

DEKALB COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

April 19, 2021

Commissioners Present: President William L. Hartman
Vice President Michael Watson
Vice President Todd Sanderson

Others Present: Auditor Jan Bauman
Attorney James P McCanna

MATTER OF CLAIMS

Todd Sanderson made a motion to approve General Claims consisting of warrant #131827 through 131832 in the amount of \$3,222.87, and wire transfer #17637 through 17732 in the amount of \$597,819.43. Michael Watson seconded, and all approved.

MATTER OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Todd Sanderson made a motion to approve the renewal of the YMCA contract for County employees. Michael Watson seconded, and all approved.

COBRA is required to be offered to eligible employees at no cost to them for the period April 1, 2021, through September 30, 2021. Our vendor, Your Cobra Connection, is handling this very well on our behalf.

Dotty Miller believes pay may be the reason why not very many people are applying for the open Zoning Administrator's position. The pay in area counties or cities ranges from \$59,000-\$79,000 for similar positions.

Other HR topics discussed: workers compensation claims and open and filled positions.

MATTER OF IMPROVEMENTS TO DOC COLEMAN LANDING

Nellie Peffley from Soil & Water wanted to discuss the Commissioners' thoughts on utilizing the Doc Coleman Landing for development of pollinator plots, native tree installation, walking path, and an improved parking and driveway to the landing. If the Commissioners are interested in doing this, a plan for maintenance would have to be determined. Soil & Water is not asking for funding but rather for permission to continue the planning process. If Soil & Water has access to Highway mowers, Soil & Water could probably do the mowing that Allen Haynes personally used to do. President Hartman said the Highway is stretched pretty thin and would not likely have mowers available. Other ideas were discussed for mowing. President Hartman then asked if beehives could be an option for adding to the site. If the right kind of bees are used, it could be. Also, the public involvement and the use of pesticides by nearby farmers would be factors to consider. The Commissioners would like to have Soil & Water do additional planning and come back with more information. No action was taken.

MATTER OF PAYROLL

Michael Watson made a motion to approve payroll for the period March 28-April 10, 2021. Second by Todd Sanderson, and all approved.

MATTER OF MINUTES

Todd Sanderson made a motion to approve Commissioners' minutes dated April 12, 2021. Michael Watson seconded, and all approved. Michael Watson made the motion to approve the Jail Committee minutes dated April 13, 2021. Todd Sanderson seconded, and all approved.

MATTER OF PART TIME POSITION FOR VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

Veterans Service Officer Ronda Hunkler and assistant Travis Holcomb explained their desire to create a part time position for the department. The Power Point presentation began with the history of growth in the department. Next, the need was explained; it is based on the number of veterans in the area, outreach necessary to those who are housebound, in long-term care, or are severely disabled, and the fact that there is no accredited VSO in the office during times of absence for vacation, sickness, outreach or training. The County has a good reputation for the service it provides for veterans, so veterans come from outside of DeKalb County to meet with our VSO. Phone call and office appointment data was presented. President Hartman asked if there is something that the Commissioners can do to encourage surrounding counties to utilize a full time VSO? Mr. Holcomb said that it won't happen if the person in that position doesn't want to work full time hours.

Ms. Hunkler proposes that Mr. Holcomb continue as a part-time employee even after training is over. He would focus on outreach, coverage during times of absence, assisting during times of surges in claims, and assist in gathering evidence, documents, research, and information for claims. The assistant manager is amazing but is not accredited and cannot do the work for the claims. The annual financial estimate would be \$23,729: \$22,800 for payroll and \$849 for the software rights. The benefits to the County are that DeKalb County will continue to be a leader in veteran support and services and will continue to secure hundreds of thousands of dollars in veteran disability benefit payments. Ms. Hunkler provided a letter of support from Commander Mike Harper of American Legion Post #97. She said she also has the support of the VFW Commander and Congressman Jim Banks.

The Commissioners will take this under advisement and would like time to think it through.

MATTER OF LOYAL ENERGY CLAIMS

Bradd Davidson was present to talk about the spike in charges for February Loyal Energy Trading accounts. Mr. Davidson provided the invoice that his company received. He took about 10% of the cost on himself to try to soften the blow to the County.

The weather events that raged the central and western United States on President's Day 2021 placed an inordinate strain on energy markets throughout the country. The result was a natural gas market that impacted Loyal Energy's valued customers.

As cold weather plunged into the plains states and deep into Texas, ranging eastward from California to Pennsylvania, the effect upon the entire energy complex was quickly felt. Natural gas producers and electricity generation facilities over the entire central and western US were hit very hard.

Early on February 12, several utilities and interstate pipeline companies were ordering operational flow orders or various warnings and declarations of impending supply/capacity constraints. At first, natural gas prices were reasonably stable but as freezing temperatures penetrated even further into Texas, those physical constraints grabbed the market and led to record setting spikes in natural gas and electricity prices.

As the situation progressed, and worsened, Chicago City gate pricing rose as high as \$250 per Dth while Midcon prices were at \$999 and Oneok Gas Transmission traded at \$1,250 per Dth. As prices continue to soar so did the constraints on physical ability to move gas which resulted in a demand for supply into those markets. This resulted in even lower supply levels and created additional operational flow orders from utilities and pipelines alike.

Throughout this entire period, and although gas prices were very high, Loyal Energy met every contractual obligation and experienced no penalties from either interstate pipelines or utility companies. It should be reminded that penalty gas from the Local Distribution Company is the combination of the highest price of gas traded on any given day plus \$60 per Dth. This would have resulted in \$310 per Dth gas and while it is a small consolation to the cost, it could have been much worse.

Commissioner Sanderson asked how NIPSCO absorbed the costs for residential customers. Mr. Davidson said they partly absorbed it on the backs of marketers. Also asked was how much the County is saving by going through Loyal Energy as opposed to staying completely with NIPSCO. All things together, the County should be saving on average 70-80 cents per Dth per month, which translates to about \$6,000 per season.

If the County is interested in doing a hedge, Mr. Davidson explained how that would be accomplished. He suggests keeping the risk as low as possible. The Commissioners would like to see some bid quotes for futures to explore that option.

MATTER OF HIGHWAY

Last week Ben Parker met with Tony Vie, architect for the new Highway location. He will work up a proposal and should have it ready by the end of the week.

Mr. Parker distributed the Annual Operational Report for year ending December 31, 2020, required by the State Board of Accounts. It balances with the numbers the Auditor's Office has in their financial software. The Commissioners would like some time to review the report before approving it.

Mr. Parker has been trying to schedule a time to go to Randolph County to tour their newly built Highway facility. He believes he and their Highway Superintendent will be able to come up with a day either this week or next week. Mr. Parker submitted a travel request that will be considered later in the meeting with the other travel requests.

MATTER OF TRAVEL COSTS FOR NATIONAL DRUG CONFERENCE (PROBATION)

Ryan Hull explained more about the trip to Washington D.C. that the Family Restoration Court and Veterans Court are anticipating August 13-18 for a conference. These will be funded by grants and user fees. Five of the six attendees will be flying. Although some of the attendees will be staying longer for personal reasons which was approved last week, all will only be reimbursed what it would cost of the flight as if they were all taking the same flight on the same day there and back. Mr. Hull forgot to add the mileage to and from the courthouse and the Fort Wayne International Airport. This will add \$31.50 for four people. He handed out the Google Map directions to be added to the travel requests. The cost for taking an Uber to and from the hotel and airport in Washington D.C. was included in the travel request for the 5 attendees traveling by airplane. Individuals will be taking different flights. And, trying to fit several people into one Uber would not work well anyway. Also, he had included meal costs at \$53/day, whereas our policy typically allows \$32/day for meals. The GSA for the Washington D.C. zip code indicates it would cost \$53/day for expected meal costs.

MATTER OF TRAVEL REQUESTS

Todd Sanderson made a motion to approve the following travel request:

- 1) Ben Parker, Mark Goodrich, and Dusty Bock (Highway) to travel to Randolph County one day the week of April 19 or April 26 to tour their new Highway Department site. No expenses will be claimed.
- 2) Rick Ring (Council) and Mike Watson (Commissioner) to travel to Columbia City on May 6 for the 2021 AIC Northeast District Meeting. Estimated cost of \$126.46 to be paid from Commissioners' travel.
- 3) Dotty Miller (HR) to travel to Fort Wayne on May 3 and June 7 for the NIHRA monthly meeting. Estimated cost of \$34.68 to be paid from Commissioners' travel.
- 4) Erik Weber and Kurt Grimm (Veterans Treatment Court) to travel to Washington D.C. August 15-18 for the National Drug Court Conference. Estimated cost of \$4,704.26 to be paid from department travel.
- 5) Kay Landwehr and Stephanie Hamilton (Family Restoration Court) to travel to Washington D.C. August 15-18 for the National Drug Court Conference. Estimated cost of \$4,768.68 to be paid from department travel.
- 6) Adam Squiller and Ryan Hull (Alcohol & Drug Program) to travel to Washington D.C. August 15-18 for the National Drug Court Conference. Estimated cost of \$4,737.18 to be paid from department travel.

Michael Watson seconded, and all approved.

MATTER OF OTHER DISCUSSION

Other discussion topics included: the Friends of the Bridge would like a portion of the old railroad bridge that the City of Auburn would also like a portion of; possible things to put into a local Solar Farm Ordinance; and preparation for April 26 Jail Committee meeting.

William L. Hartman – President

Michael Watson – Vice President

Todd Sanderson – Vice President

Attest:

Jan Bauman, Auditor