

LOUISA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Driver licensing services still a BOS concern

by JIM RUDISILL

Despite assurance of help given by the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) earlier this year, Louisa County officials say little has been provided by the state agency to resolve several concerns over the driver licensing services provided by the county treasurer's office.

The lack of assistance was revealed during the board of supervisors' Sept. 23 meeting after audience member Bryan Stephens asked for an update on the status of the service.

At its May 6 meeting, the board had agreed to continue providing the service until Nov. 30, after voting in April to terminate the service on May 30. The board had cited several concerns that had included low reimbursement from the state, safety and security of drive test monitors, scheduling/appointment difficulties, language problems, training issues and other concerns.

After learning of the county board's April decision, DOT officials arranged a meeting with the supervisors and then-county treasurer Vicki Frank for May 6, where they offered to take several steps to resolve some of the concerns.

According to the discussions at the May 6 meeting, the steps presented by the DOT personnel included linking Louisa County to the DOT's appointment system, providing multilingual informational flyers to help explain the licensing and test-driving processes, increased training opportunities on its licensing system and other help.

The state officials had also pointed out Louisa County could begin to collect a higher fee from non-Louisa County residents who receive drivers licensing services from Louisa County.

However, they had declined to make any other financial upgrade to the current revenue-sharing distribution. According to data provided by Frank at the supervisors' March 18 meeting, it cost over \$37,000 in labor in FY 2024 for the county to provide the services but the county only received \$13,657 back from the state.

Frank, who retired July 1 and was replaced by Beth Hardin, had reported at the May 6 meeting she would begin assessing the higher fee.

After hearing DOT assurances and Frank's plans, the supervisors decided to extend the May 30 deadline to Nov. 30.

However, after Stephens raised the issue at the Sept. 23 meeting, the supervisors agreed the DOT had either failed to move forward on most of the assurances or the

solutions provided had not changed the situation.

Supervisor Scot Hunt reported the scheduling integration had been completed but there had been no multilingual flyers or additional training provided, adding the DOT was apparently moving to a new system and no training was being provided on the current one.

Supervisor Kevin Hardin also criticized the new scheduling process.

"It takes more time now to schedule," he claimed.

The supervisors agreed to ask Hardin to attend an upcoming meeting and provide her assessment. However, that consultation will not be the following week because the supervisors agreed that with five Tuesdays in September they will not meet on Sept. 30.

In other action, the supervisors met with county engineer Adam Shutt and public health administrator Leah McElhinney for updates on their departments.

McElhinney reported the board of health had recently met and most of its business had been relatively routine. She did remind the supervisors of the Nov. 10 99 Counties event that will be held at the Wapello Community Ambulance Service Barn in Wapello on Nov. 10.

The event is a statewide initiative to research and provide information on cancer rates and other information specific to each county in Iowa.

According to a previous report McElhinney made on the event, Iowa has the second highest rate of new cancer in the U.S.

In his report, Shutt reported work was continuing on county roads G28 and X14 northwest of Columbus Junction. Hopefully the work can be completed by the second week of October, he told the board.

He also provided an update on the Iowa Highway 92 improvement project, explaining he understood paving on the highway could begin during the current week, although progress has been lower than anticipated.

He also reported the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) would be holding an open house on the bypass section of U.S. Highway 61 around Wapello on Oct. 1 at the Briggs Civic Center in Wapello.

Shutt said the meeting will kick off negotiations to acquire right of way for the project from near Newport to 100th Street. He indicated the right of way acquisition period will likely extend into 2026, with construction on that section not beginning

until spring of 2027.

A video on the portion that will be reviewed at the open house is available at bit.ly/idot6927. According to the video, updates to the project since the last public information meeting in Oct. 2024 include connecting 100th Street to County Road G62 and the addition of a second diamond interchange at 65th Street. The estimated cost for this portion of the project is \$115 million. Construction is not expected to be completed until 2031.

Information on the portion north of 100th Street will be available in the fall of 2026.

The board also met with Julie Davison, interim CEO for Eastern Iowa Disability Alliance; and following a discussion, approved Louisa County's participation in a 28E agreement with other southeast and east Iowa counties to provide disability services.

The alliance replaces a regional mental health consortium of counties that was disbanded after the state of Iowa assumed the cost of providing mental/behavior health costs from counties.

Chase Wakings, representative for OCV, LLC; and provided a presentation to the board; and following that presentation agreed to use \$35,833 of county opioid funds to purchase a mobile notification app, which will allow the sheriff's office to improve notifications to local residents.

The payment will cover the first seven years of service using the app, with future annual costs to be \$4,270.

Hunt was concerned about the possibility of opioid settlement money eventually drying up, but county sheriff Brandon Marquardt discounted that idea, pointing out new settlement money is expected to continue for a long time. Marquardt did point out some costs related to the app cannot be funded with opioid settlement funding because of strict guidelines. He said that portion would be paid using forfeiture and jail commissary funds.

The board also reviewed several LP bids for the large tank at the County Complex and eventually accepted the low bid of \$1.045 per gallon from Agriland FS.

A (vaping device) permit for Petro and More was also approved by the board.

In final action, the supervisors agreed to delay a decision on modifying a case-by-case policy on donating vacation/sick leave among employees until board chair Shawn Maine can meet with department heads and human resource consultant Paul Greufe.

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were also approved. These included a request from the FFA to attend its national convention in Indianapolis, IN from Oct. 28 to Nov. 1; another from the Family Consumer Science and Work-Based Learning to go to Moline, IL for Junior Achievement on Dec. 16; and a third from the Special Education Strat 2 program to travel to Rock Island, IL on Dec. 14 to attend a Circa 21 Dinner Playhouse presentation of White Christmas.

The board also agreed to provide influenza shots for staff and to pay for any not covered by insurance.

A \$155,464 allowable growth and supplement aid request to the School Budget Review Committee to cover the district's negative special education balance from the previous year was also approved by the board.

The board also welcomed newly appointed member Darin Mapel, who took his oath of office on Sept. 2.

The administrative staff also provided updates either in person or through a written report.

In his written report, activity director Michael Aragon reported Homecoming

was shaping up to be a success. He said broad community partnerships were helping to make a memorable event.

In her report director of learning Liz Goodwin said the district's Professional Learning Communities were active, with team focusing on prioritizing standards, aligning assessments and planning interventions.

While Phillips had already provided some update on buildings and grounds, he also reported that a backlog of work orders had been significantly reduced. He also told the board the transportation and nutrition services had been operating well; and said technology upgrades were being continued.

Elementary principal Cassie Stewart said there had been a strong start to school at Roundy. She also reported new and renewed efforts to meet the student needs and using fall testing assessments to plan interventions.

A similar focus on testing, assessments and intervention is happening at the secondary level, principal Paul Kissell said. The K-12 evaluation cycles have been streamlined, and attendance policies have been updated to meet new state standards, he said.

In his report,

Superintendent Michael Volk said a structural assessment of the middle school had recently been completed by Raker Rhodes Engineering and a comprehensive report would be issued in the coming weeks. He also highlighted the work of the District Leadership Team, which is establishing clear goals, norms and professional development priorities.

In final action, the board met with teacher Tessa Pugh, Louisa County Conservation Board Naturalist Lana Artz-McComb and Sam Hollingsworth of Prairie Roots Landscaping, Burlington, to discuss a proposal to transform the high school courtyard into an ecologically beneficial garden space.

According to the group's proposal, a footpath and outdoor classroom with space to seat up to 20 students would be constructed in the area, which would be planted to a variety of prairie plants and other vegetation.

The proposal cost of \$45,714 will hopefully be covered by volunteer labor, funding assistance from the Louisa County Soil and Water Commission and grants, the three explained.

The board did not take any action on the proposal.



PUBLIC NOTICE PUBLIC NOTICE PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE
2025 FINAL EQUALIZATION ORDER

The Iowa Department of Revenue is responsible for "equalizing" assessment in all 99 Iowa counties every two years. The Department compares the assessor's abstracts to a "sales assessment ratio study" it has completed independently of the assessors. If the assessment (by property class) is 5% or more above or below the state's ratio study, the Department increases or decreases the assessment.

Equalization occurs on an entire class of property, not on an individual property and occurs on an assessing jurisdiction basis and not on a statewide basis.

Pursuant to Iowa Code Section 441.47 & 441.48, the Department of Revenue of the State of Iowa Hereby notifies you of the final percentage adjustments to the 2025 valuations of real property in Louisa County as follows:

Agricultural Land & Structures, Excluding Residential Dwellings on Agricultural Realty, Outside and Within Incorporated Cities	No adjustment
Residential Realty, Including Residential Dwellings on Agricultural Realty, Outside and Within Incorporated Cities	No adjustment
Commercial Realty, Excluding Machinery and Equipment Referred to in Chapter 427A, Outside and Within Incorporated Cities	No adjustment
Multiresidential Realty, Excluding Equipment Referred to in Chapter 427A, Outside and Within Incorporated Cities	No adjustment

Taxpayers may protest the final equalization order with their local board of review. Protests will be accepted through October 31, 2025, by contacting the Louisa County Assessor's Office.

/s/ Susan Schnedler, Louisa County Auditor
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