

**STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
MINUTES  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2021**

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Board of Commissioners and meet in Regular Session at 6:00 PM, in person at the Starke County Annex Building, Knox, Indiana, with Charles Chesak, Bryan Cavender, and Mark Gourley 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 directly at 6:00 PM.

**EMS MONTHLY REPORT**

Travis Clary, Starke County EMS Director and Nancy Coad, EMS Clerk came before the Starke County Commissioners to give their monthly report. Commissioner Gourley advised that O'Hara collections was \$306.25. Nancy advised that their numbers are down but they are still equal to last year in their collections. Their numbers are down partially due to having a lot of other diversions from other hospitals. Director Clary advised that Nancy is still handling all the past billing accounts. They have switched to their new billing company, Accumed, as of a few days ago and things seemed to be going well. Director Clary advised in operations they have had no changes in operational status. They continue to operate 4 ALS ambulances out of 3 stations throughout out county. He advised that staffing is continuing to be an issue. They have had another recent full time resignation. It was a full time EMT this time, who has taken a large pay increase with another agency. We have another Full Time Paramedic who may be leaving in the coming weeks. He is in the PERF process with Valparaiso Fire Department. Director Clary stated the currently stand with 3 Full Time Paramedics spots open, which he will be taking one soon. They also have 1 Full Time EMT spot open. Their hopes are that we can soon get our pay comparable to our surrounding counties. Commissioner Gourley suggested working with WorkOne in the search for employees. The council did just get us a slight increase, and we hope to continue to work with you guys on more advancement in the future.

Director Clary stated they did not hold their monthly audit and review with the local hospitals this last month. The day we typically set aside for that they had some staff members participating in a free Trauma Symposium in Valparaiso. They held a PHTLS class for staff members. We had a Samaritan Flight come in for a training. We went over scene safety, and LZ's. We had some staff members attend the Cadaver lab at South Bend Memorial Hospital. We will be holding their monthly audit and review next Monday with local hospitals. Director Clary reported they had an injury free month in the month of September, and are doing well up to this point in October. Director Clary reported the following in ambulance maintenance:

3308 (2021 Ford Gas Engine) is finally back in service after a lengthy repair that was completely under warranty. The main hold up was waiting for the specific parts to complete the job. It had lost all brakes and power steering.

4230 (2019 Ford Gas) received a full-service oil change at Knox Ford.

0514 (2015 Diesel) has had no major issues to report. It had its cot locking mechanism replaced, a door handle on the rear door.

0086 (2009 Ford 6.0 Diesel) has no major issues, and remains in out back-up unit slot.

0085 (2013 Diesel) had no major issues, and will be going in for service as soon as 0084 gets back in service. We are currently running 0085 as our main transfer unit.

0084 (2012 Chevy Diesel) is currently out of service at Plymouth Chevy. It was experiencing DEF system issues; the power steering box was leaking and it has an oil pan leak. We hope to have that unit back this week.

4149 (2013 Ford Explorer) no repairs/service needed.

Director Clary stated that they had no major base maintenance issues for the month and they are currently stable on all personal protective equipment. He stated this is his final Commissioner's Meeting and I just wanted to take a moment to thank you guys for all of your support over the last 5 ½ years. You

guys have been great to work with and I again thank you for the opportunity. I think we have made some great strides, and I hope our service can continue to improve with the new director.

## **HIGHWAY MONTHLY REPORT**

Dan Dipert, Superintendent of the Starke County Highway Department came before the Board of Commissioners to present his monthly report. He advised that they now only have three open positions and he does have an interview this week so hopefully they will be down to two open positions. They will be running new ads as well. He stated they have reapplied for community crossings for two projects. One being hot mix on 700 E between SR8 and 625 E and Bridge #13. He will be working on the asset management plan as it must be approved by LTAP by December 1<sup>st</sup>. Superintendent Dipert advised that the new distributor truck should be arriving soon, it is currently being built at Etnyre. He advised Truck #61 is getting a used motor put in it and truck #66 still needs a motor. Service truck #83 (1997 service truck) lost oil pressure and has a knock in the engine. The red semi needs new injectors and has a dead cylinder and they have ordered a rebuild kit for the brush cutter.

Superintendent Dipert advised bridge inspection will be done on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. He stated that half of the bridges have been washed & cleaned and they plan to finish the rest after chip seal is completed. He stated they applied the final surface coat of asphalt on 600 E and they are currently in the final stages of berming on the edge of the road with truck #53. They should be wrapping this up this week. They do have a close out date for this project being November 19<sup>th</sup>. Superintendent Dipert stated that in their chip sealing operations the new distributor was a no show so they repaired and trained the operator on the old truck. They were able to complete 15.68 miles. They have started a cleaning project in the shop at their location, they purchased some used racks to help organize the shop. They have also rearranged the yard and they now park the trucks in the same location as the plow for that particular truck. They will also be painting the fuel tanks. He advised that as long as the weather holds up they will continue to mow roadsides. The two cab tractors will mow until the snow stops them. They can also run the brush mowers all winter long and with the bucket truck when available. Snow plowing will take place October 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. Due to so many trees falling down on October 11 REMC rescheduled their training on down power lines. The rescheduled date has not been set yet.

## **ERIE TRAILS REQUEST**

Steve Lucas and Larry Wickert came before the Board of Commissioners to request a resignation/realignment memorandum for one of their trails. Both Mr. Lucas and Mr. Wickert explained that the Prairie Trails Club was awarded a Next Level Trails grant through the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. This grant was designated by the State of Indiana as NLT-01-07 and was for the purpose of developing "2.1 miles of 10' wide asphalt bike/ped trail & a parallel natural surface equestrian trail with road crossings at US [Highway] 35, CR 700 and CR 600 and basic trail amenities (bike racks, signage and benches) as part of an extension of the existing Erie Trail. Project includes design." When the grant was approved, the Great American Rail-Trail had joined the American Discovery Trail and US Bike Route 35 as Trans American trails being hosted by the Erie Trail in Starke County.

As part of the grant for NLT-01-07, an Indiana Department of Transportation Right of Way Permit (T0000148776) was obtained for a piano key crossing of US Highway 35, including information and warning signs along US Highway 35. Relocation of US Bike Route 35 on the extension of the Erie Trail at its crossing of US Highway 35 would cause the elimination of the current unmarked crossing of US Bike Route 35 which uses the right-of-way of Starke County Road 800 South. This unmarked crossing is less than 1/4 mile north of the new Erie Trail crossing, and the relocation of US Bike Route 35 to the Erie Trail crossing would reduce the likelihood of confusion to both trail and highway travelers. Finally, a new cue sheet would be approved to identify the route of US Bike Route 35 from North Judson to Starke County Road 700 East. This route would be simplified and somewhat shortened with use of the straighter southeasterly path developed by the Erie Railroad and now used by the Erie Trail. Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the request made by Erie Trails. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all eyes.

## **HEALTH INSURANCE QUOTE**

Debbie Rykovich and Holly Horan from 1<sup>st</sup> Source Insurance came before the Board of Commissioners to present the yearly health insurance quote. Holly advised they have also brought Jennifer from the Difference Card Company to explain how that program works. Debbie advised that the renewal with

Cigna came in with a 23.00% increase. They did get it down to 21.00% increase (total \$1,953,687.36). Cigna has paid out \$1,880,797 with a total premium billed at \$1,037,557. So far this year we have paid out \$4,000 in HRA claims. She advised that they did quote UHC and they declined and OHO was uncompetitive. Anthem's quote that makes our plan came in at a 23.33% (total \$1,991,331.00) increase. Debbie advised that the dental is coming in with an 8% increase but if we offer a voluntary long term disability plan to employees it would bring it down to a 4% increase. Holly stated we would need a very minimal enrollment amount to receive that discount. She advised that there is no employer contribution it would all be on the employee. Holly advised that they're showing another plan with Anthem being a 3.98% increase (total of \$1,678,946.52). They will be explaining the strategy they have come up with regarding the 3.98% increase plan. Jennifer then explained what the Difference Card is and how the Difference Card works. She advised if we went with the Difference Card program the total expected costs would be \$1,811,876.00 or an 11.9% increase. She presented a chart to the Board of Commissioners to explain what the employees experience with the Difference Card.

Commissioner Gourley expressed that he would like to move to a Health Savings Account possibly at some point down the road. Jennifer explained that this option, the 11.9% increase, is without the guarantee and they project our claims to be at the \$86,380. There is an option where you could purchase financial protection that will cover any claims costs over the amount of \$198,666. This would increase the total amount to \$1,843,803.00 or a 13.8% increase. Jennifer then went through the educational materials the employees will receive introducing them to the Difference Card. Commissioner Gourley made the motion to accept the \$1,811,876.00 or an 11.9% option with the difference card, keep the employee premiums at the poverty rate, keep vision free for employees, and to accept the dental with the Long Term Disability voluntary option. Commissioner Cavender second the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

## **REZONING REDLIN PROPERTY**

Commissioner Chesak advised they will begin this continued discussion regarding the rezoning for the Redlin property. Auditor Oesterreich advised there was an update to the petition removing two of the properties from the rezoning request. Patrick Fagan was present representing Chris Shelmon, Attorney for Starke Solar LLC. He advised they removed the two farthest North parcels along US 35. Public discussion was held among those in attendance in the audience, Commissioner Gourley, Attorney Patrick Fagan, and Chris Shelmon (via Zoom). Commissioner Gourley asked what the number of the setback is from the roads for the panels. He asked if it starts from the middle of the road or from the INDOT easement line on the side of the road. Attorney Fagan advised the rezoning ordinance states it is 100 feet from the center of the road. Several public comments were made about the existence of solar farms and the attraction of solar farms. Rich Linkus stated his concerns about the areas around Bass Lake that have already been approved rezoning and solar panel installation and if the Board continues to allow for rezoning and installation, Bass Lake will be covered with solar panels. He would like to know what provisions the Board of Commissioners could make so that does not happen. Commissioner Chesak advised he has already spoken with Attorney Lucas about the possibility of limiting how many can come into the county. He also suggested having something in place to protect Bass Lake and Koontz Lake as they are resort areas. Larry Wappel made comments regarding solar farms and his own positive experiences. Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the Application for Change in Zoning to the Redlin properties. Motion dies for lack of second. Commissioner Cavender made a motion to deny the request for the Application for Change in Zoning to the Redlin properties. Commissioner Chesak seconded the motion and the motion was approved with 2 ayes and 1 nay.

## **AUDITOR BUSINESS**

Commissioner Cavender made a motion to approve the payroll claims in the amount of \$250,521.26 including deductions in the amount of \$74,153.76 for pay period ending 10/02/2021 and payroll date of 10/08/2021. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the vendor claims docket for a total in the amount of \$664,342.13. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the minutes from October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Commissioner Chesak seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to appoint Eric Wood as the EMS Director. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Auditor Oesterreich explained that through our State Board of Accounts audit what we are practicing, in a few areas of our handbook, is not what our policy states so one or the other would need to change. Commissioner Gourley made a motion for the following updates to the handbook “Employees will not be required to take time off to offset overtime hours worked. Paid non worked time such as paid vacation time, holidays will be counted in computing eligibility for holiday payment” and “that base pay and longevity will be included in overtime pay calculations”. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the Resolution Establishing the Intent to Conduct A commissioners’ Sale to Sell tax Sale Certificates for Properties that are Severely Delinquent in Payment of Property Taxes. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the LPA Contract for Bridge 7 and also the Bridge 7 Notice to proceed. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the 2022 Holiday Schedule as presented. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Jeff Berg came before the Board of Commissioners on behalf of Melissa Bohacek and the Northwest Indiana Community Action as they are looking for an elected official to serve on their board. Their board must consist of 1/3 elected public officials. The Board of Commissioners advised they will help recruit someone for the board as requested.

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to appoint Gwen Rentz to the Starke County BZA Board. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

With there being no further public comments and no further business, Commissioner Gourley 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 11:05 AM.

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2021**

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Charlie Chesak, President

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Bryan Cavender, Vice-President

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Mark Gourley, Member

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Rachel Oesterreich, Auditor and Secretary to  
the Board of Commissioners