

**STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL
MINUTES
MONDAY, MAY 17, 2021**

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Council at 4:00 PM in the Annex Building Meeting Room, Knox, Indiana, with Dave Pearman, Kay Gudeman, Brad Hazelton, Don White, Howard Bailey, Don Binkley, Todd Leinbach present, and the following proceedings were held to wit:

The meeting was called to order by Council President, Dave Pearman at 4:00 PM for the Pre-Budget Workshop and immediately following the Starke County Council Regular Session.

PRE-BUDGET WORKSHOP EMS, SHERIFF, HIGHWAY

Councilman Pearman called up the EMS Department for their budget review. Mary Lynn Ritchie, Clerk, Travis Clary, Director, and Nancy Coad, Clerk was present. The EMS department is requesting a total of \$1,438,201. Councilman Hazelton advised the only major increase he sees within the budget as a concern is the increase in Ambulance Repair. The council will reduce the Ambulance Repair account from \$29,000 to \$25,000. Councilman Pearman called up the Sheriff's Department for their budget review. Councilman Hazelton advised that the Sheriff's budget has increased due to budgeting \$100,000 for retirement. Councilman Hazelton advised he is good with the rest of the budgets purposed by the Sheriff's Department including Jail, Jail CEDIT, and 911. Councilman Pearman called up the Highway Department for their budget review. Councilman Pearman told Mary Perren that the council will put they own raises in the budget for certain salary line items. Mary stated to adjust the salaries where needed. Councilman Pearman also brought up the position of the ADA Coordinator. He advised that it should not necessarily be kept in the highway department but added to another department without the existing pay for the additional work. Mary Perren advised that they need an ADA Coordinator as soon as possible otherwise they will be losing all of their grant funding they currently have.

Councilman Leinbach suggested adding this job to the county bridge construction inspector's job description. After further discussion Councilman Pearman suggested having the primary ADA Coordinator as whoever has the title of the bridge construction inspector and then the secondary whoever is in the position of building commissioner. No one will get the extra pay and we will be saving \$5000 in the highway budget. The council requested Auditor Oesterreich to move all salary amounts in the highway budget back to the 2020 adopted rate. Councilman Pearman also advised that the created positions such as the construction inspector admin, construction inspector clerk, and etc. are outside of the raise structure and are not subject to increases with raises. Councilman Hazelton advised that they have several line items, other than payroll, that have increases as well such as travel expenses, maintenance and repair, newspaper and advertising and many more. It was discussed to reduce travel expense to \$7500 and overtime to \$30,000. Councilman Pearman then brought up Cum Bridge and LRS. He advised that they had spoken to Rik in the past and advised that they would be lowering the tax rate on Cum Bridge to be able to increase either Cum Cap or the General Fund. Cum Bridge will need to be cut \$30,000 to \$40,000. After further discussion it was decided to cut Misc. Bridges line by \$20,000 and Bridge Maintenance line by \$20,000. No changes to the LRS fund were made. Councilman Hazelton made a motion to approve the presented budgets with the provisions they have made. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

STARKE SOLAR LLC

Nick Cohen, President of the Starke Solar LLC came before the Starke County Council to present the Economic Development Agreement Memorandum of Understanding. He advised that they are excited about this project and when they come to a community it is the temperature of the officials that make a big difference. They have gotten a lot of support from the public and they have received several ideas about helping out around the lake. Councilman Pearman advised he has been to several meetings and locations reviewing solar sites in other counties. He stated he saw first-hand that a solar site is a good neighbor. The other nice thing about having a solar site within Starke County aside from the financial benefit is the job creations. After further discussion Councilman Hazelton made a motion to approve the Economic Development Agreement Memorandum of Understanding with Starke Solar LLC. Councilman Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

SHERIFF – HEALTHLINK GRANT

Sheriff Dulin and Matron McDonald came before the Starke County Council to request an addition patrolman position and a social worker position for the Starke County Sheriff's Department. Matron McDonald presented the job descriptions to the council. Councilman Pearman advised the council that yes we are still under a hiring freeze but the Sheriff's Department has obtained a grant to fully fund both positions that are being requested. Sheriff Dulin advised what he envisions the social workers to do is have more contact with kids in schools, domestic abuses, overdoses, situations when there are kids involved when they receive a call. Councilman Hazelton made a motion to approve the job descriptions and the addition of the additional patrolman and social worker to the salary ordinance. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

SCEDF UPDATES

Lisa Dan director of the Starke County Economic Development Foundation came before the Starke County Council to provide some updates. She advised that she spoke with Kirt Verhagen today about the North Judson Pitch Contest. He is again interested in having a pitch contest this year for current and/or up-and-coming North Judson businesses. In the first year he put up \$10,000 in prize money for the winner(s). We have contacted KV REMC as well as local banks in North Judson to try and secure funding for this year's event. We haven't had any luck with the North Judson banks so far, and we are waiting to hear bank from KV REMC. We believe last year's event was a huge success, and last's year's winner, Abrams Studios, is now a thriving business in North Judson. Director Dan stated that as a north Judson pop-up business Kirt Verhagen, is interested in possibly providing a co-working space in downtown North Judson to be used by people who may not currently have good internet service and may need it for working remotely. He also suggested the possibility of a pop-up building/business in down town North Judson. There is a successful business in a pop-up building in Knox. The City of Knox owned a downtown building and offered it to a local entrepreneur, who has since purchased the building and rehabbed the upper level where he and his family now live and is very successful in the downtown area.

Director Dan advised she has been working with the City of Knox and Surf Broadband to promote the installation of infrastructure to support fiber optic broadband throughout the City of Knox. The goal is to have fiber optic broadband throughout Starke County in the not-too-distant future. With the pandemic and more and more people working from home, it is imperative to have infrastructure in place to suppose all of our residents. Money from the American Relief fund may be used for broadband infrastructure, and so there is no better time than now to move broadband to the forefront in Starke County. She also stated that the Ball State downtown revitalization plan was completed in North Judson and presentation we made by the students on May 5. They provided great insight regarding the downtown area and many ideas on improving the downtown. Their plan is now available for viewing. If the council would like an electronic copy of their presentation please let her know. Director Dan advised that this Wednesday, May 19th a representative of INVets, a non-profit organization dedicated to matching our nation's veteran workforce and their spouses with rewarding, lucrative career opportunities here in Indiana, will be here touring Starke County, visiting the Veteran's Memorial, local manufacturers, taking a look at our natural resources, local restaurants, etc. They plan to video portions of the visit to market Starke County to veterans and their families.

Director Dan stated that the SCDEF has been very busy working with a number of prospects looking into locating in Starke County. They have been assisting companies, showing available buildings, providing information about buildings and sites, coordinating meetings with utility companies, in preparation of securing these companies. They have seen a huge uptick this year in companies looking to locate here. She advised that Starke County has been chosen along with five other communities in Indiana to be part of the second round of the Rural Opportunity Zone Initiative, through an effort by OCRA and the Purdue Center for Regional Development. She wanted to thank all who participated last week in a focus group to provide feedback regarding thoughts and ideas on our rural opportunity zone. There were a lot of great ideas, and when all of the information is compiled, the core team and advisory team will begin working on a prospectus for our opportunity zone, or a marketing tool to promote the best users for the zone to prospective investors. Some ideas for the opportunity zone include: housing, commercial space, business opportunities, additional infrastructure opportunities, more healthcare and dental facilities, and recreational opportunities.

Director Dan advised Starke County is one of six counties involved in an Agriculture Strategy through KIRPC and Purdue Center for Regional Development, along with Benton, Jasper, Newton, Pulaski, and

White. The idea is to understand and document agriculture output of a county, whether it's grain, livestock, poultry, hardwoods, fruits/vegetables, or dairy, to look at the existing supply chain, and determine is the region as a unique agricultural product that could be promoted. There could be potential for an Agricultural Park in Starke County potentially in the opportunity zone, based on findings verse a traditional industrial park. She advised the SCEDF is in the process of working on plans for both reducing the size of the SCEDF board as well as separating the SCEDF and SCILL as was required by Starke County. She advised she will report again in August regarding their plan for reducing the number of board members and by the end of the year regarding the separation of SCEDF and SCILL. Director Dan Stated they co-hosted a recent job fair with WorkOne, and approximately 10 community members attended. She contacted SCILL and they sent their senior students to the job fair. There were 11 companies in attendance. It is hoped that with the removal of the extra \$300 a week in unemployment benefits that many of the open position throughout the county will be filled Starke County has the 5th highest unemployment rate in the state, with over 400+ people sitting at home who could be filling the many open positions.

Director Dan advised they have confirmed an in-person Manufacturers Day event this year in October in the newly constructed all-purpose room at the Knox High School. They plan to downsize the effort and reduce the number of manufactures in attendance this year, but they are looking forward to getting back to normal. They will also host their annual prospectus luncheon along with the event as well as a manufacturing job fair. She also advised that this was the first year for the SCILL EMT and Fire & Rescue classes. Classes were hosted at Oregon Davis High school. This past Saturday the EMT students took their EMT certification test, and all students passed. These classes were created to assist in meeting the shortages nationwide for EMT's and Paramedics.

OTHER BUSINESS

With no other business or public comment to come before the Starke County Council, Councilman Hazelton made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:55 PM. Councilman Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

**MAY 17, 2021
STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL**

Dave Pearman, President

Brad Hazelton, Vice-President

Kay Gudeman

Don White

Howard Bailey

Don Binkley

Todd Leinbach

Rachel Oesterreich, Starke County Auditor and
Secretary to the County Council