

BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
SEPTEMBER 1, 2020

The Benton County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on September 1, 2020 in the Benton County Board Room in Foley, MN with Commissioners Spencer Buerkle, Warren Peschl, Jake Bauerly, Steve Heinen and Ed Popp present. Call to order by Chair Buerkle was at 9:00 AM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

Peschl/Heinen unanimous to approve the amended agenda—add item: Agreement with Benton Economic Partnership to administer a Benton County CARES Business Assistance Grant Program.

No one was present to speak under Open Forum.

Popp/Bauerly unanimous to approve the Consent Agenda: 1) approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of August 18, 2020 as written; 2) accept and file Committee of the Whole Minutes of August 25, 2020 as written; and 3) approve 2020 SCORE Grant Applications Round III as recommended by the Solid Waste Advisory Committee.

Doug Host and Kristen Houle from *CliftonLarsonAllen* appeared before the Board to provide a summary of the results of Benton County's 2019 audit; an unmodified or "clean" opinion was issued on the financial statements. Host noted that Benton County's fund balance levels/reserves are stable, stating "...in the current world we live in, having sufficient reserves takes on added importance...with the state having a gigantic budget deficit...the fact that you do have sufficient reserves puts you in a good position to go through the rest of 2020 and into 2021..." Host added "...you didn't issue any new general obligation debt in 2019...a significant thing that I see is the general obligation bonds...you've reduced the amount of debt outstanding by 50% over the last four years...I want to thank everyone at the county for being so great to work with..." Bauerly commented "...I did an analysis on the overall statement of the county... current assets minus current liabilities...we have about \$31 million in cash sitting there...that seems like a lot of money...I'm wondering how that compares with other counties..." Host stated that he will research this and report back to the Board.

Paul Neubauer, Superintendent of Foley Schools; Brad Bergstrom, Superintendent of Sauk Rapids-Rice Schools; and Christine Friederichs, St. John's Area School Principal; were present to request Board consideration for CARES funding for their schools. Bergstrom and Neubauer provided an overview of their districts' student populations, detailing COVID-19 impacts/expenses at their respective schools from mid-March to date—a net shortfall of \$239,500 for Foley Schools and \$593,324 for Sauk Rapids-Rice Schools (total expenses minus relief funding received). Friederichs stated "...our needs are much smaller because our school is much smaller...our K-6 population is 80 students...our biggest need is dollars to keep our school going...our school is based on tuition and donations...we started out this year \$25,000 in the hole...our fundraiser in the spring which we could not hold...equipment that we've had to purchase... cleaning supplies...extra expenses with distance learning...we are very hopeful that you can help us in any way..." Bauerly inquired if the schools were aware of any federal or state funding coming their way. Popp commented "...if and when it comes to the point where there's money available...I would be in favor of helping the schools if we can...I don't know what other counties are doing...I would probably lean toward how many students are actually Benton County students...so if we do divvy up this money, we do it with our taxpayers in mind..." Bauerly stated "...we don't know how much money we are going to have until we see what the townships are doing...if any money comes back...we don't know

if you guys are going to get help from the federal government...so we will have to wait and see for a little bit..." No action was taken by the Board at this time.

Monty Headley, County Administrator, explained that the proposed CARES funding allocation plan is based on the Board's consensus from the August 25<sup>th</sup> Committee of the Whole. He referenced Benton County's total allocation of \$4,905,923, of which Benton County can attribute \$3,051,340 to personnel costs responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with PPE, sanitizing service and entrance security (from March 1<sup>st</sup> through the end of November). Headley also referenced the listing of projects as prepared by department heads for CARES funding; many of the projects relate to remote work technology, allowing employees, job applicants and the general public to interact remotely, avoiding face-to-face interaction as much as possible (these projects total \$442,462). He added that the plan includes \$735,000 for CARES Business Assistance Grants through the Benton Economic Partnership. (Total of all allocations is \$4,228,802, leaving a reserve of \$677,121 for future allocations.) Headley noted that this total could change should funding to townships/cities revert back to the county (any funds unspent by November 15<sup>th</sup> should revert back to the county). Peschl/Heinen unanimous to adopt the CARES funding allocation plan as presented.

Headley stated that the proposed agreement with the Benton Economic Partnership (BEP) to administer a Benton County CARES Business Assistance Grant Program was prepared by the Benton County Attorney's Office; it sets forth BEP's duties when administering grants to businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed out that the agreement allows BEP to submit expense claims up to \$58,000 of the allocation for business assistance grants; this amount equals the 8% the County Board agreed to allow for BEP's administrative costs. Headley added that the agreement provides that BEP will receive and review grant applications and make funding recommendations to the County Board; final approval of grant awards rests with the County Board. He noted that the agreement was approved by the BEP Board at their August 27<sup>th</sup> meeting. Popp/Bauerly unanimous to approve the agreement with BEP to administer a Benton County CARES Business Assistance Grant Program, and authorize the Chair to sign.

The Regular County Board meeting was recessed at 10:13 AM to conduct a Human Services Board meeting.

The Regular County Board meeting was reconvened at 10:14 AM.

Chris Byrd, County Engineer, explained that, each year, MNDOT State Aid contracts with an engineering consultant to perform bridge load ratings of various local bridges statewide. He stated that the intent is to evaluate locally-owned bridges to see if they can withstand the loadings from Specialized Hauling Vehicles; these vehicles include trucks that have been manufactured with additional axles under a single unit to haul additional weight. Byrd noted that, this year, Benton County had four bridges evaluated— as a result, two bridges will receive a posting change:

- Bridge 05519 on CR 67 (gravel) was previously posted at a maximum weight of 36 tons, but will now be posted at 30 tons maximum
- Bridge L0030 on CR 50 (gravel) southwest of Foley is being posted for a maximum weight (single unit truck, 16 tons; tractor trailer/semi, 30 tons). Furthermore, the deterioration of the timber piling under this bridge is going to cause restricting the bridge to one-lane and away from the "bad" piling (shifting traffic from the south side to the north side).

Byrd stated that this bridge would be a candidate for state bridge bond funds for bridge replacement (estimated cost of \$250,000-\$300,000).

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

Peschl/Heinen unanimous to set Committees of the Whole: September 10, AMC Virtual Fall Policy Conference General Session; September 14 and 17, AMC Virtual Fall Policy Conference—Policy Committee Meetings.

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

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Spencer C. Buerkle, Chair  
Benton County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

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Montgomery Headley  
Benton County Administrator