

March 30th, 2021

The Morris County Commissioners met on Tuesday, March 30th, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. Commissioners Wayne Kohler, David Fox and Jim Barber were present. Bill Kassebaum, County Counselor, and Chelsey Schmidt, County Clerk, were present.

Others present: Billy Kryger, Pastor Berean Baptist Church

Christy Alexander visited with the commissioners about design plans for the Michelle Garrett memorial plaque.

Chris Blackledge, County Emergency Manager, gave a report on Emergency Management.

John Lee gave a report on Noxious Weed and Waste Management Departments.

Commissioner Fox (Kohler) moved to approve the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan Application from Weathered Wood Home, LLC. Motion carried.

Commissioner Kohler (Fox) moved to approve the minutes from the March 23rd, 2021 meeting. Motion carried.

Jeff Blosser, County Road Engineer, gave the following weekly road and bridge report:

- Hauling MSM rock on 2300 Rd. from G to B Ave.
- Hauling MSM rock on B Ave. from 2400 Rd. to 2000 Rd.
- Hauling MSM rock on 2100 Rd. from B to G Ave.
- BerKamp hauled and stockpiled Lincolnville rock to B Ave.
- Hauled Lincolnville rock on 2800 Rd. from CC to FF Ave.
- Hauling Lincolnville rock on AA Ave. from 2600 Rd. to 2450 Rd.
- Installed a new entrance pipe on Old Hwy 4 near M Ave.
- Worked on sign repairs around the entire county
- Installed more of the Santa Fe Trail signs in the western half of the county
- Performed maintenance on several machines and trucks
- Grading on the gravel routes after the recent moisture
- Ditching and rebuilding CC Ave. from the Dunlap Rd. east to the county line
- Forming the deck on the 4 Mile low water crossing
- Latimer shop discussion

Discussion was held regarding damaged and missing road signs within Morris County. Several signs in the White City area were damaged and several signs in the Dunlap area have been stolen. The County Sheriff has been notified and will be investigating each incident.

Commissioner Barber reported that 1800 Rd. north of Hwy 4 needs more gravel, when possible.

Commissioner Barber requested that improvements be made to the bridge on 1800 Rd. and C Ave. He has some concrete pipe that he will donate to be used for the repairs.

Commissioner Fox reported that 1100 Rd. and D Ave. needs attention, when possible.

Commissioner Kohler (Barber) moved to approve the Interlocal Cooperative Agreement with USD 417 and the City of Council Grove for the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan. Motion carried.

Candra Good, County Health Nurse, Dr. Daniel Frese, County Health Officer, Kevin Leeper, Morris County Hospital CEO, and Brenda Kirk provided a report on the current COVID-19 status

in Morris County. Morris County currently has 6 active COVID-19 cases. The health department reports approximately 1050 Morris County residents have been completely vaccinated (approximately 20% of county residents) and explain that this is nowhere near the level needed to acquire "herd immunity." Dr. Frese reports that there have been increasing numbers of variant strains of COVID-19 in Kansas and three confirmed cases of the B.1.1.7 (UK Variant) diagnosed in Topeka. There are other variant strains from South Africa and Brazil that are concerning to medical professionals and they feel that these strains will soon reach the United States. Dr. Frese reports that it is unknown how well current vaccinations will protect against the variant strains from South Africa and Brazil.

Discussion was held regarding the passing of Senate Bill 40. County Counselor, Bill Kassebaum, explains that Senate Bill 40 creates legal liabilities to counties that pass public health orders in response to Covid-19.

Morris County currently has a mass gathering limit of 50 people or less and a county wide mask mandate in place. Dr. Frese expressed his concerns with lifting the mass gathering limit and mask mandate. He stated that "this is not a safe time, nor a time to send the message to the public that they should become lax on taking precautions." He also stated that "as the County Health Officer, it is his job to advise and protect the community, and that rescinding the mask mandate and mass gatherings goes 100% against what he feels is in the best interest of the county."

Commissioner Barber (Fox) moved that, due to the passing of Senate Bill 40, to rescind the mask mandate and mass gathering order in Morris County, effective immediately. It is still highly encouraged that masks be worn in public, social distancing be practiced, vaccinations be completed and to follow recommendations of the CDC. Motion carried 2-1, with Commissioner Kohler opposing.

It was discussed that local business owners still have the ability to continue to require masks to protect their business and staff at their own discretion.

Commissioner Barber (Kohler) moved that paid COVID leave time will no longer be provided for any county employee who refuses to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Employees that choose not to be vaccinated may use their personal leave. This policy will be effective as of April 16th, 2021. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

--Meeting minutes can also be found on the county website: www.morriscountyks.org

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

OF MORRIS COUNTY, KANSAS

David L. Fox, Chairman

ATTEST:

Wayne Kohler, Member

Chelsey Schmidt
Morris County Clerk

Jim Barber, Member