

**MINUTES
JOINT MEETING OF THE
FOUNTAIN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
AND
FOUNTAIN COUNTY COUNCIL
January 21, 2025
Immediately Following Commissioners Meeting**

The following Fountain County Commissioners were present at the meeting:
Aaron Fruits, KW Rice, and Tim Shumaker.

The following Fountain County Council members were present at the meeting: Kelly Carlson, Denise Crowder, Jim McKee, Jeff Fishero, Todd Hegg, and Jeff Carver.

Call meeting to Order:

Fountain County Commissioners – Aaron Fruits
Fountain County Council – Kelly Carlson

Highway- Discuss building

Aaron Fruits would like to get this project started. Aaron wants to get a final vision of what is needed. The garage part and the offices, the fuel station and salt barn are a good start to what is needed. Jason Lewis set down with Roger Azar and got the plans for the preliminary layout. Salt barn plans are pricing from January 2023. Jason did get 3 estimates. He would like to revisit that. He did look at White County and liked their facility. Kelly Carlson thinks Jason would be able to tweak the plans. She thinks that since the plans have already been paid for, they should be used. Denise Crowder would like to clarify for the public the location. Jason said it would be south of the EMT building off of 41. They would like to get some bids. The salt barn bid was from 2023. This was for \$208,000. This would save money due to not losing salt to snow and rain. They were currently losing 35-40% to erosion and bleaching out. Denise stated it is time to move forward and fix the problems. Tim thinks this will be a \$6-10 million project. Jeff Fishero said we need to figure where to get the money. Kelly stated we need to have someone give us a bid so we know what we are looking at, then go from there. KW we need to tweak the plans then ask for bids. Dana Stonebraker is working on a grant for a new dispatch center now for \$500,000. Tim said that saying Maple Corner was just to move out the County Employees while they worked on the courthouse was incorrect. He said the initial reason was for 911. As far the building and construction at courthouse, the previous Commissioners knew the employees could stay. Kelly said they have discussed a location for 911 east of the jail. It would not be attached to the jail. Jeff Fishero asked if we could use LIT money, but it has to be a function of the jail. Kelly said there are stipulations on the building. It cannot be less than 1950 feet. Tim Shumaker said we had the best consultant for 911, Barry Ritter. We could ask him questions. Kelly said those are the 2 major projects we are looking at this year. Tim agreed with Jeff and asked where the funds are going to come from. He said \$7.8 million is coming from Ranger. Another one in Attica could bring 32 million. Aaron Fruits said to go ahead with the projects and move forward and get bids. They will discuss once bids are received.

Community Crossings

Jason Lewis stated that the scope of work done using Community Crossing grant has changed and they need an additional \$12,500.00. Aaron Fruits stated that this had been done in the past.

A motion was made by Jim McKee and seconded by Denise Crowder to approve the additional \$12,500 for the Community Crossings Matching Grant.

Vote: 6-0

WEGA

Aaron Fruits feels like since the County has invested \$750,000, he would not like to walk away. He would still like to see Economic development.

Rod Bannon

Rod Bannon when they started WEGA it was a trial period. He approached Covington, but they were not interested. They then approached the past Commissioners and then the Council. They agreed to look into this and do a trial period. Rod said he has been able to achieve many grants and made considerable progress. Now there is an issue due to the Council not funding the project. Rod feels the information online is inaccurate and unfair. WEGA is now without contract and without funding. Rod would like to recommend the county creating their own version of economic development. He said the county should do what they want and he would help. Some of the grants he applied for are currently in jeopardy. He said they would discuss as a board. They could change the board also. He would just like to move forward and have everyone win.

Bill Glass – WEGA President

There has been a lot of discussion. The last 1 ½ years have been difficult. There are 8 people on the WEGA board. He believes Fountain County does need economic development. He wants to look at how to move forward.

Larry Grant – Attica Mayor

Larry thanked everyone in the county who helped build bridges rather than silos. City of Attica has had a contract with WEGA for \$200,000 per year. This started before the County contract. He feels that he should be allowed to attend meetings along with Commissioners and Council members. He said this will require ongoing commitment and vision. The building in Attica has potential but not marketable. It has been gutted. Grant funds are project specific. These funds are being spent for projects that benefit all of us. He believes the County does not have a solid plan at this time.

Rod Bannon

Rod Bannon clarified that the \$200,000 that the city gives every year is project related. Rod said they are going out for bids for the incubator. The next 60 days are critical. He said we cannot have a political fight in the middle of this because grants will be lost. Rod would like to split. The county can figure it out and Attica will figure their project. Rod said they could strike a new contract if that is what is wanted.

Kelly Carlson said she would like to see the County be prosperous. When this first started, they all agreed the county needs economic development. She would like to see the project completed. She is not sure what the County role will be at this time.

Jason Fruits- WEGA Vice President

Jason would like to hear what the Council members are thinking. He would like to see the contract reinstated. He stated that every board member is invested and would like to see it move forward.

Denise Crowder agrees we need economic development. She said her concern was when the county no longer had any say on how the money

should be spent and the projects. The council member and commissioner on the board have no voting rights.

Sharon Negle – WEGA Treasurer

Sharon stated that her passion is to make sure Fountain County is successful. She wants the dollars spent wisely. She said they have taken every opportunity to go after big grants. She is worried due to the fighting, there will be consequences. She senses people want more control. She wants to see the county have economic development and the Attica project be successful. Is the county willing to go through the Additional Appropriation process to fund WEGA? How do we navigate into a healthy structure? She would like to work with the Commissioners and Council to be successful.

Brad Crain – Covington Mayor

Brad stated Rod Bannon said he didn't need to do anything with Covington because Brad would handle that. Brad said we also have Veedersburg, Hillsboro, Kingman, Mellott, Newtown and Wallace. He said the READI grant would award Attica \$8 million and Covington would be rewarded roughly \$1.6 million. He wondered about the other towns. Brad stated that Veedersburg needed help also with lights.

Rod said that he tried with Veedersburg and Hillsboro but was told no. The particular grant runs numbers and if they show someone else with a bigger return, they cut them out. Rod said they did try and will continue trying to help other parts of the county. This will take time and a tremendous amount of work. Rod said Hillsboro had been awesome, but he hasn't been able to solve this for them. Veedersburg was not interested. Brad Crain said Veedersburg wasn't interested in the housing development, but were interested in single family homes. Brad doesn't think the county should only fund Attica. He said they need to fund the whole county or nothing. He would like to see the whole county be helped. Larry Grant said that Attica has helped itself.

Jim McKee stated that he doesn't think the County can keep entering into contracts and backing out. He doesn't care what the contract is, but he does feel like we have to honor them. The contract for WEGA was through June 30, 2026.

Tim Shumaker asked how this would be funded. Jim is unsure. Tim said this contract has already been canceled and signed. Tim said for the last year he has heard nothing but negative things about WEGA. Tim said WEGA has done nothing but positive things for this county. Tim said the City of Attica is in jeopardy of losing \$6 million for the town.

Bill Glass – WEGA President

Bill stated that he had heard comments asking how WEGA would be effective. He said he would like to see WEGA work with the county to develop a new organization whether it be public private or based out of the county. He thinks public private is better for grants, but he would like to see it structured with the county. He would like a board from the local area. He said the board will discuss and see what WEGA wants to do. Rod Bannon said they didn't try to force anything. He said parts of the community were not supportive. Rod said he is the target of a lot of the anxiety. He wants to have a better way and open dialogue.

Larry Schrock

Larry said he didn't understand what was being said. He would like to understand. He said the IEBC has no transparency. You cannot get minutes or audit them. Mr. Schrock then discussed the Leap project. He would like this to be public private so the public will have a voice. Jason Fruits said there are things they can't discuss with public but there are changes they can make to work with the public and be transparent. Rod Bannon said it is a private nonprofit.

Aaron Fruits stated the county had invested county money. Rod said it was ARPA money and it had to be used for economic development. Rod said this money received 10.7 million dollars in grants. Aaron said county funds were used to secure these grants and now Rod would like the county to walk away. Rod disagrees. He said the money went to individual projects. Bill Glass said these are county projects just located in Attica.

Brandon Ricketts- WEGA Board Member

Brandon would like to figure out what the Council Members are going to do and if they are going to fund WEGA. He believes WEGA has done some great things in the county. He wonders if it is a good idea to keep WEGA at the county level and restructure something for Attica. He would like to make sure Attica doesn't fail.

Jeff Fishero agrees that Rod has taken a lot of hits. Council was worried about funding this with Rod in the position. The WEGA board did take action and gave Rod 90 days. They were hoping he could mend relationships.

Rod would like to have a conversation on splitting. Denise Crowder gets a different vibe from different members. Ethan Myers asked about the public attending WEGA meetings. Rod stated it is in the WEGA bylaws. Denise agrees we have too much invested as a county to walk away. Kelly Carlson said she would like to be able to answer to the public when they ask where the \$750,000.00 went. Tim said Rod just explained that and agreed that we need to get economic development under the county. Rod is worried that we will miss \$6 million dollars in grants if they keep arguing. Brandon Ricketts didn't agree with pulling the funding from WEGA. He would like to get advice and information on how he should vote as a WEGA member. He stated the defunding of WEGA was done hastily. Tim Shumaker said he did not know that they had not funded WEGA.

Denise Crowder stated that if WEGA stayed with the county, there should possibly be a sub group that focuses on the Attica project. Then as projects come about, different groups could focus on that. Rod said that is possible. Kelly Carlson said if WEGA continues to get money from County and city of Attica, then they need to have public meetings. If they move forward, they will need a new contract. The Commissioners and Council will have a conversation on how they would like proceed and move forward with WEGA. They feel there is some options for a win win situation. Rod said he checked and he does not need county support to continue with the Attica projects.

Jim McKee says we had a contract and we need to keep it. The Council agrees that they need to be careful and just pay what is necessary. Denise Crowder is worried about taking a year off of economic development and risk losing grants. Tim Shumaker thinks WEGA should stay in Attica and the County should split off.

If WEGA is willing to renegotiate the contract, a majority of the Council and Commissioners would like to proceed and look into reinstating.

Greenway project –

Jeff Fishero stated that the county did say they would fund the project. This was a match of \$450,000.00 with the Community Foundation and the READI grant. They do the total project will be roughly \$750,000.00. Kelly Carlson said she has mixed reservations and she has other questions. Brad Crain said Covington does all the maintenance. Lori Jordan passed around a book regarding the trail.

Jeff Fishero stated that we had promised the money to the project and now we are going back on our word. Jim McKee also agrees.

A motion was made by Todd Hegg and seconded by Jeff Fishero to fund the Greenway project up to \$225,000.00 out of Cedit.

Vote: 4-2

**THE NEXT FOUNTAIN COUNTY COMMISSIONER
MEETING WILL BE
February 03, 2025
At 9:00 a.m.**

**THE NEXT FOUNTAIN COUNTY COUNCIL
MEETING WILL BE
MONDAY, February 10, 2025
AT 9:00 A.M.**

A motion was made by KW Rice and seconded by Aaron Fruits to close the meeting for the Commissioners.

Vote: 2-0

A motion was made by Denise Crowder and seconded by Jeff Fishero to close the meeting for the Council.

Vote: 6-0



ATTEST













