

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS
PENNINGTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8TH, 2020, 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 8th, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. Members Present: Darryl Tveitbakk, Don Jensen, Bruce Lawrence, Neil Peterson. Members present via Zoom: Cody Hempel. Members Absent: None.

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

Pennington County SWCD District Manager Bryan Malone presented a wetland delineation application from Northern Crankshaft, LLC regarding the plat of 'NC Estates' in Section 12 of Rocksbury Township. Several wetland areas were identified on the property during the process. Staff from both the Board of Water and Soil Resources and the SWCD have reviewed the delineation and recommend its approval. Motioned by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to approve the wetland delineation application for Northern Crankshaft, LLC as discussed above. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

County Engineer Mike Flaagan met with the County Board and requested payment for the Jeep Cherokee from Westside Motors at the state bid price of \$24,971. Motioned by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to approve payment for a Jeep Cherokee from Westside Motors at the state bid price of \$24,971, to be paid from the 2020 budget. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Engineer Flaagan stated that the unseasonable weather conditions has warranted blading of the gravel roads and they will continue to do so until cold and snow force them to stop. He also informed the Board that work on the Black River Impoundment project is going well and continuing due to the nice weather conditions.

Mr. Flaagan stated that some landowners in the county have been cleaning ditches within the right-of-way without a permit, which can result in a \$500 fine. He would like to reiterate to landowners that they can often obtain a free permit and to contact the Highway Department for more information.

Mr. Flaagan informed the Board that two internal applications were received for the two, Full-Time Highway Equipment Operator positions that are open. Interviews will be held on December 16th, 2020 at 9:30 a.m. at the Joint Use Facility.

It was noted that the Ditch levy meeting will be held on December 21st, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. in Meeting Room A of the Government Center.

Engineer Flaagan noted that in August, 2018 a hearing was held for a partial abandonment of JD#25-3. No action was taken at that time, however, Mike stated that a resolution from the Board will be needed soon. The Red Lake Watershed will take over the abandoned portion of the ditch. Motioned by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to direct the County Attorney to draft a resolution for the partial abandonment of JD#25-3. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Inter-County Nursing Director Kayla Jore presented an update regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. She stated that positive cases spiked dramatically in November and December, including 492 cases in November alone and 42 cases from December 1-4, 2020. She believes the spike is related to seasonal gatherings and the move to more indoor activities. To date there have been 9 COVID-related deaths in the county, ranging from ages 74-98. The nursing service continues to assist with contact tracing but is struggling to keep up as the cases spike. She said a new COVID awareness app is available to help track COVID and aids in alerting those that may have come in contact with a positive case.

Ms. Jore then presented an update on the COVID-19 vaccine. The ICNS is preparing for its arrival but she noted it is not a miracle drug and will not allow recipients to stop wearing masks, social distancing, etc. Sanford Health is expecting the Pfizer vaccine to arrive there in a week or two. Phase 1A of the vaccine distribution will include health workers, related staff, etc. and Phase B will be for the general public. Kayla believes that public communication on the vaccine is lacking, but she will work with the EMD to raise awareness as she is concerned the public may fail to get both doses of the vaccine.

Commissioner Lawrence informed the Board that the Building Committee met this morning regarding the following two quotes received for asbestos removal in the Department of Motor Vehicle:

ACCT, Inc.	\$3,600
Twel Environmental, Inc.	\$3,993

Detailed quote information will be sought as both are substantially lower than expected. After discussion regarding the other Government Center offices to be remodeled, Commissioner Lawrence motioned, seconded by Commissioner Jensen, to authorize the Building Committee to approve up to \$15,000 in asbestos removal expenditures in the offices of the DMV, Auditor-Treasurer, Assessor, and Recorder. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

County Sheriff Ray Kuznia met with the Board and presented the following personnel items:

Motioned by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to approve the hire of Alexander Yourbaf as P/T Corrections Officer with an effective date of December 8th, 2020. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to approve the promotion of Jon Erickson to F/T Corrections Field Training Officer effective December 9th, 2020, with additional wages per the union contract. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to approve the transfer of Blayke Sundahl from Part-Time Corrections Officer to Full-Time Corrections Officer effective December 9th, 2020. Probation will continue for a 12-month period. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Sheriff Kuznia requested permission from the Board to donate an old county squad car to the NCTC police program. Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to donate a 2008 Crown Victoria squad car to NCTC for use in their police program. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Sheriff Kuznia said he would like to start funding for a remodel of the firing range located inside the LEC, which is no longer used due to ventilation concerns and other updates needed. Mr. Kuznia noted that a Sheriff’s auction brought in approximately \$18,000 and he would like to earmark those funds for the firing range, a project he estimates will cost between \$80-100k. After discussion, the Board requested that the Sheriff get pre-approval to earmark the funds from the county’s audit firm.

Sheriff Kuznia stated Enbridge is reimbursing the county the cost to have a Deputy on site for two hours each morning at their base on Highway 59 N. Traffic is heavy there in the morning and a few accidents have occurred. To date there has been no local protesting of the pipeline project and everything is going well.

Motioned by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to approve an on-sale liquor license for the TRF Golf Club for the year 2021. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Jensen, to approve tobacco licenses for year 2021 for Kruse In, Petro Pumper, and Farmers Union Oil. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

At 6:00 p.m. the County Board Chairman recessed the County Board meeting and called the 2021 Budget and Levy Hearing to order.

Present at the meeting were: Carl Bruzek – County Assessor, Julie Sjostrand – Human Services Director, Charles Lundgren – Human Services Fiscal Supervisor, Jennifer Herzberg – County Auditor/Treasurer, April Scheinoha – Thief River Falls Times, Mike Flaagan – County Engineer, Brian German – County Constituent, Milo Ballingrud – County Constituent.

Jennifer Herzberg was then called upon to review the summary budget and levy comparison provided to those in attendance. The proposed levy increase was 1.485% over 2020.

The Chairman then asked for any comments and questions. Commissioner Hempel questioned what items fall into the category of ‘culture and wellness’, to which the Auditor/Treasurer stated she would provide the Board members a list of those items after the meeting. With no further questions, the budget meeting was closed at 6:11 p.m. and the County Board meeting was called back to order.

The following resolution was introduced by Commissioner Hempel, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, and upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye, was unanimously carried.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Pennington County Board of Commissioners has reviewed the department budgets for 2021 at several County Board meetings and at this time finds no further changes.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the following budgets for 2021 are approved.

FUND	REVENUE	EXPENDITURES	+/- RESERVE
General Revenue	\$ 9,529,439	\$ 9,537,961	\$ - 8,522
Road & Bridge	\$ 3,508,053	\$ 3,508,053	\$ 0
Welfare	\$ 5,362,697	\$ 5,335,178	\$ 27,519
Debt Service	\$ 1,140,657	\$ 1,071,156	\$ 69,501
Solid Waste Facility	\$ 94,661	\$ 123,350	\$ -28,689

Ditch Maintenance	\$ 252,000	\$ 252,000	\$ 0
Tax Forfeiture	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ 0

The following resolution was introduced by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, and upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye, was unanimously carried.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Pennington County Board of Commissioners has reviewed the proposed levy for 2021 and the proposed Real Estate Tax Statements have been sent as required.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the that final property tax levies for 2021 is approved as follows:

FUND	LEVY BEFORE CPA*	CPA	LEVY AFTER CPA
General Revenue	\$6,909,769	\$575,478	\$ 6,334,291
Road & Bridge	\$1,268,500	\$105,646	\$ 1,162,854
Welfare	\$2,425,681	\$202,022	\$ 2,223,659
Bonded Debt Fund	\$1,135,057	\$ 0	\$ 1,135,057
Total Levy	\$		\$10,855,861

*CPA = County Program Aid

County Assessor Carl Bruzek presented an abatement application / Local Option to Disaster for Shane and Amanda Vettleson regarding parcel ID: R07.03616102. A fire on 10/19/20 destroyed a shop and the abatement reflects a market value reduction of \$4,200 for taxes payable 2021. Motioned by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to approve an Abatement Application-Local Option to Disaster for Shane and Amanda Vettleson for taxes payable 2021 as discussed above. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to approve the Human Services warrants totaling \$102,626.76, the Auditor & Manual warrants for October 2020 totaling \$3,933,810.74, and the following Commissioner warrants. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

WARRANTS

County Revenue	\$50,164.84
Road & Bridge	\$30,494.06
Ditch funds	\$ 8,387.50

Per diems and meal reimbursements in the amount of \$1,822.11 were also approved.

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to approve the Board minutes of November 24th, 2020 as written. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Discussion was held on whether to fully open the Government Center or open by appointment only. It was decided to keep the Government Center open by appointment only for the safety of the public and the staff until further notice.

Milo Ballingrud met with the County Board to discuss a tax penalty incurred on his property, parcel ID: R11.04600300. Mr. Ballingrud stated he came to the Government Center on May 15th, 2020 to make payment on his tax but the building was closed. He then mailed his payment and incurred a late fee as

the postmark date was May 18th, 2020. Motioned by Commissioner Hempel, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to forgive the penalties incurred by Milo Ballingrud on the first half of his 2020 property tax. Discussion was held with Commissioner Lawrence stating it is the taxpayer's responsibility to make sure their property tax is paid on time, and that Mr. Ballingrud could have called the Treasurer's Office on May 15th to come down and take his payment. Mr. Ballingrud responded that he made an attempt to pay by coming to the building. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Nay, Jensen – Nay, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

County resident Brian German met with the County Board in regards to his property located at 1221 Labree Ave. N. He discussed the increase in real estate taxes and value on his property since buying it 9 years ago. Commissioner Hempel questioned the valuation change from 2019 to 2020, with Mr. German stating it increased from \$146,800 to \$157,500 despite no improvements being made. Discussion was held with the Board stating that values are based on sales and sometimes the State mandates an increase to values. County Assessor Carl Bruzek stated that he would like to help Mr. German's with his questions and noted that market value questions should come before the Assessor first, and then if necessary can be brought to the County Board of Appeal and Equalization held in June each year.

The County Board Chairman recessed the Board meeting at 6:39 p.m. and called it back to order at 6:48 p.m.

Jill Palmquist met with the Board (via Zoom) to discuss tax penalties assessed on properties she inherited from her father, John Palmquist, after his passing on November 9th, 2020. It was not until after the agricultural tax due date (November 15th, 2020) that she realized he had not paid the second half of his property taxes. She would like forgiveness on the penalties due to the circumstances surrounding her dad's untimely passing. Motioned by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Hempel, to abate the penalties assessed on the second half of 2020 property tax on parcels R15.01106500, R15.01408201, and R15.01407800 in strict consideration of the circumstances discussed. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Commissioner Lawrence discussed a need for additional custodial services as determined by the Building Committee. Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Jensen, to advertise for a Part-Time Custodian I with hours not to exceed 30 per week. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

Commissioner Hempel entertained discussion on the Old Auditorium. No action was taken at this time.

Motioned by Commissioner Jensen, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to adjourn the Board meeting to December 29th, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. Upon roll call vote: Lawrence – Aye, Jensen – Aye, Tveitbakk – Aye, Peterson – Aye, and Hempel – Aye. Motion carried.

ATTEST:

Kevin Erickson, County Coordinator
Pennington County

Darryl Tveitbakk, Chairman
Board of Commissioners