

**STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
MONDAY, APRIL 17, 2023**

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Board of Commissioners and meet in Regular Session at 9:30 AM, in person at the Starke County Annex Building, Knox, Indiana, with Charles Chesak, Mark Gourley, and Don Binkley, 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 9:30 AM.

EMS MONTHLY REPORT

Nancy Coad, EMS Clerk, came before the Board of Commissioner to present her monthly financial report. Commissioner Chesak advised they had received \$329.00 from Jonathan O'Hara. Larry Brock, Starke County EMS Director, came before the Board of Commissioners to present his monthly operations report. He advised they had 143 requests for help and out of those they had 49 paramedic emergencies, 8 paramedic non-emergency calls, 62 basic life support emergency calls, 7 non-emergency basic life support calls, and 17 refusals. Their collections for this month was \$76,000. Director Brock advised they are having a major issue with staffing, there is a national EMS shortage. They are in a wage war to get paramedics. Bigger cities are pulling employees out of rural communities. Right now, he has 5 paramedics and he is able to staff one truck. He advised he currently has 13 full time EMTs. Both positions require 22 people to fill the trucks and have a full schedule. Director Brock advised he has some options to run by the Board in hopes in trying to help this problem. One way would be a pay increase for all EMS employees at \$3.00 per hour, this would increase the budget a total of \$300,000. However, it is unknown if a pay increase will help due to the National Shortage, Indiana's paramedic shortage is 2000 and Basic EMT's is 1000, and the number is expected to grow.

Director Brock advised that there is no training here in Starke County and if a person in Starke County wants to take training they have to go elsewhere. Most of that time it would be Valparaiso, South Bend, Plymouth, or Pulaski County. Training is something we lack and pay is something we lack. Another thing they could do is create a medical transport driver position. This will allow them to fill in their scheduling gaps with a medical emergency responder who is trained similar to an EMT but they would not be allowed to do some tasks. They would be able to assist an EMT. However, they would not be able to works with Paramedics without a wavier from the State of Indiana in which they are doing these waivers frequently now. The second phase they have to look at is pulling the paramedics off the trucks and putting them into a chase vehicle. This would allow them to be free for any advanced life support call. Another option is becoming a training facility and teaching EMT classes in Starke County. The final step if they had too would be dropping down to basic life support services in Starke County. Director Brock advised he would like to ask for \$300,000 and/or putting the medical drivers in place.

Commissioner Binkley asked if they currently have a chase vehicle they could use. Director Brock advised that yes, they do. He would like to hold an EMT class in August, recruit more EMT's and medical transport drivers so that their basic life support staff in up to par and then begin the paramedic chase car services. If everything goes right this would occur in June. Commissioner Gourley asked how many EMT's they have recruited out of the SKILL center program. Director Brock advised none but they have recruited two out of the Ivy Tech adult program recently. He advised that right now they have one paramedic in town at the Knox base and the basic EMT's are doing the job at the Grovertown and North Judson base. If Grovertown or North Judson needs a paramedic they call for them and they meet them in route. Director Brock advised they only intercept with a paramedic about one time every two months. He stated right now he just wants to get the medical transport driver approved and started. Director Brock advised he will be looking into what it will take to begin EMT classes in Starke County, he thinks he would be able to hold a class as soon as August. He advised the medical transport drivers would be temporary until he is able to get more EMT's staffed. He advised they would not be able to teach a paramedic class in Starke County. After further discussion Commissioner Binkley made a motion to approve the Medical Transport Driver, Part Time, for the EMS Department. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

HWY 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 currently have 15 full time CDL

drivers and two open positions. They are going to start advertising for the mowing crew within the next couple weeks. He advised that as far as community crossing go Rieth-Riley was awarded the bid and construction is set to begin at the end of May to do 600 E from Robbins ditch to HWY 30. He advised they did find out last week that they did receive \$1 million dollars for the 2023-01 community crossings project. They are advertising the project now and on May 15th they will be opening the bids. Superintendent Dipert advised he has the paver at South Eastern equipment because they are installing new guides. They rented 2 hot boxes last week so they have 4 hot boxes out on the roads for patching. He advised he has also rented a crack sealer beginning May 1st, they will go out and crack seal beginning at that time. He advised they are getting quotes for the salt shed because the roof is bad.

Superintendent Dipert advised that construction on Bridge #7 has begun on 1200 E South of HWY 8. They have started their bridge maintenance this year as well. They have two bridges that need attention. He is getting a quote to replace the tie roads on Bridge 63 and 68. He advised they are putting the Local Road Safety Plan on hold because they are working with KIRPC for a grant for the funding. This will set them back two years. He advised that the fees for the permits in his departments was last done in 2017 and he believes they need to look at that again and adjust the fees for Starke County. He stated on April 3rd he sent 5 people for distribution training and on March 30th they were invited to Fulton County to discuss road construction, they were out grinding roads. On April 6th they had four employees attend a training session on the paving process. He advised the Mammoth Solar Project has received panels and have started putting up panels on 650 N, they are still planting trees as well. Next Era has been getting more driveway permits and on 550 S they want to go above ground with their lines to the county line.

Superintendent Dipert advised that Hoosier Solar was also in the office last week wanting to run lines above ground in their right of way as well. He stated that United consulting is here today to talk about the bridge inspections that they just finished. John SanGiorgio from United Consulting introduced himself and advised that their firm is under contract to provide bridge inspection services for Starke County. The bridge inspections are required by the federal highway administration for every bridge owned by the county. These inspections keep the county in compliance with federal standards and Starke County is in compliance with federal standards therefore Starke County is reimbursed 80% of the fees for the bridge inspections themselves. He presented a full report to the Board of Commissioners to review at a later date. This report contains detailed findings of each bridge. He advised there are zero bridges that are currently recommended for rehabilitation and the top 5 bridges that are on the replacements list. He advised the average bridge age is 45 in other counties but it is 30 in Starke County. Of the 5 recommended bridges to be replaced currently three of them have already been approved for federal funding. He advised Starke County has done a great job in past years in being able to keep up with the replacement of old bridges.

JAMES YOUNG – TOWN OF NORTH JUDSON

James Young from the Town Council of North Judson came before the Board of Commissioners to request CEDIT funding for their town park project. Several years ago, they were working with the Constellation of Starke and the Stellar Projects and they completed a comprehensive plan in 2020 and they identified three distinct areas they wanted to work on in North Judson for Economic Development. Those being housing, downtown development, and parks. They have had market rate housing developments that have been finished and have already been rented out. They are working on more market rate housing being developed in the downtown area. Mr. Young advised that last year they started looking at their town parks and the town parks have not been upgraded since 1972. A couple years ago they had ball state university give a presentation and they talked about how parks are a major area of economic development. They began working with Troyer Group and identifying some projects and looking at the town park. One of the main things they wanted to start with is a new walking trail, two pickle ball courts, new pavilion, volley ball court, and new playground equipment.

He advised this is a mix use playground and it would be ADA compliant. Handicap kids will be able to use it as well. Councilman Young advised that his redevelopment commission has committed \$500,000 to the project and they are working with DNR for an additional \$500,000 grant, they are supposed to hear about approval of the grant any day now. He stated this was supposed to be a million-dollar project but with the cost of inflation it has increased to a \$1.2 million-dollar project. They wanted to come to the Commissioners today to partner with the Town of North Judson to allow them to use \$200,000 of the Economic Development funds the county has. After further discussion Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the request for \$200,000 of CEDIT funds from the Town of North Judson and to request that the council make that appropriation. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

COMMUNITY SERVICES OF STARKE COUNTY

Cindy Benke, Director of Community Services of Starke County came before the Board of Commissioners to request funding for the Starke County food pantry. Director Benke provided the Commissioners with photos of how much was stocked in the food pantry in April of 2022 compared to what it looked like in June of 2022. They hit the pastor's alliance and put the need on Facebook, media blitz, and contacted the hospital for help in stocking food in the food pantry. Since July of 2022 they have been operating with a deficit. She advised this is the only food pantry in Starke County, the one they had operating in North Judson has closed. She advised that the food pantry in the Community Services of Starke County serves all of Starke County. They have found recently that more families in the "working poor" class has been using the food pantry. These are families that do not necessarily qualify for food stamps but with the economy with the way it is they have to make choices in either paying bills or buying food. There are many families that are on fixed income and more and more families are coming to them for help. They used to get 4-6 pallets a month from the Northern Indiana Food Bank and now they have only been receiving 1-2 pallets once every two months. Commissioner Binkley asked about why they have not been getting the same amount from the food bank. Director Benke explained it is because the Northern Indiana Food Bank does not have the food either to provide. After further discussion Commissioner Binkley made a motion to provide \$10,000 to Community Services of Starke County solely for the food pantry. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

CALIFORNIA TWP TRUSTEE REQUEST

Sheri Bartoli, Starke County California Township Trustee came before the Board of Commissioners to request the use of ARPA money. She advised on behalf of the Bass Lake Fire Department during fire prevention week during the month of October, they would like to do a community hand out of smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, as well as packages of batteries. She has gotten quotes from three different vendors to purchase these items. Home Depot seems to be the better deal. Sheri provided the Board of Commissioner with prices of each item. She would like to purchase 300 smoke alarms, 100 carbon monoxide detectors, and 50 packages of batteries that they could hand out to all residents of Starke County. She advised the total cost would be about \$4427.00. Commissioner Binkley advised he would like to start making lists of these requests so that they can review all of them at once. He has nothing against it and he believes it is a good idea. The Board of Commissioners will review this request again in future meetings.

AUDITOR BUSINESS

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the vendor claims docket for a total in the amount of \$138,721.40. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Binkley made a motion to approve the minutes for April 3, 2023. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Binkley made a motion to approve and accept the roof quote from Amos Schwartz Construction in the amount of \$30,100 for the Annex 1 Building, to be paid from the Cumulative Capital Development Fund. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jay Troike asked about total acreage in Starke County for solar farms and had further discussion regarding the total acreage that is allowed for solar farms in Starke County.

With there being no further public comments and no further business, Commissioner Binkley made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. The meeting was adjourned at 10:40 AM.

MONDAY, APRIL 17, 2023

Charles Chesak, President

Mark Gourley, Vice-President

Don Binkley, Member

Rachel Oesterreich, Auditor and Secretary to
the Board of Commissioners