

Logan County Commissioners Work Session
June 25, 2024

Present: Mike Brownell, Joe McBride, Jerry Sonnenberg, Alan Samber, Kristan Lange, Jerry Casebolt, Debbie Unrein, Marilee Johnson, Rick Cullip, Ned Resch, Brian Sager, Rafer Nichols, via Zoom, Erin Owens, Jada Gettman, Tiffany Nichols, Jeff Reeves, Jeff Rice and Jennifer Crow.

Chairman Brownell called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS SESSION – Commissioner Sonnenberg moved to approve the minutes of June 18, 2024 as written. Chairman McBride seconded, and the motion carried, 3-0.

REVISIONS TO WORK SESSION AGENDA – Commissioner Sonnenberg added discussion on new fees on facilities under New Business.

REVIEW AND APPROVE SCHEDULE OF COUNTY BILLS – The Board met with Kristan Lange to review the Logan County schedule of bills dated June 25, 2024. All bills were approved as presented.

BANNER HEALTH TRANSPORTATION - Ned Resch, CEO of Sterling Regional MedCenter and Brian Sager, Base Manager for Med-Evac Banner Health’s helicopter transportation. Mr. Resch noted that he talked to Brian Sager after his meeting with the Board of Commissioners several weeks ago on May 30th where a potential ballot initiative for an ambulance service was discussed. Mr. Resch wanted to learn more about that and voice his support for those efforts.

Resch offered any resources that the hospital can provide in terms of training, through medical directorship and through emergency physician services. Brian Sager and his team have a wealth of knowledge on critical care, transport and transportation in general. He is a big proponent of the county having the ability to do interfacility transportation like Phillips and Morgan Counties and other counties that didn’t do this outside of just the 911 response.

In reading the transcript of the meeting, he read there were discussions of forming a committee to help educate the community and get community support. Mr. Resch said he is willing to do forums on the importance of interfacility ground transportation and the need for transport in rural America and how it is a huge crisis across the country.

He asked if the ballot initiative was for an expansion of the current 911 services that exist and to include interfacility ground transportation or is it a separate ambulance service out of the county that will do the interfacility ground transportation. Chairman Brownell explained that the county owns the ambulances, and the Sterling Fire Department provides the EMTs to operate the ambulance service. There is an Intergovernmental Agreement to take care of the details. When the county first took over the ambulance, a ballot initiative to fund an ambulance district failed. This is an attempt to revisit an ambulance district without having two separate governmental entities involved. We will then have to figure out if there would be enough available to have extra crews to do interfacility transfers. That’s the problem now. When we have three ambulances and one or two of them are doing interfacility transfers then that leaves us short for emergency calls.

Commissioner McBride noted that Emergency Manager Jerry Casebolt is involved in getting the planning group put together. Commissioner Jerry Sonnenberg will be representing the Commissioners. If Mr. Resch or Mr. Sager would like to be involved on that planning group, they are welcome.

Mr. Resch spoke about being a hospital administrator and the rural transport and EMS issues being complicated and difficult topics. It is not a money-making business. In the two years the hospital ran the service here, they did 1.3 transfers per day with an average reimbursement from Medicaid of \$300 per transfer and about \$500-\$800 from Medicare/Medicare Advantage. The highest reimbursement was from commercial insurance. It's not enough to cover the overhead, the rigs, the maintenance, gas and everything. Where counties and municipalities are able to find success is through a special tax.

Mr. Resch explained that NJC is setting up a paramedic training program which starts this fall. They are excited about the paramedic training program and will be partnering with NJC as a training site for the EMTs and paramedics. They will go through the Emergency Department where they will learn how to intubate patients. Resch commended the Commissioners for discussing the ballot initiative and attempting it again in the county. This is not a service that hospitals usually provide. As a community member with young children, he is a big supporter of it. If there is an opportunity, he and Brian are both available as resources and support. They will help provide education in the community, whether that is at town halls or community forums, wherever they are needed. They are both willing to help.

Commissioner Brownell commented that he has visited with Commissioners from other counties where they have local district hospitals. That probably does provide some funding from federal or state funding sources. He asked if the county formed the ambulance district, if it would be possible to open up the district for federal or state funding.

Mr. Resch did not know about government funding sources. Hospital districts are allowed to have a mill levy to help fund the hospital. In rural communities, in order to cover payroll or costs, they have the mill levy to help supplement their budgets. Sometimes the hospital district has an ambulance attached to it. The hospital is able to tap into the mill levy to cover the costs of that and it's one symbiotic organization. There are volunteer ambulance services that do fundraisers to help supplement their income. The volunteers are aging out and new volunteers aren't replacing them. The volunteer services seem to be drying up.

Resch said that the rate that they transfer patients out of the Emergency Department has not changed. It's between four and six percent, for five or more years, it has remained unchanged. The number of visits has increased steadily for three years in a row. The rate of transfers is not changing; however, the mode of transportation has changed. The transfers are done more by air transport now, but not 100%. The legislation that was passed state and federally on the No Surprise Billing is in effect and folks aren't getting hit with the balance of the air transport. Commissioner McBride commented that a lot of people have the MASA or Air Medicare insurance for the air transport coverage.

Mr. Sager commented that their organization does a lot of outreach and PR work and would be available to help in any way possible to promote a ballot initiative. Mr. Resch also offered training and education as well. The Board thanked both men for attending and for their input.

FAIRGROUNDS RENTAL FEES – Rick Cullip met with the Board to discuss rental fees for the fairgrounds. Commissioner Sonnenberg asked how we make sure that we cover the costs of our employees doing the work of cleaning the grandstands and working the arena and set fees based on that. The Board discussed fees for residents and non-residents and whether the prices for commercial events should be higher. For example, the Monster Truck event. Commissioner Sonnenberg is not sure that the fees should be that much higher just because they are from out of town. The commercial events will bring in economic impact to the area and we don't want to stifle that. The fees should be consistent. He suggested that once the rest of the prices are determined, the fees for non-resident users should be doubled.

Commissioner Sonnenberg further stated that the current fees for the stadium for non-residents are \$300, commercial \$850, and resident are \$250. If a resident rents it, they pay taxes, we're here to help them. The grandstands are a large area to clean and prepare. We need to make sure that we cover the costs of preparing. We should be able to justify an increase, probably not as high as some of the projections made, but if you're out of the county, I would say at least double.

Rick Cullip stated that the Board has waived the fees for all youth events. Many of the local events are asking for price breaks, especially for the non-profits. He said that he does not have the ability to negotiate the fees, the Board does that.

Commissioner Sonnenberg said that he does not mind them coming to the Board to request reduced fees. Some of the non-profits that want to use the facilities are probably better funded than a number of the others that aren't non-profits that are trying to use the facilities. Commissioner Sonnenberg said he would like to get away from negotiating reduced rates, like the estate sales that have been negotiated. Commissioner McBride said the proposal looks fine; however, it seems like the community center is a pretty expensive room to rent.

Cullip stated that he did that mainly off of the additional space for rental. There's really no space like that close by to compare to. Holyoke just built a new community center that's similar to ours. Theirs rents for \$1,000 but it is for a three-day rental. We run into this with our arena, they take an extra day to decorate it. The day they use it, then nobody wants to tear down or clean it that night because everyone wants to go home that night at midnight. It's always the third day before it gets cleaned up. Certain larger events like weddings or galas need to be charged a minimum, three-day event.

Chairman Brownell agreed, and used the example of the Boer goat event last year that used the premise of giving a scholarship to the kids. What their Boer goat people were doing was trying to sell their expensive Boer goats to 4-H and FFA members. It's more of a commercial event than it is a youth event. They say they are going to tie it to youth so they can get a cheaper rental rate. When she met with us, we suggested she host it at Weld County or the Ranch, but she said they cost a lot more money, so they are coming out here. They do get people in our motel rooms and restaurants and everything else. But they are already getting a pretty good price on the facility

compared to some of those larger facilities west of us and then they are chiseling us on the rental rates. Commissioner Sonnenberg feels it is a large increase and would like to find somewhere in the middle.

BNSF RAILWAY COMPANY CROSSING SURFACE INSTALLATION AGREEMENT -
Rafer Nichols of BNSF joined the meeting via Zoom – Chairman Brownell opened by saying that the rail crossing agreement contained some items that caught the Board’s attention. The flagging operation costs seemed exorbitant at \$800 - \$1,200 a day to flag.

Mr. Nichols noted in the estimate there’s only 36-man hours for flagging. That’s four days to do the work at \$1,400. What was provided to the county in the agreement as Exhibit C and C1 only applies if the county has a contractor. The way this was proposed originally was with BNSF doing all the work, that included BNSF doing the asphalt and BNSF doing the traffic control. Both those line items are included in the estimate. There would be no flagging besides what is shown as line item in the estimate. So that can be ignored. There will not be an Exhibit C executed unless the county has a contractor. The way this was proposed originally with BNSF doing asphalt and traffic control.

Commissioner Sonnenberg stated that he thought the County was responsible for paying the flagging costs. Mr. Nichols stated that there are no expenses beyond what is shown in the estimate.

Jeff Reeves, Logan County Road and Bridge Manager, joined the meeting. He stated that the total cost of the project seems to be pretty high for the amount of work being done. It would be beneficial for the county to know a timeline for future projects in order to be able to budget for them. Mr. Nichols is not familiar with any other projects on the horizon for Logan County. They try to do their best to notify the stakeholders about upcoming projects. This is a larger crossing and obviously has a lot of costs associated with it.

Reeves reported that he did discuss the project with BNSF personnel last year and told that person that he didn’t think it is right to make smaller communities or counties to foot the bill for half the costs. He was informed that it was in the Colorado Department of Transportation regulations. This is the first time that this has come up locally. Crossings have been replaced in the past and Logan County has never had to go through this process.

County Attorney Alan Samber asked which line items on the estimate are things that could be performed by the county to reduce the cost. Nichols replied that there are two asphalt line items and a traffic control line item. If the county were able to self-perform the paving and the traffic control line item, that would reduce the total costs by \$63,000. These are estimated costs. There is an added amount for contingency in the budget. Contingency would obviously be reduced by the percentage if those items were removed. Jeff Reeves stated that the County does have the capability to perform those items. Reeves stated that the County does have Traffic Control Supervisors and all of their flaggers are certified.

Alan Samber asked how the County will get credited for the in-kind flagging work to the extent of the value of \$63,000. Mr. Nichols explained that in order to make it easier for the local agency to not have to hire a contractor for asphalt, they include it in the estimate and split it 50/50.

Jeff Reeves commented that the railroad usually does not like the Road and Bridge Department working in the railroad right-of-way. Nichols said that if the county is self-performing the work, he would do his best to coordinate the work with his local maintenance team so that the two entities could work together. Alan Samber said that the county will need a revised contract showing the county self-performing those two items. He asked Nichols to send a revised draft of the contract with the county self-performing the work discussed today.

MERINO RAMS BOOSTER CLUB – Erin Owens, Jada Gettman, and Tiffany Nichols of the Merino Rams Booster Club, met with the Board to request reduced fees for use of the Logan County Fairgrounds Exhibit Center for a Cajun Boil scheduled for November 23, 2024. This will be the second year for the event. The Booster Club raises money for school improvements. Last year the club raised nearly \$30,000 and had about 300 people in attendance at the event. The non-profit group asked if the Board could waive the rental fees on the tables and chairs which would be about \$600. Commissioner McBride said that with the organization being an educational non-profit, he would be in favor of waiving the fees. Commissioner Sonnenberg moved to waive the fairgrounds rental fees for the Merino Booster Club for their Cajun Boil for the Merino Schools. Commissioner McBride seconded and the motion carried, 3-0.

Commissioner Sonnenberg stated that he will re-work the fairgrounds rental fees and put it on the agenda for final approval next week.

PURCHASING POLICY - Chairman Brownell discussed the purchasing policy and raising the limit for requiring purchase requisitions. In some cases, departments aren't following the purchasing policy. He suggested that there needs to be a meeting of department heads and discussion about the policy. Debbie Unrein sent a draft of suggested changes to policy to the Board. The Board will schedule a meeting with Debbie Unrein to discuss the policy and then the Board will meet with Department Heads and Elected Officials at a later date.

KUES GRAVEL PIT – Jeff Reeves met with the Board concerning the Kues gravel pit. Mr. Kues' son has called asking for more money. The last gravel pit that the county opened was the Barkley pit. It started at 50 cents a yard and increases by about three cents a yard every year. The contract is automatically renewed.

There is quite a lot of life left in the Kues pit and they use a lot of clay out of it. There are approximately 25 acres that are usable. Commissioner Sonnenberg suggested renewing the Kues gravel pit agreement early at 60 cents per yard. The Board asked Jeff Reeves to talk to Harold Kues to discuss redoing the agreement early for another six years at 60 cents per yard. Jeff Reeves agreed to call Harold Kues.

Reeves said he is looking into expanding the Barkley pit. They are willing to expand another 50 acres. The only other gravel pit still open is the Stephens pit, but it has not been used since he has been with the County. The Guenzi pit and the Lindstrom pit are both in reclamation now. All the other pits have been closed so the county is not paying for them. Alan Samber will work on the new Kues gravel pit lease.

PHILLIPS COUNTY ROAD GRADING ON THE COUNTY LINE – Commissioner Sonnenberg noted that Phillips County is grading three miles of road on the Phillips County/Logan County Line up to Bamford’s feedlots. Since Logan County receives the revenue from the tax deal, we probably ought to take care of those roads. He asked if we could trade them three miles somewhere else. Jeff Reeves will look at that area. Logan County grades part of it and Phillips County grades part of it. Commissioner Brownell said that we could swap out three miles on the other side of Highway six on that same road.

Commissioner Brownell also mentioned some people are complaining about the size of the rocks on the roads. Reeves said that the county does not have a screen, and they don’t have enough aggregate to require a screen. Most of the guys try to get those large rocks knocked off the road on their third pass with the grader. They don’t want to get into crushing or screening because then everyone will have to be licensed by MSHA and take mining classes every two years. Reeves said that the Barkley pit and the Kues pit really don’t have an issue with larger rocks. They used to get a lot of calls about large rocks coming out of the Guenzi pit.

Jeff talked to some people about a contract for CDL training. Their pricing seems very reasonable. If we do need to haul chip rock or other stuff from Wyoming, they would be able to haul it on their beet campaign. If we hire CDL drivers, they’ll train them and pay for the training. All the drivers are required to do is to haul beets during the beet campaign. Then they will come back to work for the county.

Jeff Reeves was asked to follow through with his weekly reports.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:20 a.m.