

**STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**MINUTES**  
**MONDAY, JUNE 19, 2023**

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, Mark Gourley, and Don Binkley (via zoom), 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.

**OPIOID COMMITTEE/PRE-TRIAL FUNDING – MATTRAW**

Shawn Mattraw, Director of Starke Circuit Court Services, came before the Board of Commissioners to review his selections for the opioid funding committee and also to discuss pre-trial funding. Director Mattraw gave the Board of Commissioners a purposed list to be on the opioid funding committee. Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the creation of the opioid funding committee and to accept R. Shawn Mattraw from Court Services; Megan Johnson, Treatment Provider; Leslie Baker, Prosecutor; Donna Swain, Treatment Provider; Dave Pearman, County Council; James Garner, EMS; and Jack Rosa, Sheriff. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Director Mattraw also advised that he had went before the council for pre-trial funding which will go into effect July 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. He stated that when a pre-trial defendant goes on GPS monitoring it is \$10 per day and that effective July 1<sup>st</sup> they cannot charge a pre-trial defendant more than \$30 per month for the monitoring. He is asking the county to subsidize that cost. After further discussion Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve \$25,000 from CEDIT for the pre-trial funding for 2023. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

**SCEDF/JOHNSON SUBDIVISION**

Lisa Dan, Director of the Starke County Economic Development Foundation, and Bruce Johnson came before the Board of Commissioners to discuss new roadways in Johnson Subdivision. Commissioner Chesak advised that it was discovered that we have actually been getting paid for the road extension since 2007 when the original plat was approved by the Board of Commissioners at that time. After further discussion it was decided that Bruce Johnson will work with Superintendent Dipert in the new construction of the roadway in the Johnson's Subdivision.

**EMS – FUNDING REQUEST**

James Garner came before the Board of Commissioners to request additional funding for the new furnace unit that was installed at the North Judson base. Commissioner Gourley made motion to appoint James Garner as the EMS Director. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Director Garner requested approval and signatures for the Medicaid cost report. Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve and accept the letter in regards to EMS being fully under the direction of the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Director Garner explained that the Board of Commissioners approved \$3,700 to replace the furnace and A/C at the North Judson base but the actual cost of this project was \$7,550. Everything has already been installed and this was accepted and approved by the previous EMS Director. Commissioner Binkley made a motion to approve the request of \$7,550 to be paid to Jackson Refrigeration for the furnace and A/C install at the North Judson base. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

**SHERIFF HOLIDAY PAY – NOONAN**

Stacy Noonan, Starke County Sheriff Department Chief Dispatcher, came before the Board of Commissioners to request a change in holiday pay. Commissioner Gourley made the motion to amend the county employee handbook page 24 the sentence that states "Highway department, or any other employees who work on an observed holiday will be paid at time and one-half for working on the holiday" being amended to say "Highway department, or any other employees who work on an observed holiday will be paid at two times and one-half for working on the holiday". Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

## AUDITOR BUSINESS

Commissioner Binkley made a motion to approve the payroll claims in the amount of \$791,125.39 including deductions in the amount of \$78,058.97 for pay period ending 06/10/2023 and payroll date of 06/16/2023. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Binkley made a motion to approve the vendor claims docket for a total in the amount of \$287,345.58. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Binkley made a motion to approve the minutes for June 5, 2023. Commissioner Gourley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

## OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Chesak then continued the solar discussion. Commissioner Gourley advised he would like to hear from people that had not spoken at the last Commissioner meeting. He would like to hear from county residents first. A public discussion was held including concerns about telling farmers and other land owners what they can do with their land, diminishing property values due to the solar panels, barbed wire fencing causing the diminishing property values. An individual explained how the Wheatfield Power Plant was burning coal and how that coal releases carcinogens. Since 1975 this has caused our area to suffer from lack of rain and causes cancer. This is an opportunity to create energy in a better manner rather than burning coal. There were many concerns regarding the road ways and how the roadways are very torn up and the gravel roads are like a washboard. One individual advised that years ago they had to get approval from all surrounding neighbors for a junkyard but they did not need to get approval from the neighbors to put up solar panels. There were more concerns regarding what happens if lightning strikes a solar panel and what chemicals may be leaked from the panel itself.

There was also public discussion held regarding the climate change and how green energy has to take over as well has the belief that it should be up to the property owner regarding what they want to o with their own property. It was said that Starke County is not a high productive area for farm ground. The only productive farm ground is by the rivers and higher ground. The Commissioners heard more complaints about the roadways especially in the San Pierre area. Two individuals who are now hobby farmers due to retirement spoke up an advised that being able to lease their land to solar has allowed them to be able to still gain income during their retirement. He also mentioned that there is no barbed wire in the fencing that they put around the solar panels. A gentleman also spoke about how he has been a beekeeper for many years and all those years ago they were able to pull 150 pounds per year but right now if they make 30 pounds they are lucky. This is due to all the weed killers killing the bees. The solar panels will help the bring back the bees and the butterflies and other animals.

Public discussion was held regarding the amount of farmland in Starke County that is going towards solar farms. It was also requested to have the Road Superintendent explain the process of restoring our roadways. Superintendent Dipert advised they keep in close contact with Next Era, he stated there is 11.4 miles involved in this project on June 12<sup>th</sup> Next Era began putting #53 stone on the roadway as well as compacting the stone down to 4 inches. They are also widening the roads to 20 feet. This Wednesday they are going to spray calcium chloride on the stone. They will then grind the stone and the roads up on Thursday. This will give us a base material that is 10 inches thick. So even though the roads are going to be gravel they are going to be hard gravel. In two weeks, they will go back and spray the top layer of the stones again with calcium chloride. In the spring of 2025 they Highway Department will go in and resurface the roads with three layers of chip seal. Next Era is investing \$220,000 per mile in these roads, which will be a \$3.2 million-dollar project.

Public discussion was also held regarding the waste product that these panels will produce after they have been on service for 20-30 years. Hoosier Solar advised they are about 3 years and 6 million dollars into their project. They are also expecting to invest another 775 million dollars more before the project is entirely finished. Next Era advised that on a typical solar job there is 250 jobs that are created and then there is also several permanent jobs that are open as well for long term maintenance. After further discussion Commissioner Gourley thanked everyone for coming in for this discussion. Commissioner Binkley advised he does not mind looking into things to make sure everything is right but he does not want to stop production on anything. Commissioner Gourley advised he came into government to give the lightest touch possible and sometimes politicians do not make the best decisions and he does not want to have a heavy hand into what private enterprise does so long as they are not infringing the rights of another we do not need to interfere with how other people choose to live their lives and he does not feel it is appropriate to place a moratorium or cap on anything. The Board of Commissioners thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and expressing their opinions. Commissioner Chesak expressed

concern in the amount of acreage that is being contracted under solar projects. Hoosier Solar explained that each one of their projects have a megawattage cap on them and not a acreage cap on them. Even if the Commissioners put an acreage cap on the amount of land this will not affect the overall project concerning megawattage. Further concerns were heard regarding the panels themselves and what chemicals make up the panels. Commissioner Binkley advised they could table this issue for tonight. Commissioner Gourley stated he does not believe this situation is appropriate for a moratorium or a cap so he would like this to be the end of this discussion. Commissioner Binkley agreed.

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to appoint Stanley Budd as the IT Director. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the Starke County Fundraising Policy. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the support letter for the Jasper Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Gourley made a motion to approve the annex key request for James Garner the EMS Director. Commissioner Binkley 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 Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. The meeting was adjourned at 8:28 PM.

**MONDAY, JUNE 19, 2023**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Charles Chesak, President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mark Gourley, Vice-President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Don Binkley, Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rachel Oesterreich, Auditor and Secretary to  
the Board of Commissioners