

September 19, 2023 meeting of the Monroe County Highway Committee

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Meeting called to order at 2:08 pm by Chairperson David Pierce.

Members present: David Pierce, Wally Habegger, Douglas Rogalla, Zach Zebell, and Nodji VanWychen.

Members absent:

Others present: Highway Commissioner – David Ohnstad, Office Manager – Brooke Adams, Kevin Cook and Scott Peterson - Highway Department Employees

2. Period of Public Comment

No public comment

3. Last Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes of the August 15, 2023 regular meeting made by Doug Rogalla, seconded by Zach Zebell. All ayes, motion carried.

4. Review Vouchers and Credit Card Charges (Discussion)

Highway Department vouchers and expenditures were reviewed. Month vouchers: \$639,802.68.

5. County Bridge Aid Resolution (Discussion & Decision)

- The Highway Committee was presented with the “Resolution Authorizing 2024 County Aid for Bridge or Culvert Construction and Repair under WI State Statutes Sections 82.08 & 61.48”. The total amount petitioned is \$128,434.00 at a 50% reimbursable rate. A \$5,638.00 administrative charge would be assessed with \$58,579.00 to be distributed to the municipalities.

Motion to accept the Resolution Authorizing 2024 County Aid for Bridge or Culvert Construction and Repair Under WI State Statutes Sections 82.08 & 61.48 as presented, made by Doug Rogalla, seconded by Nodji VanWychen. All ayes, motion carried.

6. County Bridge Assessment Resolution (Discussion & Decision)

- The Highway Committee was presented with the “Resolution Authorizing 2023 County Highway Bridge & Culvert Special Assessments Under WI State Statute 83.03(2)”. The total amount assessed to the municipalities in 2024 tax levy will be \$33,141.

Motion to accept the Resolution Authorizing 2023 County Highway Bridge & Culvert Special Assessments Under WI State Statute 83.03(2) as presented, made by Doug Rogalla, seconded by Nodji VanWychen. All ayes, motion carried.

7. ATV Ordinance Amendment Resolution (Discussion & Decision)

- The Highway Committee was presented with the “Amendment of Chapter 38, Article VI. All-Terrain and Utility Terrain Vehicles of the Monroe County Code”. Of the 5 requests that were submitted December 2022, only one was determined to be acceptable by the DOT on STH 27 between CTH T and Hawthorne Ave. The request has been forwarded to town of Adrian. This would be approving amendment to county ordinance provided the town of Adrian approves an amendment to the town ordinance.

Motion to accept the Amendment of Chapter 38, Article VI. All-Terrain and Utility Terrain Vehicles of the Monroe County Code as presented, made by Zach Zebell, seconded by Doug Rogalla. All ayes, motion carried.

8. Non-Lapsing Account Resolution (Discussion & Decision)

- The Highway Committee was presented with the “Resolution Creating Non-Lapsing Accounts for Highway Department”. The resolution included three accounts: one for capital building improvements, one for capital equipment, and one for capital highway improvements.

Motion to accept the Resolution Creating Non-Lapsing Accounts for Highway Department as presented, made by Doug Rogalla, seconded by Nodji VanWychen. All ayes, motion carried.

9. Re-Purpose of Funds (Discussion & Decision)

Motion to approve the re-purpose of funds for the purchase of Unit #'s 24 and 92, made by Doug Rogalla, seconded by Zach Zebell. All ayes, motion carried.

September 19, 2023 meeting of the Monroe County Highway Committee

10. "Paid Time Off" Proposal (Discussion)

- Commissioner Ohnstad spoke on the subject. Said we've been through this exercise before back in 2013, and again in 2021, now we are going back through it again. What he said in 2021, and other times, a successful organization does not balance their budget against the back of their employees. This is what we are trying to do with the PTO proposal. Highway employees tend to be more career oriented and sick leave hours are intended to help when long term time off is needed to be taken. The time is not given to employees, it is EARNED by the employees. With the list of current banked hours by employee, it will impact just about every person of the department. When they've accrued that many hours of sick leave, it should be welcomed that they have that dedication. The most recent retirees, they've answered and responded to the late night phone calls, and others that are current employees continue to do so. When those 5 retired they left with 186 years of service to the people of Monroe County. They accumulated sick leave for a very good reason. When retired, 75% of the sick leave was taken from them because of county policy. In his opinion it is simply wrong to take the accrued hours after years of dedication. It should be budgeted for, not just taken from them. Leave it alone for the people that see the time as an investment into their futures.
- Doug Rogalla said that he communicated last week with Ed Smudde and was told by Ed that he doesn't intend to change anything with PTO or how it is currently being handled in the foreseeable future unless he is pushed to do it.
Wally Habegger stated that Ed Smudde has been given approval by the Administration & Personnel Committee to proceed with looking into the option. Ed knows he has to enhance what was proposed last time otherwise it won't go through. From what Wally sees around the country, PTO is going to be a thing of the future, but employees have to buy into it. You won't get 100% of employees to buy into it, but a case will need to be made. The ball is in Ed's court and has a lot of work to do to get it passed.
- Commissioner Ohnstad stated that there were 33 storm responses and 33 incident responses over the course of the winter. During the summer we try to be accommodating, but during the winter, they aren't able to take time off as often as they want. The time off accrual is an insurance policy that has no cost to the county until it is paid.
- Highway Employee Kevin Cook spoke and questioned why were two open position postings on Indeed advertising PTO, but not vacation and sick leave? Kevin showed the postings with verbiage showing "Paid Time Off" under the benefits listing.
- Wally Habegger said that it seemed like last time a lot of department heads wanted PTO. Doesn't know what is driving the discussion this time.
- Commissioner Ohnstad stated that the issue comes when there is a maximum PTO accrual, maximum bank, and maximum retirement payout. David Pierce commented that when the hours get to be so high, employees should be told to use some time. Time should be paid out every year to decrease the liability to the county. Commissioner Ohnstad responded that vacation is one thing, you shouldn't lose it. It should be paid out if you're going to lose anything. Sick leave is a whole other thing.
Highway Employee Kevin Cook stated that when you work a 16-18 hours day back to back, you will feel literally sick. That's when the sick time is nice to have. You work some of the long days you need to take a day to recover. Has slept overnight at the shop before just to save time coming in for the next shift.
- Zach Zebell posed the question – is there a way that highway could be separate? The highway employees are asked to come in to work at 2 am. If you change for everyone else, you're going to lose employees willing to put in the crazy hours.
- Commissioner Ohnstad stated that last week Friday, crews responded to accident on the interstate at 6 pm. They ended up staying there until 5 am. Part of the issue is the 30% reduction in crew over the past 20 years. Every single year the county is adding positions (up 19% in the past decade county overall). Highway Employee Kevin Cook stated that when he was hired in 1996, all the sections had helpers. Meaning two guys working the roads together, all of the helpers were eliminated.
Commissioner Ohnstad stated that in a winter incident, we have to have all staff here to be able to get the job done.
- Zach Zebell stated that from a county standpoint, the banked time off is a big liability. For some companies, you don't use it, you lose it works. But for people answering their phones at 3 am, that shouldn't apply. A cookie cutter PTO for all departments doesn't work.
- Wally Habegger stated that he thinks there is a PTO program out there that would accommodate the county and get everyone on board and is willing to keep his mind open to some possibilities. At least Ed Smudde is trying to come up with something.

September 19, 2023 meeting of the Monroe County Highway Committee

11. Budget Priorities & Preparation (Discussion)

Commissioner Ohnstad provided an update on the budget.

- We did submit our budget proposal, not surprisingly it will probably get carved. Notably we did not ask for increases in personnel. We understand we are one of 26 departments, and understand there are differing priorities. A positive aspect is Brooke went through with Diane and we are paring down the number of accounts substantially. This should make things clearer.
From the local schools, to Washington, you have to establish priorities in the budget. There are ways to balance the budget, but the decisions aren't easy. The budget should be built from the bottom, start with what do we need to operate.

12. Commissioners Report (Discussion)

Commissioner Ohnstad provided a report.

- An update on the bond issue was sent out. CTH I is complete. We've got a few things left but they are incidental. CTH W is complete, payment has not been made yet. We will have bond funds remaining to put toward CTH F next year.
- CTH ET is ongoing, and going according to plan.
- Both bridge projects for the year have been wrapped up.
- CTH P work started today.
- LRIP program was released yesterday. The entitlement for county highways will be approximately \$194,000.00 for this cycle. We will be applying that to a road yet to be determined.
- ARIP hasn't been released yet.
- Supplemental and discretionary - we will be submitting projects for all. We will work with southwest district commissioners to come up with priorities. We intend to submit applications for all 3 programs. We have estimates for CTH T South and CTH A Bridges, 3 town bridges (100% design and construction) and 1 county bridge yet (just put in for rehabilitation project for Town of Sparta, can be approved for replacement at 100%).
- The STP is due October 27th. We will be submitting at least one application in each program.
- The footings and walls on the new salt building are in.
- Brickl Brothers dug the footings for the new heated building.

David Pierce requested that the October meeting be short, and then a road trip to see county projects and roads be done. Commissioner Ohnstad requested that committee members understand it is a minimum commitment of 3 hours to go from one end of the county to the other.

13. Future Agenda Items

Next meeting date scheduled for Tuesday, October 17, 2023 at **8:30** am at the Highway Administration Building.

Next meeting to include Highway road trip.

Motion to adjourn at 3:39 pm by Zach Zebell, seconded by Doug Rogalla. All ayes, motion carried.