

MONDAY, AUGUST 17, 2020

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Board of Commissioners and meet in Regular Session at 6:00PM, in person at the Starke County Annex Building, Knox, Indiana, with Kathryn Norem and Bryan Cavender present and the following proceedings were held to wit:

The meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order by Commissioner Vice-President Kathryn Norem directly after the Joint Session with the Starke County Council at 7:18PM.

SCEDF – SOLAR FARM PROJECT DISCUSSION

Director Larry Wickert came before the Board of Commissioners to discuss the solar farm project. He explained that solar farms have been becoming popular and Starke County has had some interest. He explained they have had ESN Energy Assistance approached the SCEDF about a possible opportunity zone within Starke County for a solar project. He explained that the State of Indiana has selected opportunity zones around the State, these are zones that are poorer areas and are picked for this opportunity. Starke County has one opportunity zone that has been picked by the State. He advised that it roughly goes from Yellow River up to US 30 and then from the Kankakee over to the Marshall County line. He advised that the developer would get a benefits from the capital gains tax release. In this case the county does not have to give them a tax abatement because they are getting their benefit from the opportunity zone.

He explained that this agency, ESN Energy Assistance, does this to promote economic development in Starke County. They also make sure they do everything they can to make sure it is Indiana businesses and people that do the work as well as trying to buy all the materials from Indiana. The only thing they can't buy in Indiana is the solar panels. Commissioner Cavender asked about the status of the one that was supposed to be coming in. Director Wickert advised that this is still in the works, it is located in Railroad Township. He said the project in Railroad Township is ready to move forward as long as they get the land owners set up. He explained that the Railroad Township project is being completed by a for profit company. However, the ESN Energy Assistance Company is doing this to help the opportunity zone areas. Commissioner Norem advised that what she understood is we are taking farm land that is taxed at a particular rate and it would change, it would no longer be farm land, and would be considered commercial and taxed at a different rate. Director Wickert advised the real estate tax would remain the same so the farmer that owns it would still pay the real estate taxes as they have.

Director Wickert said that when they put these panels in it would be a huge investment in personal property which would increase the tax that is collected. Commissioner Norem stated this would be a quite a bit of financial gain for the county. Commissioner Norem then asked Director Wickert why he was here today. Director Wickert advised that he just wanted to inform the Board of Commissioners about what has been happening with the solar farm project. Director Wickert advised that this opportunity zone would be about 1.25% of the land that exists in Starke County so it is not like we are going to have solar panels everywhere. Commissioner Norem asked if Umbaugh has done any financials pertaining to these projects. Director Wickert advised he does not have the financials means to hire Umbaugh to do that at this time. Commissioner Cavender advised we do have things in place to take care of the county. Such as, the solar farm companies are supposed to take care of the roads. He said there is some noise that could possibly come from it. Director Wickert advised that the solar panels do not make any noise but they have to have a unit that will take the solar energy and run it into the lines. Commissioner Cavender also stated that the companies will also do landscaping around the solar panels themselves. Director Wickert advised he wanted to come before the Board of Commissioners tonight to advise them of what has been going on with the solar farm project. Commissioner Norem asked Director Wickert who benefits from the Indiana Opportunity Zones. Director Wickert explained that there are individuals and big corporations investing in this as they have capital gain and profits to gain. He stated they have a different structures of how they can invest their money, some are for five years, and some are for ten years. However, if you put it in for a shorter period of time they will not gain as much as they would with a ten year investment. He stated those are the people who benefits from the opportunity zones. He also explained that the people who live around the area of development can benefits from the opportunity zones as there could be future economic developments as well. The State developed these zones because these are economically depressed zones.

Councilman Hazelton advised that what usually happens is when a solar farm is constructed, usually a business or corporation comes in and wants to buy that solar farm for whatever reason. He also stated that the power that will comes from the power stations located in our county would go to Reynolds. He stated the first part would go to Reynolds and the second part would go out East. Commissioner Norem

asked Director Wickert what he was going to say earlier about Umbaugh and the financial reporting on projects like these. Director Wickert advised that Pulaski County is going to have one down there and they will make a decision on the 24th of this month. If it does go forward, that firm is looking at some ground South of Bass Lake. He advised the people of Pulaski County are hiring Umbaugh to do a study, he advised if we wanted to participate it would be for that area and we would pay a minor share of that costs but then we could go ask Umbaugh all these questions. He would suggest to participate with Pulaski within this study. Commissioner Norem asked about Kankakee Valley REMC putting in Broadband. Director Wickert stated that they were looking into that when they decided they needed to run some trunk lines for communication to each of their substations around their service area. They were deciding whether or not to put up bigger trunk lines to sell space on the lines to companies to provide broadband towers. He advised that Kankakee Valley REMC did decide to move forward with that idea. They also said that the coverage areas will be where their current customers are located.

AUDITOR BUSINESS

Commissioner Cavender made a motion to approve the vendor claims docket for a total in the amount of \$400,598.27. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Cavender made a motion to approve the payroll docket in the amount of \$265,460.83, including deductions in the amount of \$80,994.47 for the pay period ending on 8/08/2020 and pay date of 8/14/2020. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Cavender made a motion to approve the minutes from August 3rd, 2020. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

OTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD

Commissioner Norem advised that WSBT was down today completing a story on the Veterans Monument. She stated it will be on TV sometime this week. She advised the next thing that is happening is that we will need to take a couple of diseased trees down located near the memorial. She advised Jeff Berg had paid for a Forester to come and look at the two big silver maples and a gum tree. Jeff Berg paid for her time out of his pocket and during her inspection she said that the roots were fine but the two silver maples were rotted. She advised they have someone that will take those down for free. Commissioner Norem advised the Forester went around and checked the other trees located around the court and there are trees that need to be trimmed and branches that are broken. They then had Jim get quotes for that work. One is for \$3,500 and one is for \$3,750. She advised that the low bid happens to be TD Tree Service who is taking down the trees located near the memorial for free. Commissioner Cavender made the motion to accept the bid of \$3,500 from TD Tree Service. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with both ayes. This will be paid from out of the Cumulative Capital Development fund. Commissioner Norem also spoke about the bid received for sealing coating the parking lots at Annex 1 and Annex 2. However, only one bid was received and has received Auditor Oesterreich to ask Jim to get more bids for the project.

Auditor Oesterreich advised she received a call today from a property owner on East Circle Ave. who lives next to an easement. He advised he will be paving his driveway soon and wanted to know if he could pave the easement as well. After some short discussion Commissioner Cavender made a motion to deny the request for the property owner to pave the easement. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with both ayes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There being no further public comments and no further business, Commissioner Norem made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. The meeting was adjourned at 7:43 PM.

AUGUST 17, 2020

Charlie Chesak, President

Kathryn Norem, Vice-President

Bryan Cavender

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