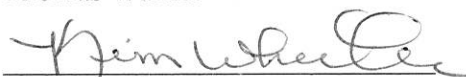
There being no further business and no further questions or comments from the public, Chair Hodges adjourned the meeting at 9:05 AM.

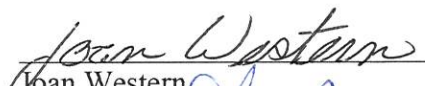
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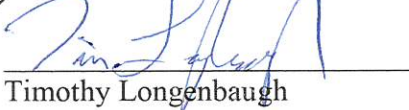

Chair Thor Hodges

Vice Chair Nicholas Brewer


Thomas Warner

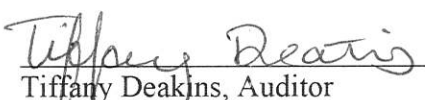

Kim Wheeler


Joan Western


Timothy Longenbaugh

John Barrett

Attest:


Tiffany Deakins, Auditor