LINN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
CEDAR RAPIDS, LINN COUNTY, IOWA
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2025 10:00 A.M.

The Board met in session at the Linn County Jean Oxley Public Service Center. Present: Chairperson Meisheid, Vice Chairperson Running-Marquardt and Supervisor Scheetz. Board members voting "AYE" unless otherwise noted.

Chairperson Meisheid called the meeting to order.

Public Comment:

Rick Moyle, 120 Meadow Breeze Ln., Center Point, stated that he is speaking as the Director of the Hawkeye Labor Council and a resident of Linn County. He thanked the Board for everything they have done and have been working on to try and better relations with the employees of Linn County. There is an MOU on today's agenda pertaining to AFSCME regarding discipline grievance rights. He acknowledged that there may be some opposition to this but given his line of work and the number of years he has been doing this job, he feels that the changes in the MOU will create due process. They strive as residents, union members and leaders and working people in general who want due process in their private lives and they have due process in the private sector collective bargaining agreements. Why would they not have entire due process in public sector collective bargaining agreements. If they have any questions about the process or steps that take place in the private sector or other sectors outside private bargaining world feel free to reach out to him.

Spencer Jordan, rural Linn County, stated that he wants to talk about airport zoning. He is a 5th generation farmer in his family and their first piece of farm ground was bought around Marion in 1980. He gave history including a farm crisis and the derecho in 2020. They have been adjacent to the airport since the inception of their farm and have coexisted with the airport fine until recently. Jordan provided background of the Marion airport including the original purchase and recent sale of the airport. To date, the city of Marion has spent an additional $2.83 million on upkeep and improvements, some of which were paid for by a grant from the Iowa DOT. As a result of the grant, it created a legal loophole for the city of Marion to require Linn County to generate zoning ordinances for rural Linn County. The ordinance enforced created physical and financial hardships for current and future owners of this land and those owners were never compensated for it. Their land was paid off in 2020 and then they were slapped with restrictions they never had before. In 2025, the city of Marion decided to end their ownership of the airport and sold the land, buildings and runway to 530 Investments LLC owned by Peg Morris for $500,000, less a potential tax credit of $50,000. Marion is basically at a $4.5 million dollar loss on this Marion airport endeavor. The city of Marion was also responsible for paying the Iowa DOT grant of $424,000 contingent on the municipalities ownership of the airport and was paid for in 2025 after the sale closing of the airport. As a result of the sale, Linn County should no longer be required to zone rural Linn County at the ledger of a private owned and operated runway, in his opinion. If Luxe Air and 530 Investments LLC would like zoning restrictions to ensure the continued viability of their airport, they should do what almost all airports in this country do. They should buy the land or compensate the landowners for zoning agreements. He asked the Board to please consider the impacts of their decisions and who or what businesses will continue to benefit from government involvement in this as well as who will continue to suffer financial hardships. Marion is heavily invested in getting this done because they have taken a huge loss on this and it looks really bad to the taxpayers who paid for this runway. Jordan has no problem with the airport, as his father-in-law owns plane and frequently flies with Jordan. The problem is that they can't take something for a private business and then zone it at the expense of others as they should be paid for that. He gave the example of building something taller and then having to discuss that with them for approval which creates winners and losers. They need municipal airports but as a private business there is no place for that type of zoning. This is for his sons and daughters in 50 years when Marion eventually creeps out and engulfs their farm. He wants his children to be able to sell the land at a premium and move somewhere else and start over. The zoning restrictions ruins property values for them.

Wendy Hartman, resident of Cedar Rapids, stated that she is a Linn County employee and part of the union and would like to address the upcoming MOU for the grievance policy for oral and written disciplines. As a union steward, she is called upon to support employees and she feels that the new MOU will be very helpful in the process, especially for newer employees who are unfamiliar with how the union works. Linn County touts that they are union but also has to remind others to follow the contracts. There is current contract language to support the MOU and asked the Board to take that into consideration. She highlighted there are a lot of other opportunities within the workplace that would allow an employee to not have a write-up including one-on-one meetings with their supervisors, ongoing staff meetings in departments and ongoing trainings. They feel that there doesn't need to be as many oral and written disciplines that are going on now. The ones that are being written up, they feel that the employee should have the opportunity to grieve those. Also, as a Linn County employee, it is very unnerving to wait for the process that is two steps prior to termination to improve their work performance. For those reasons, Hartmann hopes that there is a positive vote for the MOU.

Cindy Kettelkamp, 1310 Secrist Rd., Marion, stated that she is a dairy farmer's wife and they milk 120 dairy cows and have since 1987. What really bothers her is that there are 26.31 acres that they are talking about with the runway and that right now with the overlay is determining the zoning of 20 square miles and that seems really out of balance. The airport is no longer a municipality it is now a private enterprise. As farmers, they are a private enterprise, and it would be like them being in charge and having the power to tell another private enterprise what they can and can't do. They are not allowed to tell their neighbor what they can and can't do, so why should a private enterprise (the LLC that has purchased the property) be able to infringe on the rights they used to have and the rights they want back to be able to farm the way they see fit to farm. That includes not being able to put up a grain silo perhaps. They lost three grain silos in the Derecho and a tornado before that. If they wanted to replace those grain silos, they would have to go beg the runway and make sure it is ok for them to continue to farm as they see necessary. It simply does not make sense that 26.31 acres is responsible for the zoning of 20 square miles as that is a big city in itself. She is asking for the Board to consider what Jordan previously stated and to protect the farmer, landowner and property rights.

Robert Kettelkamp, 1310 Secrist Rd., Marion, stated that he owns and operates a dairy south of the Marion airport. He was present when this ordinance was first read to the Supervisors. At that point, his statement was that the overlay zoning ordinance in Linn County typically involves development rights and flood plains. He asked Les Beck, at that time, if Linn County had overlay zoning ordinances anywhere else such as the Cedar Rapids airport, sewage plant or the landfill and the answer was no. They set a precedent to protect the municipal airport which they didn't agree with but went along with. Now Kettelkamp feels the Board will be setting a precedent once more if the county approves the extension of this ordinance to a private owner. He can live with Marion doing it in their city limits but to extend into Linn County where they have jurisdiction over it right now doesn't make sense for a private owner.

Motion by Meisheid, seconded by Running-Marquardt to approve minutes of September 17, 2025 as printed.

Charlie Nichols, Planning & Development Dir., discussed the Marion Airport Overlay zoning district. He explained that in 2020 an ordinance was adopted since the airport was owned by the city of Marion and federal grant dollars required the overlay to be put in place to protect the federal investment. A 28E agreement was also established between the city of Marion and Linn County for all building permit applications within the airport's overlay zone to be forwarded to the city of Marion for review. The main restriction in Linn County is the height of buildings being subject to the airport overlay zoning district. The airport was recently sold to a private developer by the city of Maron. The decision the Board needs to make is to not do anything, update the ordinance to match the change the city of Marion is making or they could look at more significant changes. Nichols does not believe the county has to have the ordinance due to the private ownership. If the county chooses to change the current overlay zoning district regulations, those changes would need to go to the county's Planning & Zoning Commission for review. The Commission would then make a recommendation to the Board who would hold a public hearing and three readings.

A lengthy discussion took place regarding federal money used for the airport and moving an airport from public to private with regard to ordinance changes and rules.

Chris Janson, consultant for the city of Marion, gave a high-level overview of the overlay and site and building development in Marion's jurisdiction. He added that they dissolved the Marion Airport Committee. The airport is still a public licensed airport even though it was sold to a private entity. Janson also stated that there is an industrial development on the west side of the airport, similar to the east side which is a planned unit development.

Discussion continued regarding FAA regulations regarding height and potential upcoming ordinance changes.

Lisa Powell, HR Dir., presented an AFSCME Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Discipline Grievance Rights. January of 2021 was the first time the contract was opened after changes were made in 2017. They left all the permissives in the contract and the only thing that was proposed for modifying was the discipline and discharge and allowing grievances for 3rd and 4th step progressive discipline which was agreed to at the table. It was encouraged for managers to address employee behavior early on without fear of a grievance or administrative time and to reduce Human Resources administrative time as well. The union did still have a voice in those hearings. They are now approaching the end of that 5-year contract which expires next June and will be negotiating a new contract in January. In July of this year, the union came to Powell and asked if she would reinstate the rights of grieving the 1st and 2nd steps of discipline before the contract ends. She asked that they bring it to the table for a discussion and they asked that it be brought in front of the Board now. Powell's recommendation is to wait and make changes during the contract negotiation period where changes are made.

Supervisor Scheetz asked for a best guess of the 700+ county union employees how many step 1 or 2 grievances has the county dealt with and Powell responded that she does not have that data with her. In general, the trend has been to have more oral and written disciplines in the last few years. Those are not necessarily related to contract changes. They are pushing managers to address employee behaviors early on and not wait until they get serious or even required discipline. She noted that the contract only covers about 58% of the workforce.

Supervisor Running-Marquardt stated that they have very geographically diverse and different backgrounds. She was born and raised in a union labor household. She was a union member and has been under a contract and worked for a labor union. Running-Marquardt has seen the benefit of something like this giving the employee a voice. This is a way that they can start working together and save time down the road with having to replace a worker. The ability to have early intervention would benefit everyone. She has heard about the administrative time it will take and additional time is something that is worth it to her to ensure employees are being treated fairly. People are dedicating their lives in service to the people of Linn County and that means something to her. Running-Marquardt proudly supports this MOU and is excited about it. She acknowledged Auditor Todd Taylor in the audience who has a lot of expertise in this area from previous experience. She also expressed her appreciation to Powell and staff.

Supervisor Scheetz stated that the biggest thing for him is accountability and trust (protecting employees). He feels that having the union be able to verify and question written and verbal disciplines is essential to building trust between workers. If there is an issue, there is a process to go through. If a manager is justified in their discipline action, they will come out on top. It is important to think of the context and timing as well as including contract language that was in place prior to 2017. He doesn't want to dismiss any concerns he has heard from some of the managers and department heads. This will still allow them to do their job and if there are issues there will be a formal process whether a decision was made rightly or justly at the end of it. He is excited to support this MOU.

Supervisor Meisheid stated that as things stand now only the final 2 steps of the 4-step progressive discipline is suspension and termination that can be grieved. She feels that is appropriate because those steps carry direct and significant impact on the employee's job status and their livelihood. The proposed change would allow for grievances at the first stages of the discipline for oral and written warnings. Meisheid does not view those as punishments. They are corrective tools meant to raise awareness for behavior that needs to change for the employee to be successful in their position. Warnings work because they are simple, clear and direct. They set expectations and give the employee a fair chance to improve and prevent small issues from becoming larger ones. In many cases, they are all that is needed to resolve a problem permanently, which is the goal. Often issues are resolved with oral or written warnings, and they do not escalate any further. Meisheid can't stress this next part enough. If warnings are dragged into the grievance process, their effectiveness is lost. Instead of being a straightforward coaching tool they become points of legal and procedural conflict. Supervisors will hesitate to issue them knowing they can be forced into hours of defense and paperwork that takes away from other critical work. That discourages accountability, waste's taxpayer dollars and diverts time that should be spent supporting employees and operations. If warnings are not issued, behaviors will go uncorrected that creates frustration among employees who are doing the right thing and who must shoulder the impact of co-workers who are not held accountable which can lead to low morale. The proposal before them today is against what Meisheid feels is Human Resources recommendation and is not supported by other elected officials, managers or deputies and she believes it undermines their core values. Their first core value is to communicate openly and effectively. She feels that some elected officials only heard about this through the grapevine while others only learned about it when it became an agenda item on today's agenda. Just as concerning, managers' feelings about this change she does not feel have been heard and they cannot claim to uphold open communication while bypassing those who are most directly impacted. Another core value is to be accountable for their actions and decisions. Meisheid quoted directly from their declaration of core values, "don't foster a victim mentality by ignoring or denying the problem by pointing fingers at others choosing not to learn new tasks or processes or to say it's not my job. Own your circumstance and your results." This proposal does the opposite by allowing grievances over oral or written warnings, they are removing accountability from employees. These warnings are tools to help their employees succeed, not punishments to fight over. A third core value is to create a supportive and positive work environment. Again, quoting the declaration of values, "the service you are giving your boss, your coworkers and customers to reflect a desire to make a difference as you communicate in a respectful manner. Practice personal integrity and acknowledge contributions of your coworkers and take responsibility for their actions and attitude." This proposal undermines that standard as well by making it possible to grieve every disciplinary step they shift responsibility away from the employee and onto the manager, eroding a positive work environment for both leadership and staff. Their 5-year strategic plan is also clear. Under customer satisfaction it reads, "a satisfying Linn County results in customer confidence where their concerns and aspirations are heard, understood and addressed with the opportunity to influence policies and procedures regarding county products". In this case, she feels management is their customer. Their concerns have not been heard, understood or addressed. If they do not hold themselves accountable to their own plan, how do they expect employees or the public to trust them with theirs. She does not support this decision. Meisheid believes it is against professional guidance, it's contrary to their values and inconsistent with their strategic plan. However, she would like to suggest in her recommendation to the Board that they work towards a more comprehensive approach by working with managers and stakeholders to come up with a more favorable plan that they can revisit during negotiations in January.

Motion by Running-Marquardt, seconded by Scheetz to approve AFSCME Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Discipline Grievance Rights.

Vote: Running-Marquardt & Scheetz – Aye Meisheid - Nay

Motion by Meisheid, seconded by Running-Marquardt to approve payroll authorizations (detail is available upon request).

Motion by Meisheid, seconded by Running-Marquardt to appoint Sam Kratz to the Mechanical Board of Appeals for a three-year term ending December 31, 2027.

Public Comment:

Spencer Jordan, rural Linn County, stated that they have more support than just the two farmers that spoke today as others are in the middle of harvest today. He added that he will be in a combine or tractor for the next two months and asked that Board members reach out to him with any questions. The runway was built in a hole and originally was for small planes. Most airports are in huge, flat areas with no obstructions or changes in elevation with the exception of a few at the top of a mountain. They are almost 60 foot above where the bottom of the runway is. The height restrictions that are imposed go from the base of the runway to whatever is being built so they have to subtract the difference in elevation and that makes it really unfeasible to build things. Special elections were made for themselves with regard to the runway but not for the farmers/landowners, which is wildly unfair. They really stressed a public use airport to try and pull at their heartstrings. There are many public-use airports that aren't zoned like this such as in Manchester. If the Board isn't legally compelled by the city of Marion to adopt these ordinances or continue what they currently have, compensation will be sought after by the landowner. He feels there will be lawsuits if the county is only compelled to do it. Linn County is taking their property rights and should have to pay for it if they are not legally required to adopt the ordinance.

Cindy Kettelkamp, 1310 Secrist Rd., Marion, stated that she wants to clarify what she is referencing in terms of space. 26.13 acres is a nice amount of land and when talking about what that amount of land can control. 20 square miles is 1/5th of the size of Cedar Rapids and 9,696 football fields all together. She stated that in regards to the imaginary plane that determines whether a building is too high or not that to them it is imaginary but to herself and others it is their livelihood and there's nothing imaginary about that. They get up on the farm at 5 a.m. and work until dark every day to provide food for this area and to grow crops. While they have good ideas, they are not walking in their shoes either. She asked that the Board think about that and invited the Board members to visit their farm and see what they do. As the airport sits in a valley, they are up further height wise due to the location of their land and that hinders their ability to continue to do what they do for their county and state.

Adjournment at 11:03 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

TODD E. TAYLOR, Linn County Auditor
By: Amanda Brown, Deputy Auditor

Approved by:

BRANDY Z. MEISHEID, Vice Chairperson
Board of Supervisors