The Steuben County Commissioners and the Steuben County Council met at 8:30 a.m. on Monday, August 5, 2019, in the Commissioners’ Room of the Steuben County Community Center. Present this day were Commissioners Ronald Smith, James Crowl and Lynne Liechty, Council Members, Richard Shippe, Ruth Beer, Jim Getz, Dan Caruso, Wil Howard, Ken Shelton and Linda Hansen. Also present were Judge William Fee, Judge Allen Wheat, Magistrate Randy Coffley, Jeremy Musser, Prosecutor, Nicci Upp, Gary Fair, Kim Anderson, Assessor, Debbie Arnett, Tangi Manahan, Clerk and Kim Meyers, Auditor.

Ronald Smith said they need to figure out what to do with the Courthouse Renovation Project. He thanked the Council for putting an amount out there and they found out that number that would not fly. Commissioner Smith said they are back at the point where they need to take a look at how to finance the Project and how much to finance then they need to figure out where it is to be placed.

Richard Shipe, County Council President, said the Council put out a number for consideration. They were hoping to get the project done within that amount, but with that being said, it was just a number they knew they could handle as far as bonding. He said Jeff Peters, Peters Financial, has given out a lot of information and explained different options that are available. Mr. Shipe said they were informed the number is higher than the $7.5 Million, but like every project, you don’t want to put the maximum out there and see if you can spend it all. He said the Council understands the Judicial System and the Courts and once they have a solid number they can figure out what they need to do to get to the point where they can finance this project.

Ronald Smith said the proposals for location include adding onto the Courthouse in a number of ways, going east or to the south. The other would be across the street on the corner next to the Jail and adjacent to the Courthouse.

Judge William Fee thanked the Commission Board and County Council for this opportunity. He said they are of one mind on this. Steuben County’s Judiciary wants a building that is safe, accessible and they believe it should be located on Gale Street. Judge Fee said this is something that cannot be kicked down the road and it has to be done before something serious happens. He said that they are tempting fate and something needs to be done. Judge Fee said they believe the best solution is to go south, perhaps close down Gale Street and that gives them enough to get started. He said get the permitting and the approval from the City of Angola and move forward on the Project before something serious happens. Judge Fee said he doesn’t want something to happen because separation hasn’t been created between victims, offenders, their families and their supporters. He said he has been pushing the public conscience and he hasn’t had one person come up to him and ask why this needs to be done. Judge Fee said he was encouraged there is not one member of this body whom has expressed an opinion to the contrary and they will find there is support in this community for the Project.

Ronald Smith asked if Judge Fee was saying they should attach a building to the south end of the structure. Judge Fee said he has always felt they should add on to the south of the structure. He said he has evolved to the point he believes they could move the Courtrooms out of the Courthouse, but whatever is done, it needs to be connected and functioning as a Judicial Center.

Judge Allen Wheat said they are ready to move forward on this Project and he thinks four years is probably long enough to wait, but respects the fact that money is an issue. Judge Wheat said he agrees with what Judge Fee said and simply, head south, close Gale Street and head east as far as they need to go to accommodate the future needs of the great citizens of Steuben County.

He said this building, in addition to the ADA problems, is not large enough to do what it needs to do today. Judge Wheat said they speak of three (3) Courtrooms, but the two (2) they currently have are not large enough and they don’t have a third Courtroom, they have a half Courtroom. Steuben County needs three (3) full sized functioning Courtrooms with additional space to accommodate the staff, lawyers, jurors, etc. Judge Wheat said
when Court is in session, the Courtroom is about half full, the jury room is about half full and people are sitting in the hall waiting to go into the Courtroom which is not the way it should be done.

Judge Wheat said that costs can be controlled on this project and do it in such a way that in 30 years when the next discussion is had, those Boards will say we did it right. Judge Wheat said he would be amazed if it could be done for $7.5 Million and asked if the number is frozen at $7.5 Million. Richard Shipe said they were not frozen at $7.5 Million.

Lynne Liechty said she did present to the City of Angola for the closing of Gale Street and if she has to go back again, she said she would love the Judges to go with her.

Magistrate Randy Coffey said the nature of the clientele that crosses the Courthouse corridors has changed substantially and that is why it is more than ADA and room. He said it is also about security and things happened nationally this weekend and those things can happen here very easily. Magistrate Coffey said he was speaking to Tangi Manahan, Clerk, and as he was looking at her, she has a giant window behind her and a nice place for someone to hide by a big fan. Randy Coffey said 15 years ago he came in and found a bullet laying on his bench. He said he looked up and saw the ricochets and a hole in the window. Randy Coffey said he thought it was just a stray bullet, but then he came in the next weekend and there was another ricochet and another bullet laying on his bench. He said there are no barriers in the offices except in Prosecutor’s Office. Randy Coffey said people have charged into his office before because they are mad, upset, emotional and there are a lot of nuts out there. He said it really worries him with what they currently have as a Courthouse and for that reason, this Project needs to move forward. Randy Coffey said he has spoken to Mayor Richard Hickman and the City needs a plan to figure out what has to be done to close Gale Street.

Jeremy Musser, Prosecuting Attorney, said he is in complete agreement with what the judges just said. He said a month and a half ago there was a three-and-a-half-day child molestation trial where 150 jurors were brought in and the problems were seen in action. Mr. Musser said that not everyone could fit into the Courtroom so people had to be put in the Magistrate Court, it was extremely hot, people were getting agitated, a couple people got sick and it was a very bad situation. Not only was he worried about the people, but he was wondering if they were going to be made at the Defendant or the State, but either way a mean, mad juror is not a good thing.

Jeremy Musser said during that trial half of the gallery was supporting the Defendant, the other half was supporting the victim and they were crossing paths the entire week. He said there were a couple times where he was worried about it and he had to go into Judge Fee’s Chambers to talk about it. Mr. Musser said we have to do better than this because in an instant something can happen.

Jeremy Musser said just last week they had someone come into the Prosecutor’s Office very angry and not completely lucid so they were very happy to have that door and glass to protect the office staff. They waited for a half hour and the Deputy Prosecutor had to go out the back and sneak over to the Courthouse hoping they wouldn’t run into the guy. Mr. Musser said he doesn’t need to walk that far multiple times a day when he’s leaving himself open to whomever. He thanked everyone for their attention and for allowing him to speak.

Ruth Beer said when that $7.5 Million figure was given out, it was conservative and they’ve seen the figures of what it could cost. She said she would personally feel better, and this isn’t to stall the project, but to find some interim funding and be ready to go when the Motorola Bond is paid off. She said it would give more breathing room and be safer with the money. Ronald Smith said he shares her thoughts, but they can’t kick the can that far down the road.

Lynne Liechty said there are two (2) engineering firms that have drawn up the plans that were submitted to the City. She said they have almost the exact same plan, but an RFQ is another step. Commissioner Liechty said either Council commits themselves to this Project, which is probably closer to $15 Million to do this correctly and to build a 20,000-25,000 square foot addition. Ronald Smith requested to pass the podium back to County Council.

Jim Getz said he spent some time in the Superior Court Courtroom during a high-profile case, he didn’t have any skin in the game, but it was pretty awkward. Mr. Getz said it was handled very professionally, by the Judge telling everyone to conduct themselves today like they are in church and said it was orchestrated wonderfully.
Judge Fee said that Mr. Getz didn’t even get a seat in the Courtroom and was standing in the hallway with the double doors open. Jim Getz said he can’t even imagine what it is like when there is a case in there where it is higher profile and crazy people are sitting next to each other. Having spent time there, he agrees with Ruth Beer, County Council is committed to this Project, they all are, so here we are at budget time, it is a great time to have these discussions. Jim Getz said find the money, figure out what we are going to do, where we are going to put it and how much it is going to cost, then when the Motorola Bond or whenever the time comes, County Council will commit the money. Mr. Getz said County Council is just saying spend the seed money that needs to be spent to get this moved off center, there’s money available to spend.

Richard Shipe said with Jim Getz saying “find the money,” that is County Council’s job, the Commissioners want Council to find the money for them to continue, that is what County Council needs to do. Mr. Shipe said Commissioners have certain funds that County Council does not have control of, but those are limited. It is County Council’s job is to find the money to get this project moving. Jim Getz said respectfully, they cannot find the money until they know how much money they need and that is what he asking the Commissioners to do.

Ken Shelton thanked the Commissioners for taking the time to make this meeting possible and thanked the Judges as well. Mr. Shelton said as liaison to the Courts, he has had an opportunity to talk with them on numerous occasions and there are several concerns. He said many of those concerns have been addressed today; however, there has been discussion that there is uncertainty on our part regarding what the Judges needs are. Mr. Shelton said they need clarification on what the specific needs are. He said there has been discussion about three (3) Courtrooms, then about four (4) Courtrooms and the need of being ready for the future rather than very quickly being out of room. Mr. Shelton said when Mr. Peters came to the Council Meeting he laid it out pretty well, there appears to be some creative opportunities available and now it is up to Council to pick. Ken Shelton asked what would be the best avenue for County Council to finance this Project for the Commissioners and for the Citizens of Steuben County. He said that he is very against with raising taxes, but there are only so many avenues available to get the money for the Courthouse. Mr. Shelton said they should look at it now because costs will only increase down the road. He said the longer they wait, there is more opportunities for something drastic happening.

Ronald Smith said Jack Daniel from Martin Riley contacted everyone and found out their needs. Commissioner Smith said he respects what Mr. Shelton is saying, but they have already gone through that process. Ken Shelton said that is not what he understood from the members of the Judiciary he spoke to. He said Martin Riley came in and asked, but there wasn’t clarity and they also felt there needed to be some direction there. Ken Shelton said the record will show that there was some concern that it was not related to County Council what was needed.

Linda Hansen said for clarity, he understands how Ruth Beer and Jim Getz feel, but this project should have been placed in priority before Council passed another bond issue concerning communications. It was one of those “we have no choice, we have to go forward,” but she thinks it is terribly unfair to put that up as they can’t do this Project because there is already one bond in play. Ms. Hansen said if they were going to bond, they should have done it with the Courthouse before they touched 911. She believes it is unfair to place that barrier as a reason why they are not going forward right now. Linda Hansen said you throw a Department Head into an arena and ask what their Wishlist is and it has taken them that long to come down into the reality mode. She said time wasted, but they need to move on. Initially she said $10 Million should be the starting point and if they have to add one or two on top of that, so be it, but reality speaks louder than anything. Linda Hansen said if the judges are now together on one page and are agreeing that Gale Street is the option we need to move on, let’s not waste any more time.

Wil Howard said he is pretty simple; the Judges and Commissioners seemed to have gotten together and know what they want. Get County Council a number and it is their job to finance it. If the County cannot afford it, this group would say so.

Dan Caruso thanked everyone that has to work in the Courthouse every day and shame on the County for not setting money back a long time ago because this problem has been evident for a very long time. Mr. Caruso said he would like to thank everyone involved in this whole process because this is a massive Project for all of us. He said he is feeling really uninformed which makes him uncomfortable and it seems like he is not being given data. Mr. Caruso said when he was told $15 Million for 20,000 square feet, that’s 3.7 times the cost per square foot to build a hospital that has very sophisticated internals, technologies and electronics so he’s not sure where those
numbers are coming from. He said he is not on the Committee and they haven’t been sharing information with the Council. He said the typical cost per square foot to build this kind of structure is $200.00-$225.00 a square foot and 20,000 square feet would be closer to what they were originally at before. He said he doesn’t think they start with a number and build backwards. He said a lot of due diligence has taken place so far and he would like more data and is surprised it isn’t more drilled down at this point. As far as the timing, he thinks it has been put off long enough. When they did the Radio Project they spoke about the fact there was a need for this at that time and Council was aware this was a Project facing them. Mr. Caruso said there is debt structuring they can do to ease the burden until the other bond goes off in 2024 and then get more aggressive after that. He thinks they could do a tiered debt structure, but he just wants to get down to a firmly negotiated realistic number and make sure that negotiation is carried out in the right way.

Ruth Beer said Judge Wheat mentioned RQAW had a plan and she would love to see that. Lynne Liechty said it has been in front of the Committee quite a bit and a lot of that cost is security, double elevators, prisoner portal and a drive-in facility on Gale Street for police access. She said the issue with the current Courthouse is the security and the technology and it cannot be easily placed. Ruth Beer asked if RQAW had a price tag that came along with the plan. Lynne Liechty said there is a ballpark, but they have not done an RFQ. Ruth Beer said she would like the plan presented to this group.

Judge William Fee said they need three (3) modern, functioning Courtrooms. He said they need to be full size and if Steuben County had that, Randy Coffey could be a full Judicial Officer as opposed to being a Magistrate. As far as they are concerned, the option is Gale Street and they need to get going. He understands the financial concerns and he doesn’t want to get into the discussions about the money as it is not their business. Judge Fee said they are telling Council and Commissioners what they need for space what they believe the law is around disability access issues. They cannot afford to continue to hope bad things won’t happen and they need to be proactive.

Linda Hansen pointed out that the bottom line for Option D is $8 Million to $9 Million.

Jim Getz said Wil Howard summed it up, it needs to be decided what is needed, how many Courtrooms, how big they are going to be, how much money is needed and present it to Council and they will try to make it happen. Ruth Beer said do it in a way that they realize Council has to find the financing for it.

Ronald Smith said that James Crowl has deferred the conversation to Lynne Liechty. Commissioner Smith said he would prefer if Commissioner Liechty refer to “we” instead of “I” as they have all been working on this and it wasn’t just one person. Lynne Liechty stated they’ve had several different meetings, taken engineering companies through the buildings and met with the people. She said they have the facts and the numbers and they have gotten to the point where they need to make the decision to get the RFQ between the two (2) or three (3) companies that gave the plans and get this done.

James Crowl said he agrees with everyone’s point of view and there is one thing that they can roll away from this meeting with, if the City will allow the County to close Gale Street, that is where it is going to be and that is the biggest consensus they’ve had so far. He said the Commission Board will interview several more companies, pick an engineering firm and get the ball rolling.

Ronald Smith said the engineering firms that have worked with the Committee thus far have put a lot of time and perhaps money into this and two (2) of the studies have been very thorough. He said there is one thing that no one has mentioned yet and they have looked at the possibility of using the Masonic Building, they didn’t get a definite turndown until just recently. He said the engineering firms were using that as one of the possibilities and when that became a non-possible thing, they started looking seriously into some of the other alternatives. With what they have discussed this morning, the Commissioners will go ahead and act, but he can’t say what they will do as they are a Board. Ronald Smith said they have consensus that it will be on the south end of the building and they will petition the City of Angola formally for the closing of Gale Street. He said the City of Angola has basically already given their consent for that. Then the County Council can do their financing and see how it works.

Dan Caruso asked if they could have a timeline so when the work is done with the City so they would have an anticipated RFQ in place. He also requested what the timeline would be for responses to the RFQ and for going
forward. He said he would be in favor of keeping this on the urgent burner so Council is not holding Commissioners up at the time they are ready to go.

Ronald Smith said there is a Commissioners’ Meeting today and perhaps they can make a decision to put out an RFQ. James Crowl said it has to be cleared with the City of Angola first before any more money is spent on engineering. Lynne Liechty said the City was approached. James Crowl said the City was not approached formally. Lynne Liechty said she did approach them formally. Ruth Beer said the City wanted a definite plan of what the Commissioners’ thoughts were. James Crowl said they cannot give a definite plan until the right firm is found.

Ronald Smith said Gary Fair is aware of the utilities that would have to be taken into consideration. Commissioner Smith asked who would bear the expense of moving all of that. Gary Fair said it is a County Project and would be a County expense. Jim Getz said that the City also benefits from the County’s Judicial System. Ronald Smith said if they do not go with an RFQ today, they can do it in the next meeting, but they have to have the City’s commitment.

Ronald Smith said the next thing on the agenda is the consideration of EMS. Kim Meyers, Auditor, submitted a spreadsheet to the Commissioners and County Council. Richard Shipe said the biggest issue is if they are looking at it financially, is to put a real number to the true expense or benefit that EMS has for the County. To get through every line item that it touches and to get the true expense is very difficult and time consuming. Kim Meyers said the spreadsheet she submitted is close and as close as she could get right now. Richard Shipe said it then becomes a matter of whether it makes sense to them financially and he doesn’t know if the Commissioners have received any quotes on what outsourcing EMS would cost the County. He said he talked to a couple counties during state called meetings and he’s heard a wide range of costs for outsourcing EMS. That versus what EMS does for us and it is a personal service almost for the County residents because we have our own people running EMS and it is hard to put a number on that.

Ruth Beer said she spoke with the gentleman whom was actually the director of 911 in LaGrange County when they went to privatization and he explained there were bumps in the road for the first year, but in the end, it was the best for LaGrange County. Ms. Beer said her main questions she cared about were does the person needing medical attention get it as quickly now that EMS is privatized and is the care as good as before and what would the downside of Steuben County outsourcing EMS? Ms. Beer said she was told the ambulances actually get to the scene sooner than before which has allowed the Sheriff and Fire Departments to concentrate on their specialties. Parkview has a larger ambulance pool so many more were available in a catastrophe situation, but he reiterated this would not lessen the load on the call center. Ruth Beer said she also spoke with a DeKalb County Commissioner when the privatization occurred and he said they gave their ambulances to DeKalb Health. By doing so, for the first two (2) years they didn’t have to provide any extra funding. After that, they renegotiate every couple of years and they were then paying $200,000.00 a year to DeKalb Health which makes it easier to know what to put in your budget for expenses. Ms. Beer said she was told they got good service, the ambulances get to the scene faster, the service is better than before because of better equipment and the Commissioners were ecstatic after this got done as it was a tremendous relief of not being in the medical profession anymore.

Dan Caruso asked Kim Meyers, questions on the spreadsheet she compiled. Ms. Meyers explained that the receipts were showing from the Company that they contract with now and the money comes in at a slower pace.

Jim Getz said to keep it simple. He said it is the Commissioners’ decision to decide to do something else or to ask Council not to fund it.

Wil Howard said when looking at the possible outsourcing, he doesn’t understand why would we pay a fee to a company to provide them the patients. He said the company is coming into the Community and they direct where those patients go, whether it is themselves or a different hospital is not a question, but it would be like someone paying you to give a customer list and he doesn’t understand that. Ronald Smith said in addition, they could literally sabotage your local unit.

Lynne Liechty said they have had conversations with Cameron and Parkview and thinks it would be beneficial to have them come in and have a discussion. She said from her understanding from spending a day with Parkview, their system is completely different than ours and they would input their own system so it connects to
their dispatch and they handle it all from there. Commissioner Liechty said until we get to that point and want to explore, the experts need to be brought in. She said she’s heard the costs range from $200,000.00-$300,000.00. She they spoke to people but they never really did a sit down and that would have to take place before anyone could make a decision.

Dan Caruso said he knows that Cameron would be very concerned, they are one of the largest community stakeholders we have. One particular concern is having services redirected down to Parkview for services that Cameron does provide. Mr. Caruso said he doesn’t know if Cameron wants to be in the ambulatory business because they don’t have any numbers as to the cost. Mr. Caruso said he thinks Connie McCahill was hoping to have conversations when the Commissioners get it compiled and see what it would look like. He thinks she would use that opportunity first to protect the local interest and then when that RFP is completed then you can put it out there and make it competitive. Lynne Liechty said that Connie McCahill and Trent from Parkview were in the same room having this discussion so that Parkview would go to Cameron first. Commissioner Liechty said Ms. McCahill said when they are ready for an RFQ, Cameron is ready, but we aren’t there yet. She said there has been a lot of discussion, but there is a new EMS Director and new billing has been put in place.

Linda Hansen said that the budget will be submitted to Council to fund, they waste a lot of time bantering that back and forth and it is not their call. She asked for a decision whether or not Council knows one way or another because it is not their decision, they are not going to randomly not fund it.

Ronald Smith said they were made aware that they are replacing one ambulance, but two (2) more are needed.

Ken Shelton said he agrees with Lynne Liechty and none of them take this issue lightly, but why does Government want to be in private business? He said it seems that every time government attempts to run something it ends up getting screwed up somehow. Mr. Shelton said this particular thing is an emotional issue and people are saying we can’t do this or that. He said Dan Caruso makes a good point about Cameron Hospital, but looking at it objectively if Cameron doesn’t want that competition then it is within their control to decide what is best for them. He said they are great down there, but the reality is that institution is growing and expanding and they have tough decisions. Mr. Shelton said the unforeseen things that have come up and bit the County with this department could be eliminated. He said he agrees with Wil Howard that it defies logic to pay for a takeover and asked what if the privatization would do a better job? Ken Shelton said the Counties around us don’t have an issue and he’s talked to people as far as Tennessee. Mr. Shelton said he was told it is a tough decision because if it is County controlled and if you get out of it, it is harder to get back into. Mr. Shelton said it seems to be something they have to take a hard look at.

Dan Caruso said there are two reasons why it doesn’t work for County Government and why it does work for private industry, one is downstream revenues and the other is depreciation. The way they make up this gap and fund the ambulances is because they can depreciate ambulances and they are driving downstream revenues. If this goes to Parkview they are going to offset their expenditure up here by driving everything down and if that is what is best for the County, so be it or if Cameron doesn’t want to participate, so be it. He said that is the difference that we can’t control as Government, there is no way it could be managed any differently and have it be profitable because we don’t have those two things to work with.

Ronald Smith said he has spoken to Commissioners in all eleven (11) counties in northeastern Indiana concerning this and one by one each of them began to transition over to use the service out of Fort Wayne. He asked if society owes it to itself through Government to provide that service at an expense to Government and it is an ongoing thing, it just never stops. He said it was a wonderful thing when the North Station was put in and more recently they have stopped the going back and forth which saves those miles.

Lynne Liechty said this is ongoing and she thinks they need to take a look and if exploration is wanted, the players need to be brought in and have a discussion.

Ronald Smith said when they spoke with Connie McCahill, she had reasons why she wanted to see different changes and why not. He said he doesn’t want people to think that local services is not as good as other services. Ronald Smith said he doesn’t like the term bandaid hospital being kicked around because it is a false
concept. Ruth Beer said she is not knocking the care and the service that the local EMS provides, her comments with the other counties was that for those counties it was a better step.

James Crowl said Steuben County could change and it would take 2-3 years to work the bugs out because Steuben County is different because of the lakes. He said if this is privatized, it will take time to learn where everything is at. Having people employed that live here and know exactly where things are at, that is a plus, but the finances have to be entered into it too. Commissioner Crowl said we do not want to abandon our local hospital for sure, we have a gem out there, let’s keep it.

Lynne Liechty said nor do we want to abandon our employees and that is one of the discussions they had with Parkview. They would come in and keep the very same people. She said there would be some training involved, but that would alleviate a lot of the concerns. Ruth Beer said a lot of people employed by EMS are hesitant to make that change because of the health insurance they would be giving up. Lynne Liechty said she thinks that would be covered as well.

Ronald Smith asked if Ruth Beer found in her research if the transport numbers go up. Ms. Beer said she was only interested in how fast they go there and how good the care was, so she doesn’t know.

Lynne Liechty said since our health insurance is Parkview a lot of people go there anyway unless you ask if someone local is covered.

Ronald Smith said because this has been taken into consideration, the Commissioners need to do some discussion themselves. James Crowl said a decision needs to be made between now and budget time, but since that is coming up quick, he would say County Council would have to budget in for EMS for 2020 and they can take a look at this in 2020. Ruth Beer said she doesn’t want to rush either and she wants it done right for the residents of Steuben County.

Ronald Smith said Clear Lake Park is up for discussion and he passed the matter to Lynne Liechty since that is in her District. Commissioner Liechty said she had a meeting with Bridgett Harrison from the Clear Lake Conservancy, Molly Wehrenberg from the Clear Lake Town Council and Chris Folland on July 18. She said they had a number of questions. Their main concern is that they have been through this before and if we are not going to do this, then they want to end the discussion. Lynne Liechty said they would prefer it be gifted to them or a lease agreement be drafted. She said currently there is $11,000.00 going out to make the pathway to the lake and they wanted to build the first level of the retaining wall to help hold that path. Commissioner Liechty said the containment wall needs to go up three levels to be effective and they planned to go up one level each year. She said the Conservancy is looking to see if a Lease Agreement is done, will they be able to get grants to fund the rest of the wall project. If the Town takes over with a Lease or a Gift, they don’t have those grants and/or funds available. Commissioner Liechty said there have been issues at the Crooked Lake Park with people’s behaviors and the same thing could happen at Clear Lake because it is a well-used park. She said the time and oversight just isn’t there for both parks.

Lynne Liechty said they discussed selling it and also discussed leaving it as a Park. She asked if the Commissioners want to continue as they are, do they want to look at a Lease Agreement or should it be gifted? She said she is asking the Conservancy and the Town of Clear Lake if they would go together in an Agreement or if a collaboration can be done.

Ronald Smith asked if Commissioner Liechty has spoken to the Township Trustee. Lynne Liechty said she has spoken to Molly Wehrenberg. Commissioner Smith said some Townships are endowed with funds and maybe it could be a collaboration between Clear Lake and the Township. If the Commissioners put it up for sale, perhaps they could come up with the money to purchase it.

Ken Shelton asked why do we want to be in the business of maintaining that which is called a Park. He said he has been up there and he’s embarrassed to say that is a County Property. Mr. Shelton said the liability is huge and the stairs are just an accident waiting to happen. He said since that came out in the paper he had one person tell him he has a buyer for $3 Million plus for that property, and he feels for the Conservancy and the Town of Clear Lake to ask it to be gifted, it makes him question if are we being good stewards of the County’s money.
Ken Shelton said we have at least two (2) very nice parks within the County right now and asked where was this going to stop. He said once again, he doesn’t think they need to be in that business, if Clear Lake wants it and it is valuable as a beach, let them take it.

Lynne Liechty said that property is split by a road and there is roughly 2.64 acres and has 240 feet of water frontage. Ronald Smith said he would like to go on record and say he is not in favor of gifting the property.

Jim Getz said he would like to go on the record saying he went out to the Park. He was adamantly for not being in the Park business, but he kind of changed his mind when he went out there and spent a couple hours at Clear Lake and at Crooked Lake. He said there are a lot of taxpayers that come and go and use that property. Mr. Getz said when he was a young man, that was the only way he was able to go to a lake, they went to a place that was free. He said he doesn’t know if there is an expense there, he doesn’t think they have the right to deny the taxpayers to go and enjoy one of Steuben County’s valuable resources. Jim Getz stated, with that being said, if we are going to close Clear Lake Park, Steuben County should get out of the Park business all together and sell them all, be consistent.

Ronald Smith said Mishawaka has done an outstanding job of creating recreation areas for their public. They have like five (5) parks, they have done their riverway and have installed walks for their citizens. Jim Getz asked who are we to provide a Park for the people around Crooked Lake and deny the same services to the people who live over in Clear Lake. Jim Getz requested to be on record saying that either we are going to be in the Park business or we aren’t, sell them all.

Ronald Smith said the quality of place or life is an important feature and he thinks that would be diminished by getting rid of the parks. James Crowl said he went past the Hamilton Beach and there were 100 people out there. Jim Getz said he was there during the week and there were 100 people. James Crowl said he is in favor of it staying open as a beach. If they can work a deal out with Clear Lake or the Conservancy and they could possibly give some money for it, as long as it stays open as the public beach. Ronald Smith said they can’t mandate them to do it, but it can be negotiated. Jim Getz said he’s sure there are people on Clear Lake that would like to see the beach go away. Ken Shelton said he has talked to several people out there and the comment was made if the Town of Clear Lake wants that, there is a lot of money on Clear Lake, they bought an island. Mr. Shelton asked if the County owns Hamilton Beach. James Crowl said the Town of Hamilton owns it. Ken Shelton said that is his point, why should that be for every other tax payer in Steuben County to be absorbing the expense and liability of the Clear Lake Beach. He said he is not against parks; Steuben County is very blessed with having nice parks that are open to all of the citizens. Ronald Smith asked that a proposal be made that the citizens of Steuben County get free admission to the Trine Recreation Center and Pokagon State Park, it’s in our yard and you have to pay to use it.

Dan Caruso said County Council will have to understand, when the Courthouse gets built, the operational costs that comes with the added space, staffing, heating, cooling, security and everything else.

James Crowl said the Bike Trail is opening now and is it in the budget for maintenance and mowing?

Richard Shipe thanked Commissioner Smith for allowing a joint meeting and he thinks it is something beneficial for both of the board and she would like to continue to do this bi-annually or quarterly. Ronald Smith said he likes the quarterly idea.
August 5, 2019 Commissioners’ & Council Joint Meeting Continued

Dan Caruso, Member

Wil Howard, Member

Ken Shelton, Member

Linda Hansen, Member

Attest: Kim Meyers, Steuben County Auditor