

Prairie County Board of Commissioners Meeting

October 30th, 2024

*Prairie County Court House Commissioners Room
217 West Park St Terry, MT 59349*

www.prairiecounty.org

Prairie County Board of Commissioners Todd Devlin, Christine Keltner and Dennis Teske met in regular session at 9:00 a.m. In attendance Administrative Assistant Harry McNall.

9:00 a.m. Pledge of allegiance, call to order. Public comment on agenda.

9:30 a.m. Sheriff Kiefer updated the commissioners about the purchase of the new vehicle, grants that he closed out and other office related business.

9:35 a.m. Commissioner Keltner made a motion to accept and sign “2024-2025 agreement, Inmate Excess medical Insurance and/or Claims Administration Management”, seconded by Commissioner Devlin, “all in favor” motion passed.

9:53 a.m. Commissioner Keltner explained what she observed with the visit with BLM and Eric Urban, on the Chapmain, and Little Sheep gravel pit. There was a discussion on Noxious weeds within the gravel pits. The BLM knows the county is not putting up a fence at Cherry Creek, but instead extending the soil piles to prevent entry into the pit. There is now a second BLM Paleontologist available to supervise diggings at the pit.

10:00 a.m. County Attorney Dan Rice, and Clerk & Recorder Shari Robertson ask the question about temporary position that should have ended. If you want to keep him, he needs to end his position and then rehire him after it has been advertised. Shari explained that the original position was not advertised, and was hired, and doesn't fit the current position posting. He needs to be let go, the position needs advertised and then rehired if desired. There needs to be a position posting that states the different requirements for the temporary position.

10:35 a.m. Commissioner Keltner made a motion to end the temporary position on November 15th, and advertising a new position starting November 18th with a new hire, seconded by Commissioner Teske, “all in favor” motion passed.

10:40 a.m. Clerk & Recorder Shari Robertson provided commissioners with payroll.

Prairie County Voucher # 1049 \$31,157.72

Prairie County Voucher # 1048 \$16,806.08

Prairie County Voucher # 4 \$8,156.51

Prairie County Voucher # 1046 \$19,007.39

Prairie County Voucher # 1047 \$2,273.08

Prairie County Voucher # 1045 \$65,570.52

10:54 a.m. Clerk & Recorder Shari Robertson ask if she could use Commissioner Devlin stamp to sign the Workers Compensation Check for the 3rd quarter check.

11:00 a.m. Commissioners reviewed and signed claims.

Prairie County Voucher # 1054 \$704.66

Prairie County Voucher # 1052 \$98,883.12

Prairie County Voucher # 1053 \$2,098.69

11:48 a.m. Commissioner Teske made a motion “RM88 for records that have met their retention dates according to Montana Code 7-5-2132 for Elections Office and Clerk & Recorder”, seconded by commissioner Devlin.

11:50 a.m. Commissioner Teske made a motion “after being made aware that the county cannot donate taxpayer money to organizations, the motion for \$1000 to the MURN Park Playground Fundraiser made during the 10/16/2024 commissioners meeting, must be reversed, and the donation cannot be made”, seconded by commissioner Devlin, “all in favor” motion passed.

11:55 a.m. Commissioner Devlin read the minutes from the 10/16/2024 commissioners meeting.

12:10 p.m. Commissioner Teske made a motion to accept the minutes from the 10/16/2024 commissioners meeting as corrected, seconded by Commissioner Keltner “all in favor” motion passed.

12:15 p.m. Lunch Break

1:00 p.m. Commissioners reviewed bridge construction information requests. Commissioner Teske phoned Brandon Duffey with Great West Engineering about bridge 4086.

1:15 p.m. Laney Smith has been certified as an election staff member. Post election audit: 11/14 and Canvass is on 11/15 at 8 a.m.

1:30 p.m. Commissioners joined via zoom a meeting with Montana Department of Transportation concerning the future repairs of bridge 6690.

3:00 p.m. Commissioners joined the fair board members for an update on the fairgrounds.

Sharla Sackman first gave a presentation for the livestock building and rendering of what it could look like or concept of what the new building could look like. The building would be 100' x 250' with an enclosed area of 80'x100' with concrete floors. This building would have a wide range of uses outside of fair season.

They have collected estimates for building this building, as well as starting some donations. They have made artist's rendering of what the building would look like and could be used for. Next steps are discovering funding options and other funds/grants. They board is working on grant funding through various grant applications. One of the next steps would be to have a preliminary architectural report, and public meetings etc., before apply for the grants.

4:00 p.m. Greg Berger joined the meeting to speak to the commissioners about Industrial Development. There was turnout of concern about 40+ citizens at the meeting to listen to Greg Bergers' comments. Greg read an email he had written and sent out in advance. Greg is asking the commissioners for interim zoning; he cited Code 7-6-206 for emergency zoning. Greg referenced regulations made in 2020 in Prairie County for subdivision, in response to the proposed pipeline for safety, health and morals. Greg urges the commissioners to take action to regulate industrial energy development within the county. Greg read regulations and guidelines for interim zoning from Montana Statue. Greg pointed out that there are no limitations regarding setbacks from houses, towns etc, and provide a danger to residents. Greg believes that windmills pose a real safety risk that the commissioners should address. Also, there is a moral standing to zone concerning moral issues with the wind company. He also provided concerns of the wind company going bankrupt and leaving decommissioning to the private landowner and the county.

Greg also provided many examples of risk and health effects that have been documented near windfarms as well as livestock concerns and issues.

Commissioner Teske spoke on regulations and codes he has delt with in more populated areas. He didn't know about the wind farm issues until this last spring and address the luncheon during the 10/16/2024 commissioners meeting. Commissioner Devlin also spoke about sending them a letter about not getting on the agenda and causing issues for the county commissioners.

Tylene Eaton read a statement about health and environmental effects of wind turbines. One point was low frequency sounds and the effects on the body. In addition, she spoke about defective wind turbines that failed and created hazards such as fire, debris and chemicals releases. She also hit on the points of health, safety and morals.

Norma Peabody made a comment about the views of Montana being an attraction to tourism and just he overall view of the county. Commissioner Devlin agreed that views have value.

Tim Poper made a comment of an accelerated depreciation schedule on the windmills and depreciate after 7 years, and maintenance increases go through the roof and wind companies abandon the projects.

Greg Ments from Miles City wanted to know what the substancies cost per megawatt for wind.

Shelly Harrington is development of wind is there and EIS required for wind development? She has heard they affect water supply and water wells. How will it affect sage grouse habitat? What happens if the windmills are sold to another company, then what happens to their promises.

Shane Eaten made a comment about having a feasibility study before permitting. As well as showing that other places have used interim zoning in similar situations.

Lon Raukuf made a comment about tax abatement, and the county commissioners have been looking into this and do not have to give abatements.

Commissioner Devlin provided information on other tax reductions for other industries.

Chris Kopenopher, he doesn't really like zoning but is in support of look into interim zoning. He ask for a show of hands to see who in the room would be interested in having the commissioners looking into interim zoning. A bit over half of the room raised their hands in support.

Shane Eaton read a small part of the Prairie County Growth Policy 2016 concerning local involvement for residents.

Cody Tibbits is not against industrial development, this project of wind turbines will be in our future for generations to come, this is a big deal that should be looked deeply into it and proceed with caution. Also he made a comment about how does the process work from cradle to grave, from start to finish.

Scott made a comment about a Harvard study on wind turbines and what effects it had on the environment with a result of warmer ground.

Renee Pirts referenced global warming caused by wind turbines, as well as farming, health and animal issues. Lightening strikes are very common within wind farms. Zoning could protect our county and residents, and what process is there moving forward, where does a study start?

Commissioner Devlin said its with the planning board, and they will provide the commissioners with recommendations. Commissioner Devlin supported a resolution to protect our public lands.

Shane Eaton ask if the commissioners will have this on the next agenda to follow up on legal aspect of the process. Commissioner Devlin referred to the Land Planning Board to give recommendations to the commissioners going forward.

A comment about bankruptcy of the windmill companies down the road, and how it is a common situation. View sheds are used by the BLM to stop above ground water tanks, but not windmills.

Shane Eaton: Zoning in Montana is exempt on agricultural land, bonding is required at year 15, but other counties have mandated immediate bonding.

A citizen from Dawson County provided a comment about transmission lines having emanate domain. There were many other comments about these subjects and others.

Bob Phalan mentioned that a counties require a road bond from the wind companies.