

March 6, 2024

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on March 6, 2024 in the Lincoln County Courthouse, 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 Rebecca Nelson, Ray Stout, Chanel Geer, Nate Duram, Scott Shindledecker, Darren Short, Jesse Haag, Dustina Deans, Melanie Howell, Adam, BreeAnna Adamson, Kerry Finley, Siri Larsen, Sharee Miller, Kathryn Murphy, DJ Welch, Sarah Long, Evan Comella, Wendy Drake, Terrie Lenhart, Alaena Woody, Bill and Katie, Tingey, Sasha Palafox, Alice B, Ester Brandt and Bri.

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

09:00 AM Flying Freedom Forward Discussion: Present were Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Willie Stevens (Annex), Brian Berreman and William Gilbert.

Nate Duram (zoom) expressed appreciation for the flag and its symbolic representation, feeling that it's tied to his desire to bring communities together, united through a symbol. Nate stated Tom Price Sr. valued the flag and all proceeds from his book go to the VFW in support of the flag effort. A flagpole is dedicated in honor of Tom Price Sr., with Nate proposing similar opportunities for honoring heroes in other Montana towns through Flying Freedom Forward. Nate highlighted Eureka students' involvement in assembling a time capsule at the base of the 80-foot flagpole, fostering community cohesion. The estimated cost of the project, including the flagpole, base, and flag, is approximately \$33,000. Commissioner Letcher identified a visible location at the Eureka Fairgrounds for the flagpole, supported by neighbors. Commissioner Teske, a member of the Lincoln County Veterans Memorial Foundation, pledged to discuss the effort and raise funds through brick sales. Donations can be sent to VFW #6786 with the memo "Raise the Flag." Willie Stevens stated this is a wonderful tribute, expressing hope the Flying Freedom Forward movement spreads.

09:30 AM Revised Bike Park Proposal – Tony Petrusha: Present were Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Brian Berreman, William Gilbert, Tony Petrusha, Brian Anderson, Allye Anderson, Sharon Hicks, Bill Pepper and Hally Parker.

Tony Petrusha provided a history of the Pioneer Park bike park plan, highlighting its growth from a cleanup initiative to today's consideration of expansion with the Ski Dale facility, adding it could be a nice facility. He expressed a preference for the smaller track at Pioneer Park, with the possibility of advanced rides at Ski Dale. Hally expressed concerns about isolation, wildlife, and visibility at Ski Dale, advocating for Pioneer Park's layout allowing constant supervision of children. Allye emphasized Pioneer Park's central location, safety features such as sidewalks and appeal to families. William Gilbert Recreation Program Manager for USFS mentioned consulting with Laura on the project independently, agreed Pioneer Park offers existing structure with a stronger sense of community access. Commissioner Teske noted the approval was given for Pioneer Park pedal track location, yet acknowledged Ski Dale's potential for diverse, expandable uses with associated risks. Tony recognized the opportunity in the Ski Dale area and will seek community input. Tony advised The Libby Outdoor Recreation Association will take on the Ski Dale project development, while working on the pedal track for young children at Pioneer Park will proceed as planned. Tony acknowledged challenges in finding volunteers and affirmed the commitment of some individuals to the Pioneer Park project. Commissioner Teske noted receipt of one email in support of Pioneer Park.

09:45 AM HR and LCSO Compensatory time Discussion: Present were Brian Berreman, Brent Faulkner, Dallas Bowe and Veronica Bovee-Anderson.

Dallas Bowe Human Resources Director mentioned currently comp time for non-exempt employees is capped at a maximum of 120 hours with no cash-out option. She noted both comp and vacation time are consistently reaching their maximum each year and proposes allowing employees the option to cash out comp between 1-120 hours to prevent this from happening. Dallas added that the Black Mountain system now automatically handles this adjustment. Undersheriff Brent Faulkner commented that this change will alleviate the comp max out situation which is resulting in only an overtime option. Commissioner Teske advised he will look into a couple things and reschedule this.

10:00 AM USFS: Present were Brian Berreman, Mark Peck, Chad Benson and Veronica Bovee-Anderson.

Chad Benson USFS provided the following project updates. Granite 1000 GNA project went to the state for scoping. Norman McCedar got kicked off. Mitchell Jackson is moving along in partnership with the Army Corp of Engineers with a public meeting coming up. Ripley is being worked through. East Fork Salvage is internal. Glen Sinclair is being done with the national team Enterprise in the Eureka area. Edna Fortine is getting started. Trojan Defense has secured a regional team with funding through the Wildlife Crisis Strategy to contract road work prior to vegetative treatment. Nora Exploration is under a contractor with scoping expected this spring. The USFS, Good Neighbor and Lincoln County are working together to look at project opportunities. Chad mentioned opportunities to use county knowledge with a fairly large amount of national funding for teams in another large project. Chad mentioned the USFS change in getting out of having (non-fire) seasonal workforce and this year they hired 56 of the 80-employee goal. Chad advised they secured the YCC program where about thirty students will be provided summer jobs. Commissioner Teske asked for support with existing trail concerns and mentioned an indoor plan will be coming forward from the Libby Shooting Range. Commissioner Letcher asked for an update on the Pacific Northwest Trail and Chad agreed to seek information.

10:30 AM **Administrative Issues/Old Business: Approve Minutes / Resolution 2024-11 to set Elected Official Base Salaries / Resolution 2024-12 to Set Justice of the Peace Base Salaries / Can-Am Search & Rescue Non-County Entity Lease Agreement:** Present were Brian Berreman, Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Scott Shindledecker, Annie Gassmann and Laura Finley.

- Review of February 21, 2024 regular meeting minutes for approval: **Motion** to approve the February 21, 2024, minutes by Commissioner Teske. Second by Commissioner Hammons. No comments. Motion carried.
- Commissioner Letcher read Resolution 2024-11 to Set Elected Official Base Salaries. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve resolution 2024-11. Second by Commissioner Teske. Commissioner Teske highlighted per statute, sheriff deputies only receive a pay increase through a percentage of the sheriff's salary, with 1.5% being discussed this year as a minimum to acknowledge their work. Laura Finley, a library board trustee, expressed concern about the fiscal responsibility and transparency of this approach, noting that elected officials' raises are often not clearly explained to the public. While acknowledging the need for competitive pay, she cautioned against raising costs amidst the county's current financial situation. Commissioner Letcher appreciated Laura's concerns and pointed out the lack of clarity in media coverage regarding why elected officials receive raises. He emphasized the high turnover rate within the county, leading to ongoing training and hiring expenses. Commissioner Teske noted the strain of excessive overtime resulting from short staffing and Commissioner Hammons emphasized that none of the elected officials sought raises but are constrained by legislation until it is changed. Commissioner Letcher stated in 1998 Lincoln County sent out about 342 W-2's and are now less than half of that. He added state law dictates county revenue just like it dictates deputies pay.
- Commissioner Letcher read Resolution 2024-12 to Set Justice of the Peace Base Salary and Establish Office Hours. **Motion** by Commissioner Teske to approve Resolution 2024-12. Second by Commissioner Hammons. No public comments. Motion carried.
- Commissioner Letcher advised of a Can-Am Search & Rescue Non-County Entity Lease Agreement needed by the insurance per MACo. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve the non-county entity lease agreement with Can-Am Search & Rescue. Second by Commissioner Teske. Commissioner Teske noted this is new requirement by MACo for county owned leased vehicles to be insured they need an agreement with the entity. No public comment. Motion carried.

10:45 AM **Public Comment Time:** Present were Brian Berreman, Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Scott Shindledecker, Annie Gassmann, Laura Finley and Kiana Wilson.
none

11:00 AM **Public Hearing – Creating a County-Wide Library District:** Present were Brian Berreman, Veronica Bovee-Anderson, Scott Shindledecker, Annie Gassmann, Laura Finley, Kiana Wilson, Doug Davies, Keith Russell, Kerri Teisberg, Ann German, Dustina Deans, Brooke Bohin, Alyssa Ramirez, Malia Bennett, Melanie Howell, Sharon Hicks, Bonita Duncan, Susan Horelick, Margaret Nelson, Les Nelson, Linda (Lynn) Zimmerman, Maria Stephenson, Kristan Martin and Sedaris Carlberg.

Commissioner Letcher opened the gathering for the public hearing regarding the creation of a county-wide library district and a vote on mills to fund that district with the following. He acknowledge receipt of 122 pages of mostly emailed comments and provided meeting instructions. He shared information on the background of this issue, noting that prior to 1996, Lincoln County libraries were getting 4 mills, and in that year, voters were asked if the Library should receive an additional 3.49 mills, which was approved, totaling 7.49 mills (3.49 voted mills and 4 discretionary mills). Commissioner Letcher spoke of how I-105 legislation limited increases in county budgets. Despite property tax assessment indicating a 40% increase this year, it does not equate to a 40% increase in county budget. County budgets are limited by statute to half the rate of inflation, typically around 2-3% annually, but last year it was approximately 7.5%. Consequently, each year, the county falls farther behind. He added for perspective, in 2019, a load of oil for chip-sealing a county road cost about \$30,000, whereas in 2024 it costs around \$75,000. The road maintenance has halved because the road budget did not double. As we explore ways to fund the libraries, we recognize their importance, as many comments have said. While appreciating the libraries, Commissioners must also be fiscally responsible to our budget. The Library Board has requested we put a question on the ballot to establish them as a district, removing them from the county budget. He noted Commissioners do not control the libraries; the Library Board controls the libraries. If the libraries become a district, they will have an elected board, similar to school districts, with commissioners initially appointing the board until it can be elected. If this passes in June, the initial board would be elected in November. Commissioner Teske read the state statute of the ballot language. Commissioner Letcher added the history of the Kootenai National Forest county timber revenue, which was \$8-\$12 million annually at the time Lincoln County voted for I-105, restricting the county budget. In 1992, the county received \$8,655,424 whereas in 2023 it was \$232,270, significantly impacting Lincoln County's financial position.

Doug Davies advised it's a forgone conclusion that in order to keep a library in Lincoln county we are going to have to go ahead and set it up as a free-standing library district. I have one ask before that is done though. For more than three years the commission has been aware of a sewage leak underneath the library in Troy. For more years than that they have been aware there is a leak in the membrane in the main library allowing water into the library. Before such time as those buildings are turned over to a free-standing district, I think the commission and the county have a moral obligation to repair at least those two issues. I understand the argument about money. There are a couple interesting facts, in June of 2018 the county commission passed a resolution establishing their salaries at just under \$49,000 a year. In June of 2023 the commission passed another resolution establishing their salaries right around \$64,000 a year. That represents an increase over that time period of \$15,000 dollars apiece. That's \$45,000 per year. I would suggest if you are sincere about looking for the money you roll your salaries back to the 2018 budget and invest that money in the libraries. Another

interesting fact based on the 2022 census the average income in Lincoln County is just at \$43,000 per year and I think there is quite a disparity there.

Keith Russell while I am not opposed to the library, I am very much opposed to creating an additional governing body that is free to tax the folks to no end. You were speaking of the limits on the increase in the budget of the county and as you mentioned we have seen a big increase in our property taxes and with the valuation of the property taxes it's going to continue. We are going to see another increase as soon as it can possible be done. Our income is not increasing like that. I would ask the county to think outside the box. I put in my email to you to put some thought into combining the county library with the school libraries. Those facilities are already being supported by the taxpayers; they are already paid for. I put that in my email and it was pushed back with some inconveniences this would create. I ask you to weigh that with the inconvenience put on the taxpayers by imposing another governing body.

Brooke Bohin advised she has a three- and six-year-old and the library is very important to us. I think a small increase in our taxes is well worth the benefits of having a library district, that would support itself. It's been the way my kids socialize pre- school. I hope you guys make the decision to let the community vote on becoming an independent district. I think people should be able to decide that.

Maria Stephenson encouraged putting the library district on the ballot and feels it's important to keep the library. I appreciate the information Mr. Davies shared. That was information I wasn't aware of, although I do see the leaks when I go to the library and see the cups on the shelves. I support his suggestion in trying to figure out how to remedy both of those situations before it's turned over to a library struggling to start out.

Commissioner Letcher stated by statute the deputies' wages are tied to the sheriff's wages, which are tied to the commissioner's wages. If the commissioners do not receive an increase, the sheriff and deputies will not receive an increase either. In 2018, some clerks in the county offices were earning more than the deputies, prompting the increase.

Linda Zimmerman as a former member of the public library for 21 years and now as a member of Friends of the Library, I support the commissioners putting this issue on the ballot and let the people of Lincoln County decide yes or no.

Sharee Miller (zoom) not audible. No additional zoom comments.

Commissioner Teske stated you will see on the main street side of the library a contractor addressing an issue they have with a beam overhang where snow and water accumulate on top of it, causing leaks inside. Similarly, regarding the Troy sewer concern, they have scoped the problem, identified the issue, and are working on correcting it. Commissioner Teske also expressed gratitude to the Library for hosting public meetings.

Commissioner Letcher advised a resolution will be drafted for another meeting regarding putting this on the ballot and thanked everyone for coming in, adding we have learned a lot more about libraries in the last couple of months.

Dustina Deans and Melanie Howell Election Administrator advised of needing a resolution prior to this timeframe. Melanie noted that a mill breakdown needs added to the ballot language. Commissioner Teske stated the mill information has been provided by the treasurer's office.

Keith Russell questioned the zoom comment, advising it was not clear. Laura Finley clarified her understanding of the speaker's comment regarding Troy Schools, noting they don't have traditional libraries. They have become technology centers without physical books and opening the school libraries to the general public could pose safety concerns. Noting some people are not allowed on school property.

Ann German explained that her understanding is that for every \$100,000 of property value you own, the cost of this is \$18 per year adding that she is willing to sacrifice quite a few cups of coffee for the library. Ann added, as an attorney, I park here at the courthouse and I'm in and out of this building regularly and Sixth Street has more traffic from people visiting the library than almost any other street downtown. It's a very well-used facility.

Barb Hvizdak (Annex) a library trustee set the record straight that the commissioners encouraged the library to explore alternative funding and this has been stressed at each budget since then. The library Board did explore various alternatives. We looked at a dedicated levy, a district, met with consultants from Montana State Library and talked with other libraries who have gone through the districting process. Other alternatives were pay to use the library and charge the card holders. Even if we did charge to use the library it would not raise the money needed given the budgets we have had in the last decade. We have had suggestions to privatize the library and operate on donations and fundraising like Whitefish does. Whitefish is the wealthiest community in the entire state. The most viable option for us to move forward is to form a library district and I would encourage the commissioners to approve that resolution.

Terrie Lenhart of Spring Up Troy advised the loss of the Troy Library would be devastating for programs offered to the youth and families in the area.

Doug Davies expressed sadness when driving down Dewey Avenue in Eureka on Saturday's and seeing the library closed and groups of kids wandering aimlessly. He shared insights from a college course on community development, where they stressed businesses looking to relocate look at: public education, public safety and the libraries. Over the last few years, he has taken a few people around looking to relocate and one of the first places they stop is the library. He advised the library has a staff deserving of huge praise in developing a place that is warm and welcoming that services everybody from little kids to senior citizens. They have done a tremendous job and to lose that would be a terrible loss.

*Commissioners will meet Monday, March 11th at 11 am to discuss a resolution putting the library district on the ballot.

12:00 PM **Break**

01:30 PM **Public Hearing – Montana Lakes 3 subdivision – Planning Department:** Present were Kristin Smith, Byron Sanderson and Scott Shindledecker.

Kristin Smith presented Montana Lakes 3 with a recommendation of granting preliminary approval to Montana Lakes 3 subdivision subject to thirteen conditions and based on the findings in the staff report. Commissioner Teske discussed the existence of any old road easements and if cell service is considered a utility consideration. No public comment. **Motion** by Commissioner Teske to grant preliminary approval of the Montana Lakes 3 subdivision subject to thirteen conditions and based on the findings in the staff report. Second by Commissioner Hammons. No comments. Motion carried.

2:30 PM **Crisis Grant Contract – Vanessa Williamson:** Present were Judge Jay Sheffield, Dallas Bowe, Vanessa Williamson and Deb Burrell.

Contract Amendment for Crisis Diversion in Montana Communities between Montana DPHHS, Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Division was discussed. Vanessa Williamson Lincoln County Probation Officer provided background information, stating that the original grant application was made in 2022 and now crisis response teams statewide are transitioning to Medicaid billing to ensure program sustainability. Due to delays in finalizing policy and fee schedules, the state is pursuing these contract extensions. Vanessa suggested incorporating supervision of the crisis response team into her job responsibilities, a task she presently performs, citing the necessity to oversee Medicaid billing, which is tied to her licensed medical social worker position. Commissioner Teske confirmed the grant amount of \$263,150.19, which covers expenses for the crisis response team, therapist on-call hours, care coordinator, electronic health record system, phones, and iPads. Vanessa expressed a desire to hire someone for administrative duties, coordinating the team, scheduling, Medicaid billing, respond to crisis calls in the field and office and office reception and has worked with Dallas Bowe, Human Resources, on a job description for a behavioral health specialist role. There was a discussion regarding classifying this position as a grade 8. Vanessa noted that a new grant, starting on July 1st, will be applied for, and Commissioner Letcher clarified that if the grant ends, so does the position. Judge Jay Sheffield reviewed the Lincoln County Probation Officer job description adding to the duties: supervise the crisis response team and the behavioral specialist, respond and assist with mental health calls to include but not limited to coordinating responses, providing referrals and follow up as needed, participate in the crisis intervention team as directed, coordinate and participate in the Lincoln County mental health coalition. Dallas clarified Vanessa is currently supervising Deb and if this grant is not approved these duties will not be affected. Commissioner Letcher stated that a decision would be made next week after further review.

2:45 PM **Generator Repair Discussion – Joe Nagle, Maintenance Director:** Present was Joe Nagle

Joe Nagle Maintenance Director advised of a fault alarm on the building generator. Western States sent a technician who found an antifreeze leak at the front cover/housing area. Due to accessibility issues, it's estimated to be a two-day repair at a cost of \$5,435.26. Additionally, there is a quote to tie in a backup generator during the repair, costing \$500 per day. The generator has 410 hours on it, is run periodically, and is within its expected lifespan. **Motion** to approve fixing the generator with PILT funds by Commissioner Hammons. Second by Commissioner Teske. No comments. Motion carried.

2:57 PM **Adjourned**

LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Josh Letcher, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Corrina Brown, Clerk of the Board