

**STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL
MINUTES
MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2023**

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Council at 5:00 PM in the Annex Building Meeting Room, Knox, Indiana, with Dave Pearman, Anthony Black, Kay Gudeman, Todd Leinbach, Howard Bailey, Cassandra Hine, and Norman (Bruce) Bennett present, and the following proceedings were held to wit:

The meeting was called to order by Council President, Dave Pearman at 5:00 PM for the Starke County Council Regular Session.

Councilwoman Gudeman made a motion to approve the minutes for February 17th, 2023. Councilman Leinbach seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

PORTER STARKE SERVICES

Matt Burden from Porter-Starke Services came before the Starke County Council to provide a brief overview of services. He advised that mental health and addictions health care is complex work. He explained the report that is sent out every year regarding statistics specific to Starke County such as the top diagnoses and what are the different types of things they are treating. He explained that opioid disorders are one of the top diagnoses that are treated in Starke County. Mr. Burden advised that they are looking at developing more mobile crisis care to meet people where they are at, which would divert people from inappropriate jail or inappropriate hospital admission. They are also looking into developing a crisis center; this will be a place where law enforcement can take people rather than taking them to jail. For example, if an individual is out making a ruckus at 2:00 AM, clearly they are not in their best state. If law enforcement takes them to a crisis center then they may not have to be arrested. Councilman Pearman stated that another thing brought up by the Board of Commissioners is the opioid funds and how to utilize those opioid funds. Mr. Burden advised that if the county needs help identifying needs Porter-Starke is willing to help and collaborate with the county.

Mr. Burden advised that the mobile crisis creation would be one person at a time for a while because they have to make sure they do not interfere with police during the process. The mobile crisis unit will be available sometime this spring and for the actual crisis unit, they are hoping they will have that ready by September. Councilman Bennett asked if Porter-Starke is working with the school systems. Mr. Burden advised that throughout the area they serve they are in 34 school systems. Councilwoman Gudeman asked if Porter-Starke has used the local recovery home yet. Mr. Burden advised that they were a part of the grant funding that funded a good portion of the Hope Restored home and helped it get up and running. Amy Johnston, who works for Porter-Starke and is a ward for Hope Restored, advised that she works with the probation office here in Starke County as far as taking referrals for Hope Restored. She advised hope Restored is on Lane Street in North Judson. Councilwoman Hine asked what role, if any, would the crisis center play in involuntary commitments. Mr. Burden advised that most of the involuntary commitments would be committed more to an inpatient stay. He advised they just started a new program with one of the courts in Porter County that can mandate the outpatient side a little more but it is a little tricky on the civil commitments. Councilman Pearman advised they will check in with Mr. Burden and Porter-Starke Services within the next couple months as this gives the council some time to get some community feedback.

SHERIFF – RETIREMENT & PUBLIC SAFETY LIT TAX

Councilman Pearman advised he was in a meeting with Councilman Black and Councilwoman Gudeman with the Sheriff regarding the Deputy pay and the Retirement Fund. He advised that they discussed having Bakertilly do a study for them to see how installing a Public Safety Tax could cover Deputies pay which also could possibly fund EMS. Which in turn would free up dollars in county general to discuss how to pay the rest of the county better. Councilman Pearman then explained that the Sheriff's retirement works off of an actuary and 13 years ago when he started on the council no one knew how the actuary worked and it was very confusing. What is interesting is that the actuary is an investment-based investment. The idea is that it would make enough money to fund itself. However, the current company that we have been with for years has lost money every year. Chief Deputy Hudgens explained that there are some drawbacks in going to a retirement system like INPRS, which mainly would be for the officers who only have five years vested and they would have to start at year one.

However, they do plan to start shopping around for actuaries here soon as they understand the current plan is not working. Councilman Bailey advised that he would like the current actuary company to come and explain the Council why they have lost money over the last three or four years. Councilman Bennett asked if the number of shortfalls are actually from the number of retired officers on the plan. Chief Deputy Hudgens explained that yes it is. You have 13 people drawing on this pension plan and you have 13 people paying into this pension plan. He advised they are currently paying out \$221,000 per year for the officers who are drawing on the plan.

Auditor Oesterreich advised that the shortfall of \$28,000.66 has to be paid out of County General. What they will need to do is pay for something that is currently paid for out of county general now, out of Jail CEDIT, and then that money will be freed up in county general to cover the shortfall. Councilman Pearman advised that he has spoken to the legislators about the shortcomings of funding Sheriff's Retirement in small communities. He also advised that most surrounding counties do have a public safety income tax. In Jasper County for example, their Public Safety income tax is 2.9%. Councilman Bennett asked what the plans are with the solar money that is coming in and whether or not his can be used toward what we need out of the public safety income tax. Auditor Oesterreich advised that we may not see solar money until 2025 and they are going to have shortfalls in their current 2023 budget. Councilman Bailey asked what those shortfalls may be. Auditor Oesterreich advised as an example, what they are spending this year out of the 911 budget they are going to be short over \$100,000 in funding. Councilman Bailey stated they are there tonight talking about the possibility of a public safety income tax. He asked Chief Deputy Hudgens if this is for officer retention or why he believes we need this.

Chief Deputy Hudgens advised the public safety income tax can only be used for certain things such as salaries and pension payments. He advised that nowadays with social media and the freedom of information that is out there, the deputies can easily see what other Deputy Sheriff's make in comparison to what they make. For example, in Marshall County a Deputy starting will begin at a pay of \$62,000 a year, take home vehicle, and more benefits than what we currently offer. Councilman Bailey asked what the average salary is for 13 road officers. Chief Deputy Hudgens advised it is just under \$51,000. Councilman Bailey asked what Chief Deputy Hudgens feels is an acceptable salary. Chief Deputy Hudgens feels that LaPorte County has a good structure. Their deputies are receiving a \$1200 to \$1500 increase every year until they get to a 10-year maximum. He understands we may not have the ability to do this but he finds it reasonable if you were to start a patrolman out at \$57,000 and then over the next 3 years get them up to the \$62,000. Chief Deputy Hudgens advised that one thing he would like to add about the public safety tax is that the Sheriff's Department is not the only ones who benefits from it, the City of Knox, Town of North Judson, and Town of Hamlet would benefits from it as well. After further discussion, Councilman Leinbach made a motion to fund the Bakertilly study up to an amount of \$3,000 to be paid from the ARPA fund. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. After further discussion regarding the Sheriff Retirement shortage Councilman Leinbach made a motion to pay the \$28,000.66 from county general and to switch officers pay from county general to ARPA up to the \$28,000.66 amount. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

HIGHWAY – LOCAL SAFETY PLAN

Dan Dipert, Superintendent of the Starke County Highway Department came before the Starke County Council to talk about the Local Road Safety Plan. Councilman Pearman explained that the council had talked and they thought that USI was too high on the quote so he went to HWC and the quote he received from them was half the amount. Superintendent Dipert stated that the price from HWC is \$34,500. Councilman Leinbach provided a print out of the 25 items that would be eligible for grants if we developed a Local Road Safety Plan. Superintendent Dipert advised that the call for the grants will open in November and close on December 2nd. We would need a Local Road Safety plan in place prior to the call opening of the grant call in November. Councilman Leinbach advised that over half of the items on the list are aimed toward a bigger county and there are a lot of things on the list Starke County does not have and never will have so they need to compare spending the money on the Local Road Safety Plan with the few items that we may be eligible for. After further discussion Councilman Leinbach made a motion to table this discussion until further information is provided regarding the type of projects this can be used for. Councilman Bennett seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

SCEDF – BAKERTILLY & 6 COUNTY RURAL AG STRATEGY

Lisa Dan, Director of the Starke County Economic Development Foundation, came before the Starke County Council to discuss a Bakertilly engagement and the 6 County Rural AG Strategy. Director Dan explained that the county owns the Knox Lead Track and they are in the middle of a 3-year scope of work that is going to cost a total of \$300,000. There was only about \$400,000 or \$450,000 in the account and after this scope of work the account will be almost depleted. They have to make that money up somewhere and 10-15 years down the road when they have to do a major overhaul again in 10-15 years they will have the money to pay for it. She advised that for some reason several years ago the per car rate was dropped from \$51 to \$10 per rail car. She explained that when it went to \$10 per rail car they would invoice the company's quarterly and then they would invoice the company's the yearly maintenance cost as well such as the NIPSCO, REMC, and inspections bill. This usually ended up being about \$15,000 a piece on top of the \$10 per rail car per one time across the tracks. After further discussion it was the consensus of the council that the SCEDF should go back to the charge of \$52 per rail car per one time across the tracks and the Bakertilly study is not needed unless the company's want to pay for the study themselves.

Director Dan spoke about the 6 County AG Strategy, she handed out a summary of the strategy that they had been working on for a year and a half to take a look at the agricultural resources and take the resources we have to make those work for ourselves. This is looking at things like the supply chains, processing, packaging, etc. She advised they are working with Pulaski County, Benton County, White County, Jasper County, and Newton County. Directed Dan stated there is a farmer in Starke County that is a hemp farmer and is looking into providing seeds to other farmers that want to become hemp farmers. She advised there is a lot of grant money out there for hemp production. They are trying to get the SCEDF to be the grant administrator but this is too much for the Foundation to handle. They do not have the assets to cover if there is a default somewhere in the grant process to pay back that money. She advised they are having a ribbon cutting ceremony for new housing units near the North Judson Town Park that has just been completed. Their board will be doing a half-day training on April 5th for strategic planning. She is also still looking into broadband and expanding broadband options. They will also be having a Spring Job Fair in April. Director Dan advised they are still working with all kinds of developers for the hotel project. She advised that last week they were on WSBT News and tonight they will be featured on WNDU News for this hotel project. She stated they need 30% of investment upfront for the hotel project. Depending on what brand they go with it will be between \$1.5 and \$2.5 million dollars.

SYSCO

Councilman Pearman advised that the county will be getting \$675,000 settlement from the Sysco settlement. He stated that they agree in the past that Hamlet should be getting some of that money, around \$175,000. He did talk to Hamlet and they have an ongoing lighting project going on that they may want to use that money for. The other bulk of the \$175,000 in Hamlet money they want to spend on refurbishing the water tower. Councilman Pearman asked Attorney Schramm what they needed to be able to set up the ordinance for the money. Attorney Schramm advised he will get a fund number from Auditor Oesterreich and he will create permitted uses within the ordinance. He just needs a general idea on what the \$500,000 extra would be used for. After further discussion, it was a consensus that the permitted uses will include infrastructure. Attorney Schramm advised he would include recreation, conservation, infrastructure, and capital improvements. This should cover all possible areas.

BOARD REPORTS

Councilman Pearman advised that on the Marshall-Starke Board there has been some confusion. According to our list, his term was coming due but it turns out that they were confused by it as well and the term is good until 2024. Councilman Pearman is going to attend the next meeting and resign which will then open a spot for Councilman Black to be on the board. Councilman Pearman advised that on the Starke County Economic Development Board they have gotten a lot addressed recently, not solved, but at least addressed. Councilman Bailey reported the Planning Commission Meetings have become very effective lately. The meetings used to last only up to 15 minutes but now they last between 30 and 60 minutes and they seem to be getting more things done. He advised Mary Beever is doing a great job and the other board members are doing a great job as well. They have also retained Attorney Schramm as the Planning Commission Attorney.

OTHER BUSINESS

Auditor Oesterreich advised they need to talk about the reestablishment of cumulative funds. Last year they took the cumulative bridge fund down to 0.00% as they had a large cash balance they are not using, they funded the 2023 budget with the balance they have remaining. She stated that in 2022 the rate was 0.0160% which brought in about \$200,000. After further discussion Councilman Leinbach made a motion to reestablish the cumulative bridge rate at 0.0160%. Councilwoman Hine seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

With no other business or public comment to come before the Starke County Council, Councilman Leinbach made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:04 PM. Councilwoman Hine seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

MARCH 20, 2023
STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL

Dave Pearman, President

Kay Gudeman, Vice-President

Todd Leinbach

Norman (Bruce) Bennett

Howard Bailey

Anthony Black

Cassandra Hine

Rachel Oesterreich, Starke County Auditor