

**STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2023**

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Board of Commissioners and meet in Special Session at 6:00 PM, 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 6:00 PM.

CAPS/SOLAR DISCUSSION

Roberta Lee and Alisha Rios came before the Board of Commissioners to continue the discussion about solar in Starke County and the changes the CAPS group would like to see made. Roberta advised that she believes there is a misunderstanding regarding the proposed ordinance changes. She advised that the proposed changes were intended to be a stepping off point. To engage in a new conversation regarding solar. She advised that it has been said that most of the items being requested to be changed is already in the current solar ordinance. She said that there are similarities and in some places a word for word comparison can be made. She stated that rather than picking apart the current ordinance line by line the entire sections of a different counties solar ordinance had been suggested with finer details. She stated though that similar does not make them entirely the same. Roberta stated they have been told repeatedly that there are no future plans for more solar and there are not future plans for battery storage. However, they know that may not be true. She stated tonight is about the why and how and not whether or not it can be done. She stated in the ordinance that they presented they did place a cap in the ordinance itself. The suggested cap is 20 acres, which is 31 squares miles of solar panels. Roberta asked what questions the Commissioners have regarding their proposed changes.

Commissioner Chesak asked what counties they pulled their suggestions from. Roberta stated Kosciusko County, White County, Porter County, and Tippecanoe County. Commissioner Binkley expressed his displeasure in reopening the ordinance again. He explained they already have amended it once in 2022 and he does not want to do any more amendments. He stated that in his opinion the Farmers own the land and it is up to the land owner as far as if they want to proceed with solar. Roberta advised she understands that but she does not understand why we cannot come together as a county to satisfy everyone's needs. Commissioner Gourley advised he would like to get to the comments. Alisha stated that the meeting was not supposed to turn into what it has tonight by taking comments. The point of asking for the meeting was so that their group can meet with the Commissioners regarding the ordinance. Commissioner Gourley stated that the open-door law is so that they can gather the information and then make decisions based on all the information they have gathered to get the majority view in the county. Commissioner Chesak has looked through it several times but it is going to take more than one Commissioner to get it done.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The following individuals made public comment during the meeting. The full recording can be picked up in the Starke County Auditor's Office. Roberta Lee, Sandra Whitenack, John Wikman, Larry Wickert, Linda Bell, Jill Manges, Regan Rios, Connie Neiminger, Larry Wappel, Debbie Wappel, Just Jelinek, Matt Smileh, Bryan Fitzgerald, Dennis Bope, Margarita Bope, Kajer Ere, Lisa Dan, Jim Reif, Marcia Bedrock, Gery Welker, Daniel Straka, Phil Guba, Matt Danford, Mike Korous, Rachel Conner, and Mark Barlog.

After receiving public comment Commissioner Gourley explained that one of the issues that was brought up was that CAPS was the ones that wanted this discussion in the first place. He stated that this platform is what discussions look like in county government and it would be wrong of the Board of Commissioners to allow one group to take sole possession of the discussion time. It has to be uniform across the board. He advised that he is agnostic to the use of someone's property. He does not believe in legislation based off of aesthetics. He is committed to adhering to the open-door laws and that everyone has the opportunity to participate in the dialogs. He is pushing a person's right to do what will make the most out of what they have. Commissioner Gourley asked about the petition that was going around against solar. The CAPS groups advised they will get the Petition to the Board of Commissioners or at least how many signatures are currently on the petition. Commissioner Gourley advised that at this time he is not going to support the language that has been put in front of him.

Commissioner Binkley advised he supports the current Solar Ordinance until he sees something that will be dangerous for the community. Commissioner Chesak advised he wants to see Starke County strive but be cautious about certain things. Commissioner Chesak advised he is sitting neutral on this topic at this time.

1ST SOURCE INSURANCE – HEALTH INSURANCE REVIEW

Debbie Rykovich from 1st Source Insurance came before the Board of Commissioner to present the yearly health insurance review. She stated that initially Anthem came back with a 24.74% increase (from 2023) total cost \$2,143,280.64. 1st Source Insurance went to market and then received a quote from United Healthcare 10.91% increase for a total of \$1,905,731.28 and then PHP came in at 2.39% increase at \$1,759,297.12. So, they went back to Anthem and Anthem lowered their quote to 5.00% increase at \$1,804,063.68. The Board of Commissioners have taken this information under review and Mark asked for some other quote from Anthem with a higher deductible. This will be added to their November 6th, 2023 agenda.

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 7:57 PM.

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Charles Chesak, President

Mark Gourley, Vice-President

Don Binkley, Member

Rachel Oesterreich, Auditor and Secretary to
the Board of Commissioners