

BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 19, 2021

The Benton County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on January 19, 2021 in the Benton County Board Room in Foley, MN with Commissioners Steve Heinen, Scott Johnson, Ed Popp, Jared Gapinski and Beth Schlangen (virtual) present. Call to order by Chair Popp was at 9:00 AM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

Johnson/Gapinski to approve the agenda as written. Motion carried unanimously per roll call vote.

Jim Hovda (160 North Freedom Road, Rice) appeared under Open Forum, expressing concern with individuals having to wait outside in the cold to enter the Government Center. He stated "...Commissioners, this is 2021...most everybody takes care of business by phone...I don't think there is any reason for people to stand outside in any weather...let's treat our good tax paying citizens better..."

Gapinski/Heinen to approve the Consent Agenda: 1) approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of January 5, 2021 as written; 2) approve the Special Meeting Minutes of January 12, 2021 as written; 3) appoint Natalie Schmitt to a three-year term on the Benton County Extension Committee—January 1, 2021 through December 2023; 4) approve public defender contract with *Bradshaw and Bryant* for commitment, guardianship and conservatorship public defenders, for the period of January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021, with options to renew for three additional years, and authorize the Chair to sign; 5) accept and file Veteran Service Officer quarterly report as presented; 6) reappoint Bruce Bonebright to a three-year term on the Solid Waste Advisory Committee—January 1, 2021 through December 2023; 7) approve final plat of "*Cornerstone Acres*" in Watab Township, submitted by Tim and Gloria Rajkowski, and authorize the Chair to sign the final plat; 8) approve Purchase Money Security Agreement for S.C.O.R.E. Grant—*City of Rice*—for the purchase of two Belson outdoor eight-foot recycled park benches, four six-foot benches and four 40-gallon recycled plastic trash receptacles, and authorize the Chair to sign; and 9) approve 2020 Federal Equitable Sharing Agreement and Certification, and authorize the Chair to sign. Motion carried unanimously per roll call vote.

Roxanne Achman, Department of Development Director, presented the Department of Development 2020 Year-End Activity/Revenue Report. She stated "...we have seen an increase in permits across the board in all categories except ag buildings...and those remained fairly steady...the average permit value for house permits was \$301,826...\$35,233 for accessory structures...\$53,934 for additions...ag buildings down slightly at an average permit value of \$106,400..." Achman also provided detail on 2020 subdivisions, stating "...there are plenty of property splits occurring..."

Achman reported on the following topics: 1) Building Official Comments (the County Board renewed David Barsody's contract for one year; the Department of Development will work to collect as many comments as possible from the public to address any concerns or complaints before they become a larger issue; every permit that the Department of Development issues will include a comment card); 2) Boundary Commission Cost Assessment (Achman commented "...the Boundary Commission was asked by us from one of the residents in an area of Little Rock Lake...where the property lines did not match up with the area they were occupying...so if anybody sold property, they could have title issues...the county has the ability to move forward with this platting process and assess this cost back to those property owners... ultimately, it gives them a more saleable lot...we are looking at approximately \$67,000 spread across 22 lots and the right-of-way for Watab Township..."); and 3) GeoPermits (will be extremely beneficial to the county).

Heather Bondhus from the Auditor-Treasurer's Office explained that their office has received a request for abatement of late fees, penalties, and interest on 26 lots owned by *Cove Development Company*, who is in the process of recording a plat to combine the smaller lots into larger lots in hopes of making them more marketable. She stated that, according to MN Statutes, "...except as provided...no reduction or abatement may be granted on the basis of providing an incentive for economic development or redevelopment". Bondhus reported that, as of December 2020, when the request was received, the taxes on the 26 lots was \$38,564 and the late fees, penalties, and interest were \$11,327.51; Jim Brownson stated that *Cove Development Company* would be willing to pay the taxes in exchange for abatement of the other fees. Bondhus noted that the property taxes on those 26 lots have not been paid since 2018; as of January 2021, *Cove Development Company* owes a total of \$94,791.32 on all of its lots. She stated that MN Statutes do not allow for the abatement as requested by Mr. Brownson (an economic abatement would have to be approved in advance). Gapinski inquired of setting up a payment plan with Brownson. Bondhus stated "...if he wants to combine these lots, he must get current in payment...we would be willing to accept payments, but we are not able to authorize them to combine the lots and record a plat..." Achman added "...he could do several final plats..." Several Board members stated the fact that MN Statutes dictate what actions the County Board is able to take. Schlangen inquired as to past and current ownership of the property; she also inquired of the possibility of assessing this property at a lower tax rate (it was noted that this would require rezoning of the property). Gapinski commented "...this is out of our hands with the state statutes, but if we could have the county work with *Cove Development* the best way they can to stay within statute, but yet move it along...maybe break this up into a smaller piece..." No action taken at this time.

The Regular County Board meeting was recessed at 9:30 AM to conduct a Human Services Board meeting.

The Regular County Board meeting was reconvened at 9:39 AM.

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

Johnson/Gapinski to set Committees of the Whole: January 28, BEP Annual Meeting; February 2, Boundary Commission/DMV Issues, County Attorney education for new County Board members; February 8/May 3/August 2/November 1, Human Services; February 11, Career Solutions Annual Workforce Development Highlights; March 2, County Board recognition of Employee Years of Service Milestones; March 4, County Board Goal-Setting Session; and April 6/October 5, County Board/Employee Forums. Motion carried unanimously per roll call vote.

Johnson/Heinen to adjourn at 10:10 AM. Motion carried unanimously per roll call vote.

Edward D. Popp, Chair
Benton County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Montgomery Headley
Benton County Administrator

