

## MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2020

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Board of Commissioners and meet in Emergency Session at 2:00PM in the Annex Meeting Room, Knox, Indiana, with Kathryn Norem, Bryan Cavender, and Charles Chesak present and the following proceedings were held to wit:

The meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order by Commissioner President Charles Chesak at 2:00PM.

### **TEMPORARY CLOSURE AND REDUCTION IN STAFF OF OFFICES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

Commissioner Norem advised that they are here in direct response to the Governor's order earlier this morning in regards to the shelter in place and for everyone not to be going out except for essential functions. They are also closing down State employees who will either be working from home or staying at home and only essential service employees will come in. She explained that even though Starke County had previously closed our buildings to the public we feel this action today is warranted to comply with the Governor's orders. She advised Auditor Oesterreich has talked to the department heads about who can reduce, who is essential, and who is non-essential. Auditor Oesterreich explained she had spoken with all the departments and have come up with the following: Surveyor, Veteran's Service, Planning Commission, and EMS Office staff will be closed. Recorder, Treasurer, and Assessor will reduce to one staff member, Security will have one officer at each building (except Annex 2), and Auditor will reduce to 2 staff members, Clerk will reduce to 3 staff members. Commissioner Norem asked if Oesterreich checked with Purdue Corporative Extension. Oesterreich stated Purdue was going to work from home. Commissioner Norem stated Purdue Extension can work from home, the entire office. The Surveyor's office can work from home and the Surveyor can respond to emergencies if needed. Veterans Services can close for the next two weeks, Planning Commission can close for the next two weeks. The EMS office can close but the EMS bases will continue to run as normal. Commissioner Chesak asked if the part time worker in the EMS office would still be paid.

Commissioner Norem stated that would be up to the board to decide but she would recommend that yes all full time staff and part time staff would be paid. Commissioner Chesak agreed that all regularly scheduled part time staff would be paid. Commissioner Norem made the motion that all full time and regular part time staff will be continued to be paid. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Norem advised Health Nurse Lynch would be considered essential but asked if the other two employees would be there as well. Health Nurse Lynch stated if he needs his two employees they will be there. After further discussion regarding the additional two employees at the health department Health Nurse Lynch stated he would assume they would stay and help with operations. Commissioner Norem advised he will have that flexibility to either keep them working or put them on call at home. The board then decided that Starke County Environmental can stay operational but closed to the public. Commissioner Cavender stated he believes the two week period is not going to be long enough but they can always revisit the situation. Commissioner Norem agreed. Commissioner Norem stated that as for the Board of Commissioners they will reduce staff down to the bare minimum as defined by the department heads, working from home, if possible, but not everyone has the capability to be able to work from home. The fewer the people on site the better even though the buildings are already closed to the public. She advised that is their goal to comply with the Governor's order and the fact that we want to continue to pay our employees.

Auditor Oesterreich advised that Superintendent Ritzler had asked about the employees he has that have underlining health conditions and/or over the age of 60. Is it okay that they still work or do they need to be off work? Attorney Lucas stated if they or any department has people who are vulnerable, they should be staying at home or at least asked to stay at home. Health Nurse Lynch advised this would include anyone 60 or older and/or with an underlining condition including heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes. Those who meet this criteria are more at a risk of developing more severe complications relating to COVID-19. A discussion was held regarding whether or not to make the employees stay home or to offer that they could stay at home with pay. The Commissioners advised the department heads should suggest those employees, who met the criteria, to stay home with pay and if an employee does not want to stay home because they feel they would rather work, the Commissioners can decide on this by a case to case basis. The Board of Commissioners named the IT Department as essential. Commissioner Norem advised that Health Nurse Lynch is best suited to identify how his department

should run. So he will be in charge of setting guidelines for his employees. Commissioner Norem advised the new reduction in staff will be until the close of business on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There being no further public comments and no further business, Commissioner Cavender made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and it passed with all ayes. The meeting was adjourned at 2:31PM.

**MARCH 23, 2020**

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Charlie Chesak, President

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Kathryn Norem, Vice-President

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Bryan Cavender

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Rachel Oesterreich, County Auditor  
& Secretary to the Board of County Commissioners