

BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 18, 2016

The Benton County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on October 18, 2016 in the Benton County Board Room in Foley, MN with Commissioners Jim McMahon, Jake Bauerly, Ed Popp, Spencer Buerkle and Warren Peschl present. Call to order by Chair Buerkle was at 9:00 AM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

Popp/Peschl unanimous to approve the agenda as amended (add item: consider short-term exception to personnel policies regarding compensation time for exempt employees in Auditor-Treasurer's Office).

No one was present to speak under Open Forum.

Bauerly/McMahon unanimous to approve the Consent Agenda: 1) approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of October 4, 2016 as written; 2) accept and file Administrator's Report/Monthly Financial Report as submitted; 3) adopt Resolution 2016-#35, reappointing Brian Koester as Benton County Assessor for the term January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2020, and authorize the Chair to sign; and 4) approve Application for MN Lawful Gambling Exempt Permit—*Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation*—to hold a raffle at Jack & Jim's, 11025 Duelm Road NE, Foley, on March 18, 2017.

Chris Byrd, County Engineer and Joe MacPherson, Assistant County Engineer, provided a five-year history of the Engineering Technician position in the Highway Department and the challenges experienced in recruiting qualified engineering technicians over the past year. Using the adopted five-year road construction plan as a guide, MacPherson explained that staff arrived at an estimated number of staff labor hours for each project (i.e. survey work, plan preparation, bidding documents, contract administration) and compared those "in house" labor costs (including all equipment used by the engineering technicians) to that of utilizing consultants for those same projects using rates for similar work. Byrd stated findings that the use of consultants would be at least two times the cost of utilizing internal engineering staff; in addition to being more cost-effective, the county could control the schedule and discipline of "in-house" staff, as well as the purchase of new equipment. Byrd spoke of possible ways to attract employees, which may include some type of incentives. Bauerly suggested that a two-year degree be recommended, as opposed to required, for the Engineering Technician position and then train that employee in the skills that they are lacking. Buerkle stated the need to have further discussion on how the current labor shortage is affecting not only the Highway Department, but other county departments as well. It was noted that the County Engineer already has the approval to move forward with the advertising and hiring of an Engineering Technician. Headley noted the goal today was to share the analysis with Board members; he agreed that the Board should schedule a Committee of the Whole to discuss these issues further.

Karri Thorsten, Auditor-Treasurer, explained that, currently, the Auditor-Treasurer's Office is very short staffed and in the midst of tax collection, elections and preparation for TNT statements. She indicated that staff are willing to put in extra time in order to meet these demands; however, according to the Benton County Personnel Policy, exempt employees may not accumulate more than 40 hours of unused compensatory time. Thorsten stated her request for an exception to the policy to allow the limit on compensation time for the exempt employees in her office to be waived through the end of November; any hours that have been accumulated over the 40 hours would be added to the employee's compensatory bank and used at a later time. Buerkle commented "...it seems like the right thing to

do...but I'm very skeptical to change policy..." Bauerly commented "...we have to adapt our rules in order to keep operating until the pendulum swings the other way..." Popp noted that the request does contain a "sunset" (end of November). Lee Katzmarek, Human Resources Director, noted that, if this request is allowed, this compensatory time will not be payable on a cash basis. Peschl/Bauerly unanimous that the limit on compensation time for the exempt employees in the Auditor-Treasurer's Office be waived through the end of November; also that any additional hours that have accumulated over the 40 hours be added to the employee's comp bank.

The Regular County Board meeting was recessed at 9:52 AM to conduct a Human Services Board meeting.

The Regular County Board meeting was reconvened at 10:18 AM.

Monty Headley, County Administrator, shared the request from the City of Sartell that the County consider a monetary contribution toward a study by the Urban Land Institute on potential re-uses of the former VERSO paper mill site; the City has secured a \$7,000 grant and needs an additional \$3,000 for the study. He stated his belief that a Technical Assistance Panel would be formed to conduct "an extremely intensive one-day brainstorming session". Buerkle inquired if the Benton Economic Partnership Board should have input regarding this request. Popp stated his belief that the new BEP Executive Director should be a participant on the panel; he also felt that the City of Sartell should contribute toward the study costs. McMahon/Popp unanimous that Benton County contribute \$1,500 toward the study; further, that the BEP Executive Director (John Uphoff) and two Benton County Board members be allowed to participate on the panel.

Board members reported on recent meetings they attended on behalf of the county.

Topics discussed under Commissioner Concerns included 1) skilled labor shortage in a union environment; and 2) City of St. Cloud orderly annexation area (City of St. Cloud's ordinance appears to have more of a metro vision that is at odds with Benton County's rural nature).

Peschl/McMahon unanimous to set Committees of the Whole: October 24, discuss impending retirement of County Recorder; discuss recruitment strategies.

Popp/Bauerly unanimous to adjourn at 10:42 AM.

Spencer C. Buerkle, Chair
Benton County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Montgomery Headley
Benton County Administrator