

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS  
PENNINGTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
JUSTICE CENTER BOARD ROOM  
DECEMBER 12<sup>TH</sup>, 2023 – 5:00 P.M.**

Pursuant to adjournment, the Pennington County Board of Commissioners met in the Pennington County Justice Center Board Room in Thief River Falls, MN, on Tuesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. Members Present: Seth Nelson, Bruce Lawrence, Neil Peterson, David Sorenson, and Roy Sourdif. Members absent: None.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Peterson and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The Chairman asked if there were any amendments to the agenda. Hearing none, there was a motion by Commissioner Sourdif, seconded by Commissioner Sorenson, to approve the Board agenda as presented. Motion carried.

Recognition of Citizens: None.

Motioned by Commissioner Nelson, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to approve the Board minutes of November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023, as presented. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Sorenson, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to approve the Auditor & Manual warrants for November 2023 totaling \$6,553,546.72, and the following Commissioner warrants. Motion carried.

County Revenue	\$126,065.13
Road & Bridge	\$ 47,374.62
Solid Waste Facility	\$ 89.34
Ditch Funds	\$ 13,250.00

Per diems and meal reimbursements in the amount of \$2,075.00 were also approved.

Human Services Director Julie Sjostrand presented a Joint Powers Agreement for 2024 between Pennington County Human Services and the State of MN/DEED. Motioned by Commissioner Nelson, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to approve a Joint Powers Agreement between PCHS and the State of MN/DEED regarding the MN Family Investment Program and Diversionary Work Program for the period of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024. Motion carried.

County Sheriff Seth Vettleson presented the following:

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to accept the resignation/retirement of Lead Records Clerk Maria Srnsky effective December 31, 2023, and to thank her for 30+ years of service to Pennington County. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Sourdif, seconded by Commissioner Sorenson, to authorize the County Sheriff to advertise for the position of Lead Records Clerk. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to authorize the County Sheriff to advertise for the position of Corrections Officer. Discussion followed with the Sheriff noting there are currently three vacancies for Corrections Officer. Hearing no further discussion, the motion carried.

Kayla Jore – Pennington/RLC Public Health and Home Care, and Miranda Solem - Sanford Health, presented an update from the Opioid Funding Committee. The committee meets monthly and consists of members from the school, human services, public health, Sanford Health, and law enforcement. Their goal is to intervene with families with children where opioid abuse is suspected. They noted that a counselor works individually with children who have viewed parental abuse of opioids and potentially alcohol or other drug abuse. They noted that while some funding has been used for family resources, expenses to date have been minimal. The Board thanked them for their report.

County Engineer Mike Flaagan presented the following items:

Engineer Flaagan noted that the CSAH #7 project is complete and he is recommending final payment to R.J. Zavoral & Sons, Inc, noting a total project cost is \$1,211,214.64. The following resolution was introduced by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, and upon vote was unanimously carried.

### **RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, Contract No. 2302 (C.S.A.H. #7) has in all things been completed, and the County Board being fully advised in the premises,

**NOW THEN, BE IT RESOLVED**, that we do hereby by accept said completed project for and on behalf of the Pennington County Highway Dept. and authorize final payment as specified herein.

Chairman Peterson discussed and displayed the 2023 AMC County Conservation award presented to Pennington County for the C.D. #96 project, commending Engineer Flaagan for his work on the project. Mr. Flaagan noted the following were instrumental to the project's success: Peter Nelson – SWCD, HDR Engineering, Davidson Construction, and his Highway Dept employees that assisted with the project.

Peter Nelson – SWCD District Manager, presented the FY 2024/2025 State of MN Natural Resources Block Grant Agreement with Pennington County, noting that the total grant awarded is \$154,890. Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to approve the FY 2024/2025 NRBG Agreement as presented. Motion carried.

Auditor-Treasurer Items:

Motioned by Commissioner Sorenson, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to approve issuance of the following licenses for 2024. Motion carried.

Farmers Union Oil	Cigarette & Tobacco
Northdale Oil Inc.	Cigarette & Tobacco
Kruse In	Cigarette & Tobacco

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, to approve the following licenses for 2024:

TRF Golf Club	On-Sale Liquor & Sunday Sales
Legacy Catering LLC	On-Sale Liquor & Sunday Sales
Carpenter’s Corner	On-Sale Liquor Sales
Falls Stay and Play	3.2 On-Sale Liquor
Kruse In	3.2 Off-Sale Liquor
Northdale Oil, Inc.	3.2 Off-Sale Liquor

County Coordinator Items:

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Sorenson, to approve the hire of Nicholas Tretter as Full-Time IT Technician with an effective start date of January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. Motion carried.

The County Coordinator discussed the EAW submitted to the State for the proposed Auditorium demolition project, noting one comment was received during a 30-day comment period ending on November 16, 2023. The County Board, acting as the RGU, then has 30 days to make an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) need decision. Findings of Facts and Conclusions have been prepared and were presented to the Board. Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, to approve the Finding of Facts and Conclusions as presented and also the following resolution. Motion carried.

**RESOLUTION APPROVING THE FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS FOR THE AUDITORIUM DEMOLITION ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET AND NEGATIVE DECLARATION ON THE NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**WHEREAS**, Pennington County was required to complete an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for the Auditorium Demolition project; and  
**WHEREAS**, the Pennington County Board of Commissioners are designated as the Responsible Government Unit (RGU) for the project; and  
**WHEREAS**, the Thief River Falls Auditorium and Municipal Building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places; and  
**WHEREAS**, Pennington County submitted a mandatory EAW to the Environmental Quality Board (EQB) where the document was available for public review and comment for the period of October 18 to November 16, 2023; and  
**WHEREAS**, Pennington County received one comment letter on the project, that being from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO); and

**WHEREAS**, staff has initialized a response to the SHPO and will continue to provide information and communication so that the parties can come to an agreement on a 'suitable course of action' regarding the property before demolition can proceed; and

**WHEREAS**, based on the criteria in Minnesota Rules part 4410.1700, and the information contained within with EAW, the project does not have the potential for significant environmental effects.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, by the Board of Commissioners in Pennington County, MN, that the County Board hereby adopts the Findings of Fact and Conclusions for the Auditorium Demolition Project and a Negative Declaration of the Need for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to approve the Collective Bargaining Agreement between Pennington County and I.U.O.E. Local #49, which includes employees of the Pennington County Highway Department, for a three-year period effective January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Sourdif, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, to approve the hire of Amber Vareberg as Deputy Assessor-Appraiser with an effective start date of January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. Motion carried.

County Attorney: None

Committee Reports:

Commissioner Peterson noted that the Commissioners and other county officials attended a recent AMC conference and each reported on the training breakout sessions they attended.

County Attorney Seamus Duffy then informed the Board of a substantial increase in marijuana being brought into TRF schools by students, and school administration is requesting that his office address the issue. He noted that it is still illegal in MN to possess marijuana if under age 21, however there is no corresponding penalty in MN Statute for such possession. MN Statute 645.241 – Punishment for Prohibited Acts – allows for a petty misdemeanor and fines up to \$300 for adults, less for minors. Mr. Duffy informed the schools that they can create sanctions but he can only enforce the laws and prosecute, but regarding minors and marijuana what his office can do is minimal. He noted 10-15 instances in the last two weeks of students bringing marijuana to school, with some as young as sixth grade. He wanted to make the Board aware of the situation as parents may reach out to them regarding the issue.

At 6:00 p.m. the County Board Chairman recessed the County Board meeting and called the 2024 Truth-In-Taxation Budget Hearing to order. The Board Chair noted to those present that this meeting is not regarding property valuations and action cannot be taken regarding valuations at this Hearing.

Present at the meeting: County Commissioners, Carl Bruzek – County Assessor, Jennifer Herzberg – County Auditor-Treasurer, Seamus Duffy – County Attorney, Kevin Erickson – County Coordinator, Lucas Fornshell – Accounting/Payroll Manager, April Scheinoha – Thief River Falls Times, and the following Constituents: Cindi Kilen, Curtis Huot, Andrea Zipprich, Melissa Lorensen, Michael Lorensen.

Jennifer Herzberg was then called upon to review the summary budget and levy comparison provided to those in attendance. She noted that the budget has not changed since the levy was approved. She then reviewed the budgeted revenues and expenses for 2024, noting any significant changes by department. She noted a substantial increase to County Program Aid for 2024. The proposed levy increase is 6.00% for 2024.

Curt Huot questioned the large increase to the E-911 budget, to which the Board replied that we are moving to a new system called NexGen 911, a costly but necessary update that will locate and target mobile emergency calls, which now account for a large portion of 911 calls.

Michael Lorensen questioned the County Attorney’s budget increase for 2024, with the Board noting a staff of one County Attorney and three licensed Assistant County Attorneys, along with respective salary and insurance increases. Mr. Lorensen also questioned several other budget increases, with explanations including the purchase and implementation of a new property tax system, and new medical and meal providers for the jail which must be budgeted for in 2024.

Hearing no further comments, the Chairman closed the Truth-in-Taxation Budget Hearing at 6:19 p.m. and called the County Board meeting back to order.

The following resolution was introduced by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, and upon vote was unanimously carried.

**RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, the Pennington County Board of Commissioners has reviewed the department budgets for 2024 at several County Board meetings and at this time finds no further changes.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the following budgets for 2024 are approved.

<b>FUND</b>	<b>REVENUE</b>	<b>EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>+/- RESERVE</b>
General Revenue	\$ 11,885,736	\$ 12,851,181	\$ -965,445
Road & Bridge	\$ 8,751,620	\$ 8,751,620	\$ 0
Welfare	\$ 5,519,935	\$ 5,519,935	\$ 0
Debt Service	\$ 1,140,782	\$ 1,072,006	\$ 68,776
Solid Waste Facility	\$ 96,896	\$ 125,600	\$ -28,704
Ditch Maintenance	\$ 225,000	\$ 225,000	\$ 0
Tax Forfeiture	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 0

The following resolution was introduced by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Sorenson, and upon vote was unanimously carried.

**RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, the Pennington County Board of Commissioners has reviewed the proposed levy for 2024 and the proposed Real Estate Tax Statements have been sent as required.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, the that final property tax levies for 2024 is approved as follows:

<b>FUND</b>	<b>LEVY BEFORE CPA*</b>	<b>CPA</b>	<b>LEVY AFTER CPA</b>
General Revenue	\$8,041,028	\$717,941	\$ 7,323,087
Road & Bridge	\$1,754,879	\$156,730	\$ 1,598,149
Welfare	\$2,531,366	\$225,959	\$ 2,305,407
Bonded Debt Fund	\$1,135,582	\$ 0	\$ 1,135,582
<u>Total Levy</u>	<u>\$</u>		<u>\$12,362,225</u>

\*CPA = County Program Aid

City Council member Michael Lorensen voiced concerns over what he believes is disparity in county property values. He noted that some commercial property in the county has decreased in value while a majority have increased. He can understand an overall increase to a classification type. The Board Chair noted that the County Assessor’s office sets the property values and classifications and the County Board stands behind their work. He noted that Assessor’s office is open to the public and can be approached anytime with questions on values, classifications, etc.

Motioned by Commissioner Sourdif, seconded by Commissioner Sorenson, to adjourn the Board meeting to December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. Motion carried.

ATTEST:

Kevin Erickson, County Coordinator  
Pennington County

Neil Peterson, Chairman  
Board of Commissioners