

COUNTY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING – APRIL 1, 2002

The meeting was called to order by President Charles Canary.

I. ROLL CALL

The following members were present: Pam Young, Ron West, and Brent Waltz. Keith Wright, Daniel Dennis, and Richard Mason were not present. John P. Wilson was present as the Council's Attorney.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. INVOCATION

IV. PRE-BUDGET REVIEW

Mr. Canary explained that the Council stated at the budget hearings they would explore alternative revenue sources for the county. Whether that would be through additional taxes, revenue within the county, or a combination of both.

Each member shared his or her thoughts and findings on the issue.

Mr. Canary stated he spoke to the Health Department concerning the permit fees and the possibility of increases. John Bonsett, Health Director, related to Mr. Canary that if you increase some of the fees too high, such as septic repairs, individuals would do the work without obtaining permits. The Health Maintenance Fund could be affected by the State of Indiana's reductions.

Mr. Canary also spoke to Marla Hash, County Assessor, about the Reassessment Fund and perhaps some expenses of the townships could be paid from this fund. Mrs. Hash expressed concern on the fund not being able to pay for such expenditures because she was not sure there was enough money to pay for the current reassessment. She is currently paying for two deputies in her department from the fund.

Mr. Canary noted that most budgets have been reduced to the maximum amounts and there are a few line items that will need to be increased, such as postage. Mr. West noted that E-mail might help resolve the increase in postage for some of the departments.

Mr. West remarked that he visited the Animal Shelter and spoke to the Warden about the various fees and expenses the shelter has. He stated that sometimes it is not taking a service and raising the fees but perhaps looking at the services that are being provided and the cost to do so. He questioned if the service should continue if the county is losing money.

Mr. West stated the money being spent for Juvenile Detention Center has always been a concern of his. He did speak to the Juvenile Detention Center's Director, James Higdon and Mr. Higdon had some ideas he would like to share with the Council. Mr. Higdon was not in attendance to report to the Council.

Mr. West noted that an attorney expressed that perhaps a "false alarm" fee could be established because of the expense that is incurred every time a Sheriff Deputy is called out somewhere. The fee could generate revenue and also reduce the number of runs because the alarm owners would monitor and service them more often.

Mr. Waltz stated that as a liaison for the Board of Commissioners there are two issues; the first would be to reduce their budget and the second would be to obtain additional revenue in their area of control. He noted that reducing the budget would be very difficult to do. He stated that he opposes any type of tax increases. He felt obtaining additional revenue would be the best solution. The first would be to establish an inmate processing charge of \$25.00 and with a 75% collection rate that would generate approximately \$100,000.00 annually. The second element of revenue could be through the Johnson Memorial Hospital. He noted that throughout the history of the hospital the taxpayers have subsidized them during lean periods of time. The county purchased the ground that the hospital is on and the county has helped provide the vast majority of the buildings. The hospital last year netted approximately four million dollars and they do not pay the county any rent. They did lease from the county some ground a few years ago for two million dollars. He proposed that the hospital pay one million as a rent/lease arrangement, which would leave the hospital three million dollars a year to invest in buildings and equipment. The Hospital Board of Directors would need to agree to a rent/lease. The Board of Commissioners appoints the five-member Hospital Board. He recommended that a meeting take place with the Hospital Board and the Commissioners to discuss the potential lease. Mr. Waltz noted that other municipalities are considering the same type of arrangement, for instance the City of Greenwood with their airport.

Mrs. Young remarked that she was not aware that the county had subsidized the hospital. She feels the hospital is one of the county's most valuable assets and they have done a very good job in managing the facility. She commented the hospital should continue the way it is now.

Mr. Waltz noted he agreed the hospital has been able to manage itself very well over many years. He stated the county has two choices to receive additional funds; one is either increase taxes or look for revenue within. He would choose the option of looking for revenue. He commented that the hospital is negotiating an agreement with a surgery group where 10% of the net proceeds of the hospital would go to the doctors.

Mr. Waltz commented the Wheel Tax could generate approximately two million dollars, however of that money the county would only receive nine hundred thousand. The remainder would be distributed to the municipalities in the county. That is one of the reasons he is not in favor of a Wheel Tax.

Mrs. Young reported on a few of the departments that she is the liaison too. The Sheriff's Department revenue is receipted into dedicated funds by statute. There is a grant called "Operation Pull-Over" that they could apply for to receive approximately \$16,000.00 for overtime. The Jail's Budget in years past has received revenue from the Department of

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Corrections for housing their prisoners, however according to the newspapers the Sheriff and Commissioners have decided to discontinue housing DOC prisoners.

Mrs. Young noted that the County Misdemeanant Fund would not be able to fund three positions in the future. The fund receives \$66,000.00 a year for housing certain misdemeanants. The budget for 2002 is \$103,000.00 and cannot continue either County General will have to fund the positions or cut positions.

Mrs. Young reported that all of the Community Corrections funds are derived from state grants or user fees. The only money that Community Corrections use from County General is for three correctional officers in the amount of \$74,000.00.

Mrs. Young noted that the Inspection and Testing Fund would not be able to continue to fund the Building Inspector's position.

Mrs. Young indicated that several of the line items in the Commissioner's Budget would need to be increased next year. The Insurance (increase of \$250,000) and the Care of Patients/Inmates (increase of \$250,000). She noted that the Commissioners have stated that they no longer want the payment for vehicles to be paid from the Cumulative Capital Development Fund. Also the Jail's budget is not completely funded and also the increase expense of high profile trials. She estimates that County General will have additional spending of approximately \$800,000. She noted that 72% of the money is spent on personnel and perhaps the Council should consider restructuring the work force. Also, the Computer Department could be funded from the Cumulative Capital Development Fund.

Mrs. Young suggested that perhaps the county should encourage White River Township to figure out ways to address some of their problems.

Mrs. Young feels there is a need for additional revenue and the county needs to look at new taxes unless some drastic changes are made. She noted the various alternative revenue sources; impact fees, edit tax, wheel tax, and innkeeper tax. If the Edit Tax were approved then bridges could be funded through that tax and decrease the bridge rate and possibly increase the general fund rate.

Mr. West noted that sixty-nine new employees have been added since 1996 and twenty-eight of them were for the jail. He questioned how the county was able to maintain the jail population of around 150 during the lawsuit and now that it is over the jail population are over 250. He feels the county needs to investigate where all the inmates are coming from now.

Discussion was held on the amount of money the county spends to house DOC prisoners and whether it is beneficial to the county or not.

Mr. West noted that there are two sources of revenue, the first being conservation in personnel and the other alternative taxes. He noted that several Council members have expressed that they are not for any type of tax increase, however they approved the General Obligation Bond for the Communication System that was a tax increase to property owners.

Mr. Waltz commented he was for the Communication System due to another debt rate was reduced.

John P. Wilson, Council Attorney, commented he has been investigating court costs for public defense. There are two laws on the books currently that authorizes the courts to assess part of the costs of defense to a defendant. One of the statutes allows the judge to assess up to 100% of the costs of the defense, however the defendant must have the present ability to pay the cost or it is invalid. The second statute provides that the court has the power to assess up to \$50 for misdemeanors and \$100 for felonies but does not say that they have to have the present ability to pay. If the legislator were to modify the law to provide for an assessment up to \$500 for misdemeanors and up to \$1,000 for felonies, this would generate a lot of money for the Public Defense Fund. He stated that he has spoken to several of the County Judges, Public Defenders and Clerk. Everyone seemed to be in favor of this type of an amendment. He suggested that the Council pass a resolution and forward to all the county's state representatives asking them to support and sponsor an amendment to the existing statute. The courts could also get creative with the bond schedule and assess a portion of the bond to be cash. The courts could also order tax refunds of defendants be held in a fund until further order of the court.

The Council members concurred to have Mr. Wilson prepare a resolution for consideration at the April 8th Council meeting. They asked for Mr. Wilson to meet with each judge prior to the meeting to make sure they are in support of an amendment to the statute pertaining to the assessment costs to a defendant.

Mr. West recommended the Council focus on four different areas:

- Jail Population
- Someone to Review Grants
- Employees
- Transfer of Funds

There being no further business, Mr. West moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Waltz seconded the motion that carried unanimously.