

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2020

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Board of Commissioners and meet in Regular Session at 7:10PM due to the lateness of the Starke County Council joint session, in person at the Starke County Annex Building, Knox, Indiana, with Charles Chesak, Kathryn Norem (via Zoom) 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 President Charles Chesak directly at 7:10PM.

KIRPC-2ND PUBLIC HEARING FOR COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDS

Edwin Buswell from KIRPC came before the Board of Commissioners to hold the 2nd Public Hearing for the COVID-19 Relief Funds. Commissioner Chesak opened the Public Hearing at 7:13 PM and asked for any public comments. With there being no comments Commissioner Chesak closed the public hearing at 7:14 PM. Mr. Buswell explained that OCRA has opened up a third round of COVID-19 response grants. Commissioner Norem explained that she received an email from one of our State Representative's encouraging us to apply for this grant. Commissioner Norem asked Mr. Buswell to state a brief purpose of this grant. Mr. Buswell explained that the purpose of this grant is to assist communities with responding to needs from the COVID crisis. He explained that this is the third round of grants. Starke County received grant money in the first round for food distribution, the second round was only for businesses, and the third round includes eligible activities such as mental health services, child care services, public wifi locations, food bank or pantry services, establish a systems payments program, and provide loans to businesses. Commissioner Norem advised that out of that list the thing that interested her the most was public wifi, food services, and loans for businesses. Commissioner Norem advised this is her last meeting and she does not feel she should be taking a vote on this so it would be up to Commissioner Chesak and Commissioner Cavender to vote on whether or not they want to pursue this grant. Commissioner Chesak and Commissioner Cavender both agreed that this is something they want to pursue. Mr. Buswell stated that the grant is for a maximum of \$250,000, but this can be split between the different activities. He also advised that there is no local match required. Commissioner Norem asked when the deadline is for this grant. Mr. Buswell explained the proposal is due January 29th, 2021. He stated the full application will be due February 26th, 2021. Attorney Lucas suggested contacting other non-profit organizations to ask what they see as needs in our county. Commissioner Cavender made a motion to move forward with this new grant with KIRPC in the amount of \$250,000. Commissioner Chesak seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

DLZ UPDATE ON 3RD FLOOR REMODELING OF COURTHOUSE

John Kirk with DLZ came before the Board of Commissioners to provide an update of the 3rd Floor Remodeling project of the Courthouse. He explained that COVID has really hurt there supply chain. There are still making progress but they are still holding on the chairs for the large courtroom, tile for the bathrooms, and light fixtures for the large courtroom. However, they have completed the small courtroom, the carpet within the administrative offices, and the carpet going into the large courtroom should be completed by the end of next week. He advised they are also waiting on some marble, this is expected to be here in about 10 weeks. He advised he spoke to the Judge who said the courts will not be opening for some time so he would like to complete the project right even if there is a delay. Mr. Kirk wanted to commend Commissioner Norem as she has been keeping a close watch on him to make sure this project gets done. Mr. Kirk advised that by the middle of January the lights and seats are supposed to come in so really all they will be waiting for the longest is the back setting of the bench.

HIGHWAY-GRANT AGREEMENT & INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS

Superintendent Ritzler came before the Board of Commissioners to have a grant agreement signed and also to discuss two intersection improvements. He advised that at these two intersections they had made the suggested initial improvements as provided by Laura Slusher at LTAP but he would like to continue with his recommendation on this. He advised at 200N and 700E, there are two reasons she didn't think a four-way stop was warranted. First being the low traffic volumes and second because when you put a new four-way stop in there is a risk to the people who normally do not stop at that intersection. He advised that, per her suggestions, they are cut back the vegetation, added cross traffic does not stop signs, and they will also be adding stop bars. However, Ritzler advised he does not agree with her traffic counts. He is recommending one of two options to the Board of Commissioners, the first being that they put in the stop bars and they see how that works for a while. The second being they go ahead and put the

four-way stop in with stop ahead signs. After further discussion Commissioner Cavender made a motion to put in the stop bars for now and reevaluate the intersection in six months. Commissioner Chesak seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Superintendent Ritzler advised that the other intersection is 100E and 500S. Laura stated that this could warrant a four-way stop. She advised that first they should try talking to the four-corner owners and see if they would be willing to cut back the farm fields and trees in that location. Ritzler advised he did this and none of the property owners were happy about that suggestion. He recommends a four-way stop at this intersection. Commissioner Cavender made a motion to put in a four-way stop at the intersection of 100E and 500S. Commissioner Chesak seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Superintendent then asked Commissioner Chesak to sign the Community Crossings Grants A249-21-LG200591 and A249-21-LG-200592. Superintendent Ritzler also advised he has reviewed the driveway ordinance presented by Attorney Lucas and he does not have any changes to mention. He has come up with a permit to make the ordinance. After further discussion Commissioner Cavender made a motion to make this the 2nd hearing for the Driveway Ordinance and will be formalized at their next meeting. Commissioner Chesak seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

AUDITOR BUSINESS

Cavender made a motion to approve the vendor claims docket for a total in the amount of \$1,193,770.85. 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 \$265,540.40, including deductions in the amount of \$81,474.39 for the pay period ending on 12/12/2020 and pay date of 12/18/2020. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

PURCHASE OF SURVEYOR TRUCK

Commissioner Cavender made a motion to rescind the previous motion at the last Commissioners meeting regarding the purchase of a Surveyor's vehicle and to approve the purchase of a 2021 Chevrolet Silverado K1500 in the amount of \$29,300.00 from Lochmandy Chevrolet Buick. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

CARES ACT FUNDING ORDINANCE

Commissioner Cavender made a motion to approve the Use of Cares Act Funds: Reimbursement of Public Health and Safety Costs Ordinance. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

OTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD

Auditor Oesterreich presented the Board of Commissioners with the final draft of the WTH GIS Map of Starke County. Commissioner Cavender made a motion to approve the map. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Attorney Lucas presented the updated version of the employee handbook. Commissioner Cavender made a motion to adopt the updated purposed employee handbook effective January 1, 2021. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Chesak presented the Interlocal Government Agreement for the use of the Planning Commissioner Inspector vehicle. Commissioner Cavender made a motion to approve the temporary Interlocal Government Agreement. Commissioner Norem seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Chesak presented the letter of support on behalf of the Board of Commissioners for the trail along the Yellow River and also the Main Street Community project. Commissioner Cavender made the motion to approve both letters of support. Commissioner Chesak seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Norem advised that Health Nurse Frank Lynch contacted her about his vacation time. He asked for an extension as he has not been able to use his vacation during this pandemic. Attorney Luas suggested making a motion based the COVID Pandemic that the board waves the rule on vacation time in allowing him to retain his vacation time. Attorney Lucas also suggested that the board could pay him compensation time. Commissioner Norem advised that Health Nurse Lynch has a lot of compensation

time. Commissioner Norem advised that she would like to see a motion made to pay Frank his compensation time and if he does not have it in his budget to cover this it should come from the COVID relief monies. Attorney Lucas advised that it is his opinion that Frank does have a legal right to get paid his compensation time. After further discussion regarding if Frank is considered an exempt employee and how he should be paid out, it was decided that his position is considered exempt and he would be paid normal time for his compensation time. Commissioner Norem made a motion to allow Health Nurse Lynch to carry his vacation time for one year because of the COVID crisis. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Norem made a motion to pay Health Nurse Frank Lynch his compensation pay at his regular hourly wage. Commissioner Cavender seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Norem advised she would like to say a few things being that this is her last meeting. She stated that twelve years goes by fast and a lot faster than she would have thought. When she first took office in 2009 the county was broke and the LRS budget for the highway department was at a zero. There was sewage dripping in the basement of the jail, there were pot holes everywhere, half the bridge in the county were down, the infrastructure was crumbling and in terrible shape. She never had any idea that so much would transpire over the course of twelve years. In order to get all of these things done you have to have three commissioners that are willing to work together and support each other and you really have to have a good collegial relationship. She hopes that the new Commissioner coming in recognizes this and respects the current board for what they have here and can learn to be a part of that process and that system. She advised that they have had good relationships with the council, it is not that they always agree and sometimes they have had some drag outs but all in all they have good regard and this is the key to getting things done. Commissioner Norem advised that over the twelve years some of the things that have improved is that we had a basic EMT service here in Starke County This is one of the first things the Commissioners had worked on. They started with one paramedic services and eventually expanded the services to all three EMS bases, which was with no additional tax money. He advised that Kris Rannels was instrumental in helping them get these services going.

Commissioner Norem advised that shortly after being in office she had organized a tour for the Starke County Council to view the conditions of the jail at that time. She said the jail was in such a horrible condition she had never seen anything like it in her life. She stated after a couple of jail fires and a Class Action lawsuit and a lot of blood, sweat and tears, they did get State Legislation to allow them to use Local Income Tax to build the new jail. She stated we now have a nice facility, a Sheriff that has done a good job in running it, and have been able to provide services to the inmates that they could have never had in the jail that we previously had. She advised when the new jail moved to their new location they had remodeled the old jail into being able to expand the court services such as with Community Corrections. She advised they then had done some repairs and remodeling of the courthouse. She advised that twelve years ago the roads and bridges were also in terrible condition. She is very thankful for Mark Smith in that first year to show us how to deal with not having any money in the LRS budget. Commissioner Norem commended Superintendent Ritzler for all the worked he has done over the years to improve the overall infrastructure of roads and bridges. She advised there are some things she regrets not being addressed. The big ticket for her in the hospital. She encourages them to look toward an acceptable solution that will not only meet the needs of this community now but also far into the future. In particular the Save the Hospital Fund should be put into a permanently endowed fund with the community foundation that will address the healthcare needs of the people of this community in perpetuity. She advised that in the area of the Starke County Economic Development Foundation, we pay them taxpayer money, in which the Board of Commissioners are representatives of the taxpayer and we need to make sure they are making the best decisions possible with that money for our taxpayers. She advised she will be taking a spot on the Park Board and she has a particular interest in developing parks and recreation. She views this as an economic development tool and a quality of place tool.

PUBLIC COMMENT

With 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 the motion was approved with all ayes. The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 PM.

DECEMBER 21, 2020

Charlie Chesak, President

Kathryn Norem, Vice-President

Bryan Cavender

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