

January 31 2024

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on January 31, 2024, in the Lincoln County Courthouse, 512 California Ave. Libby, Montana. Present were Commissioner Letcher, Commissioner Teske, Commissioner Hammons, Administrative Assistant Jennifer Brown and Clerk and Recorder Corrina Brown.

Meeting allows for Zoom participation. Present online were Chanel Geer, Darren Short, Rebecca Nelson, Melanie Howell, Ray Stout, Jesse Haag, Adam Stephenson, Michelle Byrd, Michelle Bianco, Dustina Deans, Lexi Smith, Laura Finley, Evan Comella, Mary Handy, Alyssa Ramirez, Siri Larsen, Sharee Miller, Peggy Williams, Pam Rackley and Josh Colman.

Commissioner Letcher opened the meeting with the **Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer**.

09:30 AM LC Fairgrounds 4H Barn Discussion-Josh Colmen: Present were Veronica Bovee-Anderson and Brett McCully.

Fair Manager Pam Rackley reported an increase in 4H fair participation. This year they have 100 hogs, 25 beef with 6 breeding projects and 25 sheep, including 2 breeding projects. There are also 2 market goats and a couple of dairy goat projects. Pam advised over the past 11 years, the fair has consistently grown, and expressed the desire for more livestock accommodations. Josh Colman provided details about concrete pours and lumber needed to divide stalls, install water and hardware, stating these measures won't be sufficient for the sheep and goats, necessitating a pen system this year. Josh advised, based on current sign-ups, this year's material cost estimate is \$10,000 with labor provided by volunteers. Josh mentioned the fair facilities are used throughout the year with clinics, showmanship and different things in the barns. Commissioner Teske inquired about considering a cap on the number of animals, acknowledging 4H is a great program. Pam explained that many fairs cap market projects by weight limits adding they have swine at 220-300 lbs., goats 95-75 lbs., sheep 110-150 and beef 1150-1500 lbs. this year. Pam stated in the future they may work out a plan where if animals are not in the weight limits, they basically go home. Despite wanting to avoid turning any kid away from 4H, Pam acknowledged the need to consider options for managing growth. Commissioner Teske suggested exploring long-term solutions, like mentorships or partnerships for 4H kids. Commissioner Letcher suggested utilizing funds generated from animal sales, with perhaps 10% contributing back into the program, making it self-sustainable without relying on taxpayer funds. Both Josh and Pam advised of seeing benefits of increased youth investment, they will research a buyer's premium program, shifting from the current private sale between the buyer and the youth and plan to review this with their livestock committee. Pam acknowledged the aging state of some buildings, expressing the need for structure upgrades. Commissioner Letcher encouraged developing a plan for self-funding. Josh confirmed \$10,000 should be sufficient for this year and if not, they will seek donations. **Motion** by Commissioner Teske to look at using the economic development fund or, if not feasible, PILT for the \$10,000 to fund this expansion. Second by Commissioner Hammons. No comments. Motion carried. Veronica questioned agricultural grants. Commissioner Letcher commented they applied for a grant for bleachers but did not get it. Pam advised she is conversing with some grant writers and they do have annual people partner grants through MSU and the 4H program. This year's fair is the last weekend in August.

10:15 AM Title III Grant Proposal for MSU Forest Stewardship: Present were Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Jennifer Nelson, Annie Gassmann and Kerri Teisberg.

Forester Jennifer Nelson introduced Lexi Smith of MSU Extension Forestry (via zoom), who is requesting funding for the 2024 Forest Stewardship workshop they plan to present in Eureka. Lexi provided an overview of this program adding workshop dates in Eureka are July 25-26 and August 2, 2024. She mentioned the forest division workshops are funded in part by a federal award through the farm bill, then through the USFS to the MT DNRC and then some awarded to MSU. This funding was cut to about a third or \$40,000 and this year DNRC funded all but about 15,000 of the proposed budget. To address this, they were given a \$5,000 contribution from the Forest Stewardship Foundation and increased registration cost to \$150 but are still short. Jennifer advised this is paid out of Title III funds, expressing a desire to support the Eureka workshop with \$5,000. **Motion** by Commissioner Teske to approve Title III funds in the amount of \$5,000 for the 2024 Forest Steward workshop. Seconded by Commissioner Hammons. No comments. Motion carried.

10:30 AM Administrative Issues/Old Business: Approve Minutes / Resolution 2024-6 Amending Mill Levy for State Equalization and Tax Levy Informational Letter Language / Weed Department Wage Increase Request Revisited / Notice of Intent to Form a Library District: Present were Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Melanie Howell, Annie Gassmann Scott Shindledecker and Kerri Teisberg.

- Review of the Lincoln County budget committee minutes for approval: **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve the January 23, 2024 budget committee minutes. Second by Commissioner Teske. Commissioner Teske noted to strike the word annually from the road fund contribution. No public comment. Motion carried.
- Review of regular meeting minutes for approval: **Motion** by Commissioner Teske to approve the January 24, 2024, minutes. Second by Commissioner Hammons. No comments. Motion carried.
- Commissioner Letcher read Resolution 2024-06 amending the mill levy for state equalization, county high school equalization and county elementary equalization mill levy authority for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2024. Commissioner Letcher read the statement that will be sent out with the new 2nd haft tax bill. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve, under protest, Resolution 2024-06. Second by Commissioner Teske. no comments. Motion carried. Commissioner Letcher added the budget is fully funded without us having to overtax taxpayers and none of the schools are not being funded because we chose to go with what was necessary.

- Weed Department Wage Increase Request Revisited: Commissioner Teske advised he had questions from the last meeting for payroll who wasn't here at that time. He stated that sometime ago the commission set up a scale for pay for particular job descriptions and duties and structured the county accordingly. To implement a grade increase, it has to be done across the board. The original request was as follows: temps go from a grade 5 to 6, however all 90-day temporary employees for the county start at grade 5. The same applies to roadside spray, wanting a bump from 6 to grade 7. Commissioner Teske did not receive a specific job description for this, but payroll advised it falls within that. The tansy ragwort coordinator request from pay grade 7 to grade 8, all coordinators fit within the same code with MACo at grade 7, and although most of these are grant-funded, it is not fair to other departments that are not grant funded. The final was supervisor at grade 12 and Commissioner Teske checked to ensure it's consistent. Commissioner Teske emphasized that they understand retention is tough and workloads are heavy but if they were to do this it would have to be across the board on a tight budget.
- Commissioner Letcher advised of Resolution 2024-08, expressing the intent to create a county-wide library district following last week's discussion. He stated the library board can initiate a petition drive for signatures, or the commission can proceed with a resolution of intent to create a library district, with the same goal of presenting it before voters. Commissioner Letcher mentioned he received all negative public feedback on doing a resolution, with about a dozen emails and phone calls, with most favoring the petition process. Commissioner Teske clarified the discussion last week was a request from the Library Board for a Resolution of Intent from the Commissioners. He emphasized that there is a compressed timeline of March to accomplish a petition, verify all petitioners, and ultimately bring the matter to a vote of the taxpayers. Commissioner Teske advised he appreciates having the option to hear from the taxpayers, allowing the voters to decide. He added the quickest route to get it on the ballot is to pass a resolution, have a public hearing, then get it on ballot for June 4th and the outcome will be known. If this approach is unsuccessful, other financial options for maintaining and supporting the library will need to be explored. Commissioner Hammons agreed this decision should go before the voters. Commissioner Letcher mentioned some concerns received, such as if the library becomes a district, it's no longer under the control of the County Commissioners. To clarify, he stated the county commissioners don't control the library nor dictate their policies or procedures; the Library Board does. The library operates under MCA guidelines, and the County Commissioners only control half of their budget, which comes from county mills. Commissioner Letcher stated voters approved mills to fund the library and the county has always supplemented those mills, last year approximately \$250,000 came from the county funds to supplement the library. He added the library is important to our community and would like to see the voters make this decision adding the county was 1.7 million dollars short in the county budget last year and to get back \$250,000 would be a huge benefit when facing cutting services or finding new revenue. Despite receiving pushback based in misunderstandings, Commissioner Letcher stressed that passing the resolution of intent is the quickest way to let the voters decide. He added to do so they'd pass a resolution of intent, hold a public hearing for input and then need to pass another resolution to put it on the ballot. Commissioner Teske agreed, stating this gives the public the ultimate input, as opposed to a small number of petition signers. Election Administrator Melanie Howell advised she needs all approved ballot language by the end of March, with mid-March being preferable. She added if it's not on this primary, it would be next year before the vote could be held. She stated the petition route would require 2,236 qualified elector signatures all requiring verification. Commissioner Teske noted that the library board specifically requested the Resolution of Intent option. Commissioner Letcher stressed the need to address the county budget situation adding, this approach allows voters to make the decision and read Resolution 2024-08 a resolution of intent to create a county-wide library district. **Motion** by Commissioner Teske to approve Resolution 2024-08 as read. Second by Commissioner Hammons.

Michelle Bianco, resident and voter of Lincoln County—not as a library board member—stated that the letter circulated on social media and presented to the commissioners was almost completely full of falsehoods, and this is harmful to the process. She noted the commissioners, in September-October by way of a survey, stated they would prefer the library become a district. The language of this letter that became adversarial toward the library board and the library itself was harmful. Nothing that would be transferred in the process of the library becoming a district would be moved away from the taxpayer. All properties and contents are still the taxpayers. If the library district should, at any point, fail, the taxpayers still own all the contents. Also, control of any content, whether it be something someone finds controversial, the public still maintains a voice in that via regular meetings with the board. The board meetings have public comment at the top of the hour and encourage public attendance. However, the language that the library wanted sole control of these properties, also the language toward offering employees a bridge in their insurance coverage was derogatory. The library currently pays all the salaries and insurance on those employees and will continue to pay those bills going forward, whether as a district or maintained as a county. I would like the record to reflect there is a lot of misinformation and hope the public comes to the information meetings the board is planning.

Library Director Alyssa Ramirez thanked the commissioners for considering moving forward with this. She added, for public record, by the end of today, a webpage linked to the library's website, which is lincolncountylibraries.com, will detail the information regarding the library district and the request to the taxpayers. She urged anyone seeking information to look there for accurate details. She advised they are planning three community information sessions; the dates will be posted on the webpage once finalized. Please reach out to me with questions or concerns at aramirez@lincolncountylibraries.com. No further comment. Motion carried.

10:45 AM **Public Comment Time:** Present were Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Gerald Wallace, Scott Shindledecker and Mark Radzwion.

No public comment.

11:00 AM **Public Hearing – Establish Days/Hours of Operation for County Offices:** Present were Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Gerald Wallace, Scott Shindledecker and Mark Radzwion.

Commissioner Letcher read Resolution 2024-05 establishing days/hour of operation for county offices. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve resolution 2024-05. Second by Commissioner Teske. No comments. Motion carried.

11:15 AM **Public Hearing – Annexation; Bull Lake Rural Fire District:** Present was Gerald Wallace, board member.

Commissioner Hammons read the public hearing notice of the Bull Lake Rural Fire District's intent to annex and then read Resolution 2024-07 annexing Cabinet Vista Estates Phase II subdivision into Bul Lake Rural Fire District. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve resolution 2024-07 annexing Cabinet Vista Estates Phase II into the Bull Lake Rural Fire District. Second by Commissioner Teske advising he has not received any public comments. No public comment. Motion carried. Bull Lake Rural Fire District Trustee Gerald Wallace advised they will send all the appropriate property owners a letter with the ISO rating for insurance purposes.

11:30 AM **Revisit Planning Fee Increase Proposal:** postponed

11:45 AM **Local Government Review Discussion - Determine Study Commission Number and Establish Funding:** Present were none.

Commissioner Teske advised of a webinar with Dan Clark of MSU regarding the MT constitution, which mandates a review of local government election every ten years. Voters are asked to decide if they want to elect a study commission to review their city and county government process and structure. There was a discussion of membership and funding allocation considering the projected expenses prepared by elections. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons for five study commission members and one mill of funding. Second by Commissioner Teske. No comments. Motion carried. Libby Mayor Peggy Williams questioned the value of a mill, Commissioner Teske advised it's currently around \$59,000.

11:59 AM **Adjourned**

LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Josh Letcher, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Corrina Brown, Clerk of the Board