

**STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL
MINUTES
MONDAY, APRIL 17, 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, Howard Bailey, Cassandra Hine, Todd Leinbach, 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 Special Session.

Councilman Leinbach made a motion to approve the minutes from March 20, 2023 and March 31, 2023. Councilman Bailey seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

SHERIFF-FUNDING REQUEST

Councilman Pearman advised that initially the Securitas Technology Representative wanted to change all the locks at the jail but they are going with only the locks that don't work right now fixed so they can be working as soon as possible. For six locks, installed and programed, will be \$7,500 per lock. Councilman Pearman is asking for up to \$45,000 for this project. Councilman Leinbach made a motion to approve up to \$45,000 to be paid out of the ARPA funds for the replacement of (6) locks at the Sheriff's Department. Councilman Bennett seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

COMMUNITY SERVICES – FUNDING REQUEST

Cindy Benke, Director of Community Services of Starke County came before the Starke County Council to request funding for the Starke County food pantry. Director Benke provided the Council 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. After further discussion Councilman Black made a motion to approve \$10,000 to be paid to Community Services of Starke County from the ARPA funds. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

TOWN OF NORTH JUDSON – FUNDING REQUEST

James Young, Council Member, with the Town of North Judson came before the Starke County Council to request funding for their town project. He advised several years ago they started the adventure with the County with the Constellation of Starke and working together on identifying projects that they needed to do. In 2020 they did a 5-year comprehensive plan that identified areas such as housing, downtown development, and their parks as key areas of Economic Development. Currently they are working on the parks project, which has three phases, their redevelopment commission has put up \$500,000 for this project and they have also been working on a DNR grant in which they would get \$500,000 from the DNR as well. Councilman Young advised this was originally supposed to be a \$1 Million-dollar first phase but it has now come back as a \$1.2 Million-dollar project to get this done. He advised that is why he has come before the council tonight as he is looking for their assistance in getting this project done. Councilman Pearman asked why Councilman Young is not seeking some of that money from somewhere else other than just from the county. Councilman Young stated this is a great opportunity to build our partnership with the county and economic development projects moving forward. Anytime you can build synergy within the county it speaks positively about their leadership.

Councilman Leinbach asked why the project could not be downsized by \$200,000. Councilman Young stated that a project like this has not been done in over 50 years and they are looking at it as this might be a once in a lifetime thing. Councilman Leinbach also asked what will happen with the contract price comes in way over the engineers estimate. Councilman Young stated that the construction engineers estimate was the \$1 Million and the updated is the \$1.2 Million. Councilwoman Hine stated that the Town of North Judson has done their leg work and the residents even outside of North Judson use that park frequently and this is something she would like to see happen. Councilman Bennett advised he was there when they implemented the EDIT tax and this is exactly what EDIT was intended to do, to improve the living of all of our citizens. Councilwoman Gudeman made a motion to approve the \$200,000 request from the Town of North Judson, contingent upon the grant approval by the DNR, and to be paid from CEDIT. Councilwoman Hine seconded the motion and the motion was approved with 6 ayes and 1 nay.

EMS – NEW POSITION

Larry Brock, Starke County EMS Director, came before the Starke County Council to ask for funding for a new position and the changes in EMS. Director Brock advised that Indiana has a shortage of Paramedic of 2,000 and EMT of 1,000. The market has turned to competing with each other for the dollar amount. He would like to hire and create the position of 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 work with Paramedics without a waiver from the State of Indiana in which they are doing these waivers frequently now. Councilman Bennett asked how many transfers they are doing from the hospital now. Director Brock advised they are not doing any transfers. He stated that the hospital wants paramedics for the transfers and he does not have the staff for this at this time. He advised he has offered putting up two EMTs if they can send a nurse but the hospital is short on staff as well. The hospital has been hiring tri-county for their transfers from 7AM – 7PM and then at night the patient will stay in the ER until they can be transferred. However, if it is an emergency transfer they will send their only paramedic out on that call. Further discussion was held about the transfers from the hospital.

Director Brock advised if the helicopter can not fly and they can not get other means of transportation he will initiate his employees to do it. After further discussion Councilwoman Hine stated that this situation needs to be addressed whether it be an increase in pay so we can actually staff the EMS or having the hospital take over the EMS services as a private entity. Either way it needs to be addressed it is not acceptable for our tax paying citizens to be sitting in the ER waiting 12 and 24 hours for a transfer to Indianapolis. Director Brock advised that these improvements are going to come in steps. The first step is to get the EMS staff back up. Councilman Pearman asked if they can still bill for an ALS service if they are using a chase vehicle. Director Brock advised that yes, they can. Councilman Bailey asked if it is 2:00 AM and they need a chase unit to respond. Who would be out to respond as the chase unit. Director Brock stated that the chase unit would be stationed at the Knox Base, waiting to respond when needed on a 24-hour bases. Councilman Pearman asked if Director Brock was still planning on hiring as many paramedics as possible. Director Brock advised that yes, they would still be hiring as many paramedics as possible but the medical transport driver is a current temporary solution. After further discussion Councilman Bennett made a motion to approve the pay rate of \$13.00 per hour for the Medical Transport Driver. Councilwoman Hine seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

ZIP THRU LEASE

Councilwoman Hine advised she had given the lease to Attorney Schramm to review and the council members should all have a copy as well. She is confused as to why commercial property on US 35 is being rented for such a minimal amount each year. Councilwoman Hine stated she does not think the building is not currently being used as to what was agreed to way back in the 90's. Additionally, the agreement was executed by an Evelyn Estok who is now passed away as well as the Airport Board. She is not clear on the role of the Airport Board and how the property is tied into the hospital as well. If we are looking at protecting our citizens and taxpayers she thinks that charging fair market value for a piece of property on US 35 would be fair to the taxpayers. Attorney Schramm advised he has reviewed the lease some and there was a point in there where it says it "may be" used as a restaurant but it does not say it "shall be" used as a restaurant. Attorney Schramm advised he did not see a survivorship section but there is an assignability section. There is no section that says it is binding on successors. Councilman Pearman advised every time they have a discussion with the hospital they always say a big decision in

when they make that termination is based on that piece of ground there and they don't like the fact that they are a health entity and that ground is selling tobacco products. Attorney Schramm asked who is operating the property now. Councilwoman Hine stated she believes it is Dennis Estok. Councilman Black made a motion to have Attorney Schramm look further into the Zip Thru lease. Councilwoman Hine seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

EMS LIT TAX

Councilman Pearman stated that they had Bakertilly complete a study for them regarding the EMS LIT tax, basically showing how much tax revenue would be generated and how much it would cost the taxpayers. Depending on what we may set that rate at we could take the EMS budget and have that paid with the LIT tax freeing up some county general money. The county is needing this increase to support a raise in pay as well as some shortfalls being experienced in the 911 fund. He advised they need to to help the EMS department whether it be better staffing and better billing or helping privatizing the service. The one thing with the EMS LIT tax is that they can change the rates yearly. Councilman Leinbach advised that he believes the need is definite but he is more apt to going with 0.10% and making up the rest with the ARPA money rather than going for the full 0.20%. Councilman Bailey stated he will not support a tax increase. What he can support though is ARPA money and CEDIT money until we start receiving money from the solar companies. Councilwoman Hine agreed with Councilman Bailey's statement. Councilman Pearman advised what they could do is one full year being funding with the ARPA money. Councilman Leinbach made a motion to table the EMS LIT tax. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Councilman Leinbach made a motion to use \$900,000 of ARPA loss revenue money in 2024 to go to the pot to give all county employees a raise up to 10% as approved by their Department Heads and also approved by the council. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

ALCOHOL BOARD APPOINTMENT

Councilman Bennett made a motion to appoint Gwendolyn Rentz to the Starke County Alcohol Board. Councilman Bailey seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

BOARD REPORTS

Councilman Pearman advised on the Economic Development side they recently had a meeting about broadband. They discussed that it could cost around \$45 million to get fiber available to all residents within the county. However, what they learned was that most of that cost would be covered by grants so they would have a very small contribution amount.

Councilman Pearman also discussed the possibility of a memorial plaque for those individuals who have served on County Council. Matron McDonald advised that the Farm Program could possibly make a plaque.

Councilman Leinbach advised that he is a part of the Veterans Memorial through the legions, he represents Hamlet and the Veterans Memorial needs some flags for the memorial site on the courthouse grounds. He will be reaching out to the Congressman's Office to see if he is able to get a US Flag or one with the Capital.

With no other business or public comment to come before the Starke County Council, Councilman Leinbach made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:34 PM. Councilwoman Hine seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

APRIL 17, 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