

**STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL  
MINUTES  
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2023**

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Council and Starke County Board of Commissioners in joint 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.

**ADOPTION OF 2024 BUDGETS**

North Judson San-Pierre Schools

Councilman Bennett made a motion to approve/adopt the 2024 budget as advertised and also approve the Reduction in Appropriation Ordinance in the amount of \$468,814. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Starke County Airport

Councilman Bailey made a motion to approve/adopt the 2024 budget as advertised. Councilwoman Hine seconded the motion and the motion was approved with 6 ayes and 1 nay.

Starke County Solid Waste

Councilwoman Hine made a motion to approve/adopt the 2024 budget as advertised. Councilman Black seconded the motion and the motion was approved with 6 ayes and 1 nay.

Starke County Government

Councilman Pearman advised that there have been some previous discussions regarding the Starke County Budgets pertaining to the fair board. There has been some discussion regarding modifying how the council appropriates the funds. He advised based on the outcome of the fair board meeting their board has decided not to have any county council involvement in their board. Councilman Pearman does not believe they should defund them but to be responsible to their constituents they need to be able to tell the public what those funds are going for. One of the discussions in their last meeting was to make a policy for that fund that they would come to the council and request the funds when needed. Councilman Bennett stated he will make that motion but he advised that when tax payers come to them and want to know how their tax money is being spent he feels they are obligated to tell them. So, he is in favor of leaving that fund but any expenditures from that fund would need approval by the county council. Councilman Bennett made a motion to approve/adopt the 2024 as advertised with the exception that any expenditures that come from the Fair Board Account it would need further approval by the council. Councilman Pearman seconded the motion. Further discussion included Councilman Leinbach advised that he would agree with Councilman Bennett's motion and he believes the fair board would be okay with this as well because they will still get the money and everyone will know exactly what the money went for.

Commissioner Binkley asked who the council appointed to the airport board? Councilman Leinbach advised they have not appointed anyone to the airport board yet. Councilman Pearman stated they did the same thing to them. Councilwoman Hine advised she will be abstaining from voting for the fair board but she does believe that the issue of financial transparency has been somewhat resolved because Councilman Leinbach was able to obtain their tax return information from the internet. Councilwoman Hine advised that she did look that over and she felt like that alleviated the financial transparency concerns. She went on to say that because they do require the other entities that they provide large amounts of funding to, to also have a seat on their boards then she feels that Councilman Bennett's suggestion is a fair compromise. Councilman Bennett feels that this would not hurt the program but it would allow them to be able to tell other people what the money is being spent on. Commissioner Binkley stated they handled the airport approval without any additional requirements. Councilman Leinbach stated he voted nay for the airport. Commissioner Gourley asked about why they are needing

an additional layer on top of what these individuals will have to go through because there is already a claim approval process that go before the Board of Commissioners. Councilman Bennett stated because if there is a cash reserve why do they need to keep coming back and asking money from the county rather than taking a draw from their own funds. Commissioner Binkley stated that they are singling out the fair board in this matter when it comes to providing funding to another entity. Councilman Black stated the fair board recognized some things that needed to be changed and he wants to give them credit for that. Commissioner Binkley stated he would like an answer to the fact that it still feels like they are singling out the fair board when they did not make the same recommendation about the airport board in regards to coming to the council to ask for the money that was already appropriated. We are talking about \$12,500 for the fair board and over \$1.5 million for the airport but they passed that without further questions. Councilman Leinbach stated he voted nay for the airport board for this reason.

Councilwoman Hine advised she feels like this issue has become a power struggle between these two boards and they are not letting anyone off the hook as to who is doing what, but she feels that this is now a power struggle and this could be detrimental to the county. She feels like looking at us starting a committee between the council and fair board would at least start rebuilding the bridge that is needed but she believes that Councilman Bennett's suggestion was still a good compromise. They are still going to get their funding and the council will also be able to be responsible in their actions to the tax paying voters. Councilwoman Hine stated if the airport board comes back and states that they are also going to refuse to amend their bi-laws to provide the council with a seat then they are going to state the same proposal that they would need to come to the council when they need the funds. Councilman Bailey wanted to make a comment regarding the fair board meeting that was held the other night, he advised that the committees that were created by the fair board is going to be a great way to get more public involvement. He feels this is going to be a great thing. After further discussion Councilman Pearman called for a vote. The motion passed with 6 ayes and 1 abstention.

#### **HIGHWAY – TRANSFER REQUEST**

Dan Dipert, Starke County Superintendent, came before the Starke County Council to request a transfer. Superintendent Dipert advised this came up about six or seven months ago when they began the work on Bridge 7. Councilman Bennett wanted to know how this happened because in the past the consultant fee was always added to the project. Councilman Leinbach asked if it was an LPA job. Superintendent Dipert stated yes. Councilman Leinbach advised this should have been posted on the INDOT website for inspection under the LPA projects and if it was not he does not understand how it was awarded without having a RFQ for that amount of money. Commissioner Gourley advised the reason that this additional money is needed is because we used to have a Certified Bridge Construction Inspector but he had retired and now that work has to be contracted out. Councilman Leinbach stated he understands that completely but he feels this should have been brought up a long time ago not after the fact. Superintendent Dipert advised that this will come up again next year because they are going to be short again this amount when Bridge #137 is constructed. After further discussion Councilman Pearman made a motion to approve an additional appropriation for 1135.30675.000.0000 in the amount of \$69,729 and a reduction in 1135.10610.000.0000 in the amount of \$48,729, 1135.10615.000.0000 in the amount of \$5,000, and 1135.10804.00.0000 in the amount of \$16,000. Councilman Bailey seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

#### **NORTHERN INDIANA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION- ENDOWMENT**

Jacque Ryan, Director of Development with the Starke County Community Foundation came before the Starke County Council to continue discussion regarding participation in endowment funds. She provided examples of the different grants they have done throughout Starke County. She also explained the possible different committee members that would make recommendations regarding what they will be doing with the endowment. Councilman Pearman stated he is interested but the thing that scares him a little bit is that these funds can not be reeled back once they have been donated. He thinks they need a little more education as far what is the best entity to manage the health care of Starke County moving forward. Councilman Leinbach asked what the Commissioners thought of this endowment. Commissioner Binkley advised that they are more in favor of doing a part of it but not the full amount. Corinne Becknell Lucas introduced herself and explained that one of their jobs is to thoroughly understand what the purpose of the endowment would be and, in this case, it would need to be health related and this would be discussed ahead of time. Councilman Leinbach asked were the ordinance fits into the whole thing, he stated as he understands it, it would take a unanimous vote on the Commissioners part and then 5 votes from the council.

Councilwoman Hine advised that section 5 states that upon a request by the Community Board of Directors of Starke Memorial Hospital ( the members of which are appointed by the Board of Commissioner pursuant to the lease), the Starke County Council, upon affirmative vote of no fewer than five of its members, may appropriate and the Board of Commissioners of Starke County, Indiana, upon a unanimous effective vote, may expend funds from the Trust Fund for the following purposes and no other, which then it goes on to give four conditions. Councilwoman Hine stated that then if section five criteria are met they would move onto section six. One of the things that are talked about in section six is about the lease expiration, in which she had questioned this in an email with Commissioner Chesak and Councilman Pearman. She also stated that section six also purposes further conditions regarding the lease of the facility, if medical care commensurate with that now provided by Starke Memorial Hospital is provided within Starke County to the citizens of Starke County; and, if funds remain in the Trust Fund. She advised then following separate public hearings conducted by the Board of Commissioners of Starke County, Indiana and by the Starke County Council and after consultation by each of those bodies with the Community Board of Directors, the remaining Trust Fund may be appropriated to and expended for such use as determined by a joint ordinance and appropriation adopted by the unanimous vote of the Board of Commissioners of Starke County and by the affirmative vote of no fewer than five members of the Starke County Council. After further discussion Councilwoman Gudeman made a motion to table the endowment request. Councilman Black seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

### **SCEDF – RURAL OPPORTUNITY ZONE**

Lisa Dan, Director of the Starke County Economic Development Foundation, came before the Starke County Council to introduce Roy Anderson who has an upcoming opportunity within the Rural Opportunity Zone. Mr. Anderson advised he is an entrepreneur and he makes whiskey. He would like to set up a small research and product distillery here in Starke County. He plans on over the next few years investing \$151 million dollars into this facility. This facility would be located in the Rural Opportunity Zone. He explained how our area is the perfect area for testing and producing his products. He advised once everything is up and moving they are estimating employing between 125 and 250 employees. After further discussion Director Dan then introduced Scott Franco who is with SURF Internet, he explained that they have already began working within the limits of the City of Knox and the Town of North Judson. They are also working on the Koontz Lake area and the Town of Hamlet. He handed out some information regarding their services that will be available in Starke County.

### **SURVEYOR – TRANSFER REQUEST**

Councilman Pearman made a motion to make an additional appropriation in 1000.20100.000.0023 Office Supplies in the amount of \$300. Also, a reduction in appropriation in 1000.30100.000.0023 in the amount of \$100, a reduction in 1000.30204.000.0023 in the amount of \$100, and, reduction in 1000.31700.000.0023 in the amount of \$100. Councilwoman Gudeman seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

### **OTHER DISCUSSION**

Councilwoman Hine provided legislative update handouts to the County Council for review.

Auditor Oesterreich requested funding for an Employee Appreciation Event in December. Councilwoman Gudeman made a motion to approve the Resolution Establishing the Employee Annual Employee Recognition Fund and Expenditure for the Council Council in the amount of \$1800. Councilman Black seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

### **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.

**SEPTEMBER 18, 2023**  
**STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL**

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Dave Pearman, President

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Kay Gudeman, Vice-President

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Todd Leinbach

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Norman (Bruce) Bennett

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Howard Bailey

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Anthony Black

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Cassandra Hine

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Rachel Oesterreich, Starke County Auditor