

# Ottawa County Board of Commissioner's Minutes

April 8, 2024

The Board of County Commissioners met in regular session in Suite 201 at the Ottawa County Courthouse.

## Those present were:

First District Commissioner Dawn Wolf

Second District Commissioner Scott Mortimer

Third District Commissioner D. D. Malmberg

Jerry Ayers, Rick Shupe, Dan Denning, Chris Smith, Joe Mullen

Commissioner Wolf called the meeting to order at 8:00 am and Dan Denning led the group in opening prayer, followed by the flag salute.

Dan Denning left the meeting at 8:01 a.m.

## County Departments:

### Public Works

Mortimer discussed with Smith and Mullen about 150<sup>th</sup> road. There is a culvert that is plugged on the west side and needs to be cleaned out. Smith and Mullen said they have seen this, and this is on the list of things to get done. Lee Ann Sparks came into the meeting at 8:07 a.m.

On motion by Commissioner Malmberg, seconded by Commissioner Mortimer, by unanimous vote the Board approved to make Brandon Sauers the 2024 Noxious Weed Supervisor for legal purposes. Smith, Mullen, and Sauers left the meeting at 8:15 a.m.

**Public Comment:** Ayers said if the appraised value went up \$10,000 that would mean assessed value would be \$1,300. Ayers stated that means if there is another 12% increase it could be bad for the taxpayers. Sparks said her property went up \$33,000. With the talk about raising wages for employees, she wanted to let the commission know that her wages have not raised and her business can't withstand raising prices or people won't want her services. Ayers asked the commission, when departments are turning in budgets do they know how much their budget will go up? The commission has brought in Scot Loyd with the Lloyd Group the last 3 years to train employees how to build a proper budget. Malmberg stated they are trusting that the departments are telling us what they need. Malmberg also stated that Loyd is trying to help us build cash reserves and trying to help the road department get graders paid off so we can pay cash in the future. Sparks talked about costs to maintain roads and wants to see a resolution to lower the overall budget. Wolf discussed that there is a state statute on how the appraiser has to appraise properties. It was discussed with the group about the wage study, the commission wanted this because we need a set pay scale. Commission said that after the Arnold Group gave the total wage amount to Ottawa County was not compared to other small counties. Wolf stated that she asked for 10 specific local area counties to compare with Ottawa County. Wolf also stated that she found out that Ottawa County is the last of the 105 counties in sales tax collection, because we have no industry and when they tried to bring in industry they often get fought on it by tax payers.

Shupe, Ayers, and Sparks left the meeting at 9:00 a.m. Daren Booth and Julie Yarmer, JoDee Copple and Michelle Campbell came into the meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Julie Yarmer and Daren Booth came into the meeting to discuss the quarterly review of health insurance. Tanya Paul with DVAC came into the meeting at 9:18 a.m. commission discussed with Yarmer and Booth on what the next year looks like with health insurance Ottawa County has saved at least \$200,000 in the last 2 years since going with Freedoms Claims. Thornton came into the meeting at 9:35 a.m. Yarmer and Booth left the meeting at 9:41 a.m.

Tanya Paul with DVAC read the commissioners a sexual assault awareness proclamation for the month of April.

On motion by Commissioner Malmberg, seconded by Commissioner Mortimer, by unanimous vote the Board approved to proclaim April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Paul left the meeting at 9:46 a.m.

### Sheriff

Prisoner count Ottawa County 6.

Thornton addressed the commission with the statement, the jail is not closed. Thornton has made the decision, based on budget shortfalls and the lack of outside facility inmates and our own inmates, to cut the housing of long-term local inmates in the jail. The jail will still do inmate housing (short-term), such as booking and transport of local inmates when reasons and arrests dictate to do so. They will primarily be housing inmates in Mitchell County at this time.

Due to the Ottawa County Jail no longer housing other facility inmates it has caused a reduction in the Law Enforcement (Jail) budget. The jail is partially funded by the inmates housed from other facilities. Therefore, it

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would only make sense as far as a reduction of expense in the budget, to cut staff within the jail. Under current operations the jail would have been thousands of dollars over its 2024 budget, and this is just based on expenses such as salaries, utilities, and day to day living for the inmates. Thornton stated it is his duty to do what he feels is the best for the county and the tax paying citizens.

The county employed 6 full-time staff and two part-time staff within the jail while only housing 4-6 local inmates. With these changes he will only need 3 full-time correction staff and 2 part-time employees. Some of their job duties will be the same as they have been but when there is a lack of inmates in the building he will be adding to these job duties.

The Ottawa County jail was built in 1997 with the intent to house local inmates while making money (revenue) off housing for other facilities around the state. In the time Sheriff Thornton has been employed here they have housed for Johnson County, Riley County, Sedgwick County, Saline County, Dickinson County, Cloud County, KDOC, INS and other federal inmates.

Thornton knows the bonds for the initial construction of the jail were paid off in half the time that it was projected to be paid. They added to the safety of the jail in 2017 and added three more secure rooms and a multi-purpose area. We are fortunate that we had made these decisions for revenue during the hot time for housing out-of-county inmates. The jail has more than paid for itself many times over throughout the years.

The county has always gone through ups and downs with our inmate population. We were maxed out and then went back to having as few as 2. Thornton has seen this many times during his career, but feels this time is different as the costs are increasing and other counties are building bigger and better facilities to house their own inmates. All of us are facing the issue of funding and at the same time, trying to keep employees trained and hired. It is his goal to do whatever he can to get inmates back in our jail. If you have any questions, he encouraged citizens to reach out to Sheriff Thornton at [sheriff@ottawacounty.org](mailto:sheriff@ottawacounty.org).

On a motion by Commissioner Mortimer seconded by Commissioner Malmberg, by unanimous vote the Board approved a 5-minute executive session for personnel exemption to discuss non-elected personnel including Wolf, Mortimer, Malmberg, and Thornton. To return at 10:08 a.m.

Thornton left the meeting at 10:13 a.m.

### Human Resources

Michelle Campbell and JoDee Copple discussed with the commission about the wage study. Copple and Campbell have discussed with the Arnold Group about the totals of the whole wage study, they have given it a second look and they have lowered the whole number from \$549,000 down to \$246,581.36. Copple said they are trying to get it to match the current resolution as much as they can. Copple also stated that the wage study is being done so that the county can have a pay scale, which we have never had. It was not being done to implement overall pay increases. The \$246,000 is getting current employees into the pay scale that the Arnold Group has presented. Mortimer gave Wolf and Malmberg wages from Mitchell and Cloud County. Commissioners stated they will not approve that high of total increase.

On a motion by Commissioner Malmberg seconded by Commissioner Mortimer, by unanimous vote the Board approved a 5-minute executive session for personnel exemption to discuss non-elected personnel including Wolf, Mortimer, Malmberg, and Copple. To return at 11:40

On a motion by Commissioner Malmberg, seconded by Commissioner Mortimer, by unanimous vote the Board approved the April 1, 2024 minutes as corrected.

Mortimer left the meeting at 11:46 a.m.

### Claims for Approval: Totaling \$40,310.76

County General	\$21,965.74
Road & Bridge	\$4,950.53
Noxious Weed	\$26.75
Ottawa Co 911	\$357.40
Employee Benefits	\$5,361.57
Law Enforcement Center	\$217.66
Payroll Clearing	\$541.80
F.D. #2 MPLS GEN	\$586.54

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Ottawa TWP Road	\$6,154.15
Historical	\$148.62

On a motion by Commissioner Malmberg, seconded by Commissioner Wolf, by unanimous vote the Board approved the claims as corrected.

**Commission went to the Fire meeting in the courthouse basement on Wednesday April 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

**Commission will attend the area commissioners meeting in Concordia, April 10<sup>th</sup>.**

**Malmberg and Wolf will attend the Kansas County Commissioners Association Conference April 15-18 in Pittsburgh, Ks.**

With no further business before the commission the meeting was adjourned at 12:18 p.m. on motion by Wolf and seconded by Malmberg. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

ADOPTED this 15th day of April 2024.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
OF OTTAWA COUNTY, KANSAS

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dawn Wolf, Chairman

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D.D. Malmberg, Member

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Scott Mortimer, Member

ATTEST:

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Heather Maddox, County Clerk