MINUTES for July 22, 2024
BOARD of CHEROKEE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' CHEROKEE COUNTY, KANSAS

CONVENE

Chair Cory Moates called the regular session of the Cherokee County Board of Commissioners (the Board), to order at 9:00 AM on Monday, July 22, 2024, in the Commission Room, #109 of the Cherokee County Courthouse located at 110 W Maple St., Columbus, Kansas. Commissioner Frazier opened the meeting with prayer followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioners Cory Moates, Lorie Johnson, Myra Frazier, County Counselor Jake Conard, Deputy County Clerk Jess Frasher, Columbus News Report Owner Larry Hiatt, Clearway Energy Representatives William Dean, Barry Matchett, Jon Hadley, County Landowners David Scott, Teresa Greninger, Jinjer Scott, Dale Scott, Jacqui Scott, Dean Teel, Maggie Pillar, and Harold Pillar were present.

APPROVAL of MINUTES

Commissioner Frazier motioned to approve the minutes as presented from July 15, 2024. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF PAYROLL

Commissioner Moates motioned to approve the payroll as presented. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF PAYABLES

Commissioner Moates motioned to approve the payables as presented. Commissioner Frazier seconded the motion. The motion passed with Commissioner Johnson voting against the motion.

LAND USE

William Dean and Barry Matchett of Clearway Energy came before the Board to discuss details of their plans to develop solar energy farms within the County. Dean reviewed the statistics of the company and discussed the process to select and develop sites for future solar farms. Dean stated that they utilize bi-facial solar panels. Matchett elaborated, explaining the design and features of bi-facial solar panels, stating that they are translucent, and allow for sunlight to pass through them, preventing the ground below from being completely shaded. Matchett stated this feature allows for the land to retain some agricultural use while also housing the solar panels. Dean stated that construction would be estimated to finish in the back half of 2027 into early 2028. Matchett stated that they have looked at the existing tax structure of the County and that they have estimated that the project would generate 39 million in tax dollars for the County. Matchett stated that under Kansas law, renewable energy projects are exempt from real estate and personal taxes for the first 10 years of the project duration. Matchett stated that is has become a practice among developers in Kansas to create contribution agreements with county boards of commissioners so that the county can receive revenue from the project during the first ten years when the developer is not required to pay taxes. Matchett stated that if the County were to move ahead with what is considered the best practices in the state of Kansas, the contribution agreement would be about $340,000 a year for the first ten years of the project. Matchett stated that these funds can be directed to a particular department or budget if needed. Commissioner Frazier commented that it seems similar to payment in lieu of taxes, which is a matter they have experience with. Matchett stated that they estimate that a project like this would employee around 200 people, and they work very hard to hire locally. Commissioner Moates asked what the build time would be. Dean stated that it would be around 18 months. Matchet stated that they only purchase solar panels that are manufactured in the United States. Commissioner Moates asked what the negatives of solar energy are. Matchett stated that the only negative is that they are unable to generate electricity at night, but because they are part of the larger grid, it is not fundamentally a problem due to other sources contributing. Commissioner Johnson questioned how this project would benefit residents who are not leasing land for the project, stating that previous renewable energy projects in the region have raised prices of electricity. Matchett discussed factors that affect electricity rates and credited aging coal plants as a factor in the increasing rates. Landowner Roger Draeger addressed the Board stating that he was working with a different company. Draeger stated that his main concern was being restricted in how he uses his land, and continued stating that he was still planning on using the leased land for agricultural purposes. Commissioner Johnson responded, stating that the Board also must consider the neighboring landowners when making decisions on matters like this. Commissioner Frazier stated that she is in favor of private property rights and explained that she is in favor of people being able to utilize their property as they please as long as it does negatively affect the surrounding property owners. Frazier stated that while she is subject to change, she currently sees no problem with the project. Commissioner Moates invited Dean and Matchett to the public information meeting taking place on August 8th to discuss solar energy developments in the county.

DITCHING COMPLAINT
A citizen from commission district 3 came before the Board with a complaint regarding the ditches bordering her property, stating that they need cleaned out. Commissioner Moates offered to view the area of complaint with the citizen.

APPRAISERS UPDATE
County Appraiser Delinda White came before the Board to provide an update on her first week in the office. White stated that it was a good first week and was complementary of the office staff. White informed the Board that she believes she will need to hire an additional staff member and would like to do so in the next month.

PAY RATE CHANGES
Commissioner Moates motioned to approve the pay rate changes for County Health Department employees Melody Nelson and Becky Mogle, from a rate of $20/hour to $21/hour, effective beginning the July 2024 payroll month. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

CONTRACT AMENDMENT
County Counselor Conard presented a contract amendment to the Board which updates the fee schedule for services provided by MAWD Pathologist LLC. Commissioner Moates motioned to authorize Health Department Administrator Peyton Kessler to sign the amended clinical laboratory services agreement. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

ASSURANCE AGREEMENT
County Counselor Conard presented an assurance agreement to the Board. Conard stated that the agreement is a requirement to receive a USDA grant that Health Department Administrator Peyton Kessler has applied for, and that the agreement would assure the USDA that the County is complying with civil rights laws and non-discrimination clauses. Commissioner Moates motioned to authorize Health Department Administrator Peyton Kessler to sign the USDA Assurance Agreement. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

NON-ELECTED PERSONELL EXECUTIVE SESSION
Commissioner Moates motioned for a 10-minute non-elected personnel executive session with the Board, County Counselor Conard, and HR Director Deana Randall, to return at 10:20 am. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Board took no action.

ADJOURNMENT
Commissioner Moates motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

ATTEST: Resolved and ordered this 29th day of July 2024.

Lisa Tasker - Deputy
County Clerk – Rebecca Brassart

Commissioner Chair – Cory Moates

Lorie Johnson
Commissioner – Lorie Johnson

Myra Carlisle Frazier
Commissioner – Myra Carlisle Frazier