

**STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL  
MINUTES  
MONDAY, AUGUST 21, 2023**

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Council in regular session at 4:30 PM in the Annex Building Meeting Room, Knox, Indiana, with Dave Pearman, Anthony Black, Kay Gudeman, Howard Bailey, Cassandra Hine, Todd Leinbach, Norman (Bruce) Bennett present, and the following proceedings were held to wit:

The meeting was called to order by Council President, Dave Pearman at 4:30 PM for the Starke County Council Regular Session.

Councilman Bennett made a motion to approve the Minutes from July 3, 2023. Councilman Leinbach seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Councilwoman Gudeman made a motion to approve the Minutes from July 18, 2023. Councilwoman Hine seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

**2024 PUBLIC HEARINGS**

2024 Starke County Government

The public hearing was opened for the 2024 Starke County Government budgets. With no public comment, Councilman Bennett made a motion to close the public hearing. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. The public hearing was closed at 4:32 PM.

2024 Starke County Airport

The public hearing was opened for the 2024 Starke County Airport budget. Councilman Pearman inquired about the \$122,000 surplus the airport had and explained that Councilman Leinbach looked into how the City of LaPorte handled their budget. The City of LaPorte approved the appropriations and purchases and he feels the council needs to take a better look at how departments spend their appropriations so they can explain to their constituents on what the money is being spent on. Auditor Oesterreich asked if the council is wanting the airport to come to them if they are making larger purchases. Councilman Pearman stated yes. After further discussion Councilman Pearman made a motion to set the amount at \$25,000 in which anything over that amount the airport would need to come to the council for approval. Councilman Black seconded the motion. Councilman Leinbach expressed concern that the airport was not present during the budget workshop but he would also like to know what the Starke County residents get from the airport for nearly \$2 million dollars. Councilman Pearman agreed and this is why they need to start putting eyes on the airport budget and the airport spending. He also mentioned having representation on the airport board. After further discussion the two members of the airport board that were present will go back and talk to their board about possible council representation. The motion was then approved with all ayes. The public discussion continued regarding the airport budget and it was asked what the total budget was. Councilman Leinbach advised the budget request was for \$1,862,941. Auditor Oesterreich advised that the taxpayers' portion of that was around \$300,000 per year. Councilman Black made a motion to close the public comment on the 2024 Starke County Airport Budget. Councilman Leinbach seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. The public hearing was closed at 4:45 PM.

2024 Solid Waste

The public hearing was opened for the 2024 Solid Waste Budget. With there being no public comment Councilman Bailey made a motion to close the public hearing. Councilman Bennett seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. The public hearing was closed at 4:46 PM.

2024 North Judson San Pierre Schools

The public hearing was opened for the 2024 North Judson San Pierre Schools budget. During the public hearing the new Superintendent Kelly Shephard introduced himself to the Starke County Council. With there being no further public comment, Councilman Leinbach made a motion to close the public

hearing. Councilman Black seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. The public hearing was closed at 4:48 PM.

## **STARKE COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION – ENDOWMENT**

Jacque Ryan, Director of Development with the Starke County Community Foundation came before the Starke County Council to discuss possible participation in endowment funds. Kathy Norem also came before the board for this discussion as a representative of the Hospital Community Board. Director Ryan advised that they will be speaking about the Save the Hospital Funds that are currently invested in CD's. Councilman Bennett stated that he was a Commissioner back in the day when they first leased the hospital and in 25 years they have not gained hardly anything. He would like the council to keep in mind the good that this money can do for Starke County citizens and even the youth in Starke County. Mrs. Norem advised that the Save the Hospital fund and the issues with the hospital are two separate things. The save the hospital funds, at the time, was set aside because the hospital board members at the time wanted to save the fund to be able to get the hospital back. She knew at the time that this would most likely never happen and most county owned hospital are non-existent now. She advised as a hospital board member now, they do have a good relationship with the CEO of the hospital who is Keith Nichols and she has been very happy with his positions on things. They have been having discussions with the hospital regarding what a new facility would look like and she expects those discussions to continue.

Director Ryan explained that the Starke County Community Foundation is a branch of the Northern Indiana Community Foundation and she explained their mission. She explained that endowments funds are a gift that will gain interest and then a portion of the interest is provided in a grant through an annual distribution. The remainder would then be invested as well so the principal amount is protected and they never have to dip into it. Director Ryan explained they provide grants, scholarships, and different Community opportunities. She advised she is here today to address the Save the Hospital funds to possibly put them in action to address community health, mental health, and all around county wellness. Kathy Norem explained that the Community Foundation is a collection of funds that people donated their money to this organization to be distributed that will fulfill their lifelong dreams. She explained that the Save the Hospital Fund was created to stay in the health care arena and it should not be used for other things such as fire trucks, bridges, or anything other than the wellbeing and the healthcare needs of the citizens of our community. Director Ryan handed out a performance projection which would incorporate these funds and the projections are based off of NICF averages over the last three decades. The projections she has estimated are from a total of \$6 million dollars but she can provide additional projections for other amounts as well.

Councilwoman Hine advised she has been doing research regarding future investments of solar money. She had found something called Trust Indiana. She advised that Trust Indiana only invests in public sector funds and securities and other investments that are legally permitted pursuant to Indiana Law and in a manner further defined by the Trust Indiana Investment Policy. Councilwoman Hine stated the fact they are talking about investment funds that are legal and permissible just makes her think that they might need to look into the investment this organization makes with endowments funds complies with this as well. Attorney Lucas advised there is a specific statute that speaks to that being IC 36-1-14-1 and it is unique to Community Foundations and giving the authority for the Community Foundations to doing those investments. Councilman Pearman is concerned about the funds because that is their nest egg to make sure our community has a hospital. Mrs. Norem advised that one of the reasons this was put together to bring with was because they had a Commissioner at the time that wanted to buy new equipment for the highway garage, so that is why these funds were initially put into Save the Hospital Fund so it could only be used for the things it was supposed to be used for. She stated that in her opinion these funds are taxpayer funds and the Community Health Care is now a for-profit organization and she believes there are ways they can work with them but she does not believe that these funds should be used to fund a building for them as that is their responsibility and their job and they are making headway on discussions regarding that.

Director Ryan advised that putting this money in an endowment would not limit what the county and different Health Officials would have the ability to do with it because there would be a committee that would be assembled by various people who are already dealing with community health in different ways and is established to oversee this. It would not be the Community Foundation making the decisions solely, it would be a collective effort. Councilman Leinbach asked if the original investment would ever be returned to the county. Director Ryan advised it would not. Director Ryan explained with the full \$6 million invested over the span of ten years \$2.3 million would be distributed to be put towards charitable health needs and the fund would have a balance of \$7.8 million. Over the span of 50 years the total

distributions would be \$21.7 million with the fund balance of \$18.5 million. Councilman Pearman would like to see some examples of what this money would go towards for charitable reasons. Mrs. Norem explained there would have to be structure of how you would identify the needs and how you would execute delivery of the money. Further discussion was held regarding the possibilities of what the endowment funds could be used for in regards to promoting health and wellness throughout Starke County. Councilman Bennett stated that the \$6 million dollars they set back 25 years ago was for two reasons, the first being they did not want to County Government to get ahold of the funds to be just for just anything and two because they had it in their minds that \$6 million dollars would have went along ways to help equip the hospital at that time. Mrs. Norem agreed.

Councilman Pearman asked if it was an all or nothing deal. Do they have to invest the entire \$6 million or could they do a smaller portion. Attorney Lucas advised he does not see why not but he will look into that. Councilman Leinbach advised that this seems like it could benefit a lot of people. He stated that this would not totally take the Starke County Council out of the equation and it would take the council out and their predecessors out for making bad decisions. He stated he is not in favor of an all or nothing either. Mrs. Norem asked if this is worthy of further discussion and possibly a committee being created with members from each board to further the discussion. Councilman Pearman advised he believes the council needs further time to process the information and maybe at their next meeting they will talk about the creation of the committee. Mrs. Norem advised the Hospital Board will be meeting soon and the Northern Indiana Community Foundation will be making the same presentation. She advised she feels that after that meeting they should expect a full recommendation by the Hospital Board for them to move forward.

#### **MAINTENANCE – FUNDING FOR 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR HEATING AND COOLING**

Ricky Green, Director of Maintenance, came before the Starke County Council to request funding for the heating and cooling project on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the courthouse. Director Green explained that the Board of Commissioners went with the slightly higher bid this morning because Comfort Express included the electrical work and the other bids did not. Commissioner Gourley advised the Board of Commissioners decided to utilize ARPA funds for this project. Director Garner presented the bids as follows: Comfort Express Bids were as follows: Clerk Area \$22,950.00, Records Area \$22,950.00, Commons Area \$18,700.00, Child Support Area \$22,950.00, Small Claims Area \$22,950.00 for a total of \$110,500. After further discussion Councilwoman Gudeman made a motion to approve \$110,500 for the project and to be paid from ARPA. Councilman Black seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

#### **LIABILITY INSURANCE RENEWAL FUNDING REQUEST**

Councilman Pearman advised he has met with our liability insurance about the renewal rates. Auditor Oesterreich advised that there was not enough budgeted for 2024 to cover the significant increase in rates. She advised they are projected to need \$100,000 to cover the renewal proposal. Also, that the Board of Commissioners have chosen to stay with Bliss McKnight for everything except the workman's compensation insurance which will now be the IPEP. After further discussion it was proposed to take the \$100,000 from ARPA. Councilman Black made a motion to fund \$100,000 of the 2023-2024 liability insurance from ARPA. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

#### **EMS - AMBULANCE FUNDING REQUEST**

Jim Garner, Director of Starke County EMS, came before the Board of Commissioners for the approval of a funding request of two ambulances for his department. Director Garner advised he has received several quotes for a new ambulance purchase. The first quote was a used 2014 Ford E450 with 125,000 miles for \$22,000 from Osage Ambulances. Director Garner stated this particular ambulance is an older LaPorte County unit and was well maintained. The second quote was a 2022 refurbished unit on a brand-new Ford E450 that has been completely brought up to current specifications. The quote came from Elite Ambulance Sales in the amount of \$180,850. The third quote brought forth was for a 2023 Ford E350 in the amount of \$197,000. The final quote received came in at \$229,565 for a 2025 Ford E450. Director Garner advised he would like to go with the 2014 Ford E450 with 125,000 miles for \$22,000 from Osage Ambulances with the donation money from the Northern Indiana Community Foundation and also the 2022 refurbished unit from Elite Ambulances in the amount of \$180,850. He advised we have a check coming from the insurance company in the amount of \$156,600 to help with the purchase of the Elite Ambulance. The insurance money will pay for all but \$24,500. The Board of

Commissioners votes this morning to take that money from cumulative capital development. Director Garner advised this is the additional appropriation he is requesting tonight. Councilman Black made a motion to approve the additional appropriation request in the amount of \$25,000 to be paid from cumulative capital development fund. Councilman Bennett seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

### **SHERIFF – NEW POSITION REQUEST**

Councilman Pearman advised the Sheriff was taken off the agenda but he does want to make the comment that they do currently still have a hiring freeze in place for all departments. After further discussion Councilwoman Hine made a motion to reinforce the hiring freeze. Councilman Bennett seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

### **HIGHWAY – ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATION REQUEST**

Dan Dipert, Starke County Highway Superintendent, came before the Starke County Council to request an additional appropriation from MVH Restricted to pay for a project. Auditor Oesterreich advised he currently has \$1.5 million in MVH restricted and he is asking to fund his additional appropriation request with that. Superintendent Dipert advised that they will be completing construction on a new roadway within Johnson's Subdivision and he would like to get a couple extra miles of chip and seal. Councilman Leinbach expressed his disagreement in funding this project. He asked if other new roadways will be constructed in areas that needs it such as the Monterey area. Councilman Pearman advised the problem in this case is the Board of Commissioners at that time in 2007 already agreed to the project itself and legally we don't have a choice to fund it. After further discussion Councilman Pearman made a motion to approve the additional appropriation request in 1173 in the amount of \$320,000. Councilman Bailey seconded the motion and the motion was approved with 4 ayes and 3 nays.

### **FAIR BOARD DISCUSSION**

Councilman Pearman advised they were waiting to see if they have discussed with the Fair Board about the possibility of adding a position on the Fair Board. Bobby Binkley advised that they have discussed this at a couple of their meeting and at this time it is still a little up in the air. He advised they are just looking for more information on what their intentions are with being on the Fair Board, how much more money they may get for this, and who would be the member that would sit on there. Councilman Pearman stated that he does not believe there is a set amount of money and he believes there is a lot of dissatisfaction with the current fair. Discussion was held regarding what those dissatisfactions are. Councilman Pearman advised the money the fair board currently receives is taxpayer dollars and he would like to see it become more but they want to know what it is spent on, but the main thing is, is that they are hearing a lot of dissatisfaction with the public. He states this is why they came up with the idea to alleviate some of that dissatisfaction and get involved. Councilman Pearman presented a letter that he has received from an anonymous individual, this letter can be viewed in the Auditors Office. Councilman Bailey asked if the Fair Board wants this fair to be a Starke County Fair for 4-H members and 4-H family members only or if they want to fair to be a community-wide fair so that even individuals who do not know what 4-H is will come and participate. Bobby Binkley stated that if there is 5 million people who show up to the fair but they do not show up to the auction it does not benefits them at all so it is not a simple question.

Bobby Binkley stated his purpose for being on the Fair Board was to give the kids the largest youth organization in the area a place to showcase their projects that they start in October. Further discussion was held regarding what, why, and how people attend the fair in general. Discussion was also held regarding the possible threats about pulling the funding from the fair board. Councilman Bennett stated that the 4-H council has said that all of the money that the council appropriates to them goes directly toward 4-H members. Julia agreed. Councilman Bennett stated he does not see that as a problem the place he feels that they, as the county council, puts together a fund of money for the fair board to come and ask for a certain amount of money for certain projects and the council would say aye or nay to those projects. He stated there are a lot of youth in this county that are not getting any money and he is all for making sure the 4-H council gets their money but he is in favor of putting together whether it is \$20,000 or \$30,000 but have them come forward to request with their projects to approve or disapprove. Councilman Bennet gave some examples of what that fund would be for.

Bobby Binkley stated he believes all this could be solved if council members would just show up to one of their meetings to ask these questions or make recommendations. He stated they have not decided whether or not to move forward with the council's request. He advised that at the last meeting the council stated that it may not be one of them that would be represented on the board but the phone call he received later they agreed that it should be one of the seven members. Mr. Binkley stated at as of right now the appointment has been tabled by the fair board but if they have more information in regards to what the council is going to bring to the board he will take it back to the fair board and maybe that will sway them on making the appointment. Further discussion was had regarding what used to be at the fair, what could be at the fair, and who is welcome at the fair. Discussion was also held regarding the Yellowstone Trail Fest and how much was charged to have the festival there. Councilman Leinbach stated that if it was misunderstood that they wanted to take money away from the fair that has never been the case. The whole idea is not to control the board, the idea is to be with the fair board, brainstorm, and help them with the board. In conclusion Councilman Pearman stated that this discussion regarding the funding is not about 4-H it is about wanting to help making the entire program bigger and we want that site to be improved. In his opinion they will never put in a large amount of money without representation.

## **OTHER DISCUSSION**

## **BOARD REPORTS**

With no other business or public comment to come before the Starke County Council, Councilwoman Gudeman made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:37 PM. Councilman Black seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

### **AUGUST 21, 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