

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL
REGULAR JOINT SESSION MINUTES
MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2024**

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council at 4:00 PM in the Annex Building Meeting Room, Knox, Indiana, with Don Binkley, Charles Chesak, Dave Pearman, Anthony Black, Kay Gudeman, Howard Bailey, Todd Leinbach, Norman (Bruce) Bennett, and Cassandra Hine, present, and the following proceedings were held to wit:

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner President Don Binkley and Council President, Dave Pearman at 4:00 PM for the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council Regular Joint Session.

911 DISPATCHER WEEK

Attorney Schramm advised:

NATIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHER WEEK - April 14th-20th, 2024

Do you know what role a Dispatcher plays in public safety?

Starke County Sheriff's 911 Communications Center currently operates with 10 full time dispatchers and 1 part time dispatcher. Our dispatchers normal shift hours for days are 6a-6p and nights is 6p-6a to maintain 24/7 emergency response service.

911 Dispatchers bridge the gap between those in need and the help they require. Often called, the First, First Responders, we are the first person you may speak to on your worst day. 911 Dispatchers are the lifeline that connects the public with emergency services, and their expertise and dedication make them central to public safety.

Our dispatchers currently dispatch for all agencies throughout Starke County including, Starke County Sheriff's Office, Knox City PD, North Judson PD, Hamlet PD, 7 Volunteer Fire Departments and Starke County EMS. Starke County dispatchers also provide coordinating efforts to Lutheran Air, local utilities, and Hazmat as well as having frequent communication with surrounding counties and agencies. In 2023, Starke County Sheriff's 911 Communications Center received 23,085 calls for service.

Dispatchers are the calm and capable voices in times of chaos, guiding both callers and responders to ensure the best possible outcome during emergencies. Starke County Dispatchers are trained to be quick thinkers, effective communicators and maintaining the ability to stay composed during a crisis. These qualities play a pivotal role in ensuring a rapid and coordinated response to emergencies, ultimately saving lives and property.

Certifications include, 40 hr. Basic Telecommunicator course, CPR or T-CPR (telephone), EMD certified (Emergency Medical Dispatch), IDACS certified (Indiana Data and Communications System), NIMS (National Incident Management System) – IS-100, 200 and 700. For that, our Starke County Dispatchers are truly the heartbeat of Public Safety.

The Starke County Dispatchers have been honored with proclamations signed by the Governor of Indiana and Starke County Commissioners recognizing National Public Safety Dispatcher Week. Throughout the week, the Starke County Dispatchers are honored to receive gifts of appreciation from local businesses and individuals to express appreciation. If your organization would be interested in thanking these often forgotten, unsung heroes of Public Safety in any way, or donating items to be given out as prizes during our week's festivities, please contact Director Stacy Noonan (Ext 287) at 574-772-3771. Thank you in advance for all of your support.

EMA – MULTI HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN APPROVAL

Victoria Chessor, Starke County EMA Director came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council to get the final Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan Approved. Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan as presented. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

KNOX YOUTH CLUB

Marc Vendl, Starke County Youth Club Manager, came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council to give a Youth Club update. He advised the radiothon is coming up on May 3, 2024 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM CST. Individuals can call in pledges or submit pledges online.

ASSESSOR/UPDATE MOBILE HOMES

Michelle Schouten, Starke County Assessor, came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council to discuss mobile home legislative updates. She advised as you may or may not know, the Indiana legislature passed Senate Bill 183, in which a county council can enact an ordinance exempting personal property mobile homes from taxation. I wanted to discuss this with the council because I don't think it is a good idea. According to the report from the Legislative Services Agency Office of Fiscal and Management Analysis, the projected loss of tax dollars in Starke County would be \$95,944 for 2025 and \$98,506 for 2026. But putting the loss of tax dollars aside, it also would create an inequity in taxation for certain taxpayers. Starke County currently has 567 Personal Property Mobile Homes, and 987 Real Property Mobile/Manufactured Homes. If we exempt the personal property mobile homes there is an unfairness to those who have retired their titles to real estate and are no longer considered personal property. They are now being taxed simply because they took the time to do the retirement process. Also, there is a process (albeit a complicated one) in which someone can "un-retire" a title. If taxpayers who have retired their titles start doing this, it could result in further loss of tax dollars.

Assessor Schouten advised that she believes that this bill was proposed in response to complaints from the Treasurer's Association about the difficulties they have in collecting some of the tax dollars owed on personal property due to the transient nature of many mobile home property owners. In our county, our Treasurer has historically done a good job of sending the unpaid personal property taxes into demand status. At that point our county has a collection agency that goes after these lost/missing tax dollars at no charge to the county. (They charge their fees to the person from whom they are collecting the unpaid tax dollars.) I spoke with our Treasurer, Lauri, and she confirmed that if our county enacted an ordinance exempting personal property mobile homes, it would barely affect her workload if at all. And while it would likely slightly lessen the work load in my office, I don't feel it would actually save the office that much on our workload. This is especially true if people start the process to return their real property mobile homes to personal property status, which would greatly increase our workload while actually lowering the county's tax base. This lowering of the tax base then increases tax rates for everyone that is still required to pay taxes. In short, I really do not believe this is a viable solution to the problem that the legislature was trying to solve, and furthermore it is a really bad idea for our county. After further discussion Commissioner Chesak made a motion to recommend to the Planning Commission to look into creating a mobile home ordinance that requires the mobile home to be connected to real property.

SHERIFF – OPIOID PURCHASE REQUEST

Jack Rosa, Starke County Sheriff and April Wilhelm, Starke County Jail Matron came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council for an opioid purchase request. He stated that they would like to purchase equipment for their surveillance team, it is a total of \$56,367. Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the purchase request as present by the Starke County Sheriff to be paid from the Unrestricted Opioid Fund. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Sheriff Rosa advised that they have received two insurance checks for a vehicle that was wrecked. He advised the total of the checks were \$21,055.54. Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the vehicle purchase in the amount of \$21,055.54. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

TRAVEL REQUEST/TRANSFER REQUEST

Mandy Thomason, Starke County Recorder, came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council for a travel request and transfer request. Recorder Thomason advised that she would like permission to travel out of State to Iowa to the Fildar conference, she advised that this is where Fildar is located and the cost of the conference is free, they only pay for their hotel room. Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the travel request. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Councilwoman Hine made a motion to approve the transfer request as follows: An additional appropriation in 1000.20100.000.0004 in the amount of \$500. As well as a reduction in 1000.30201.000.0004 in the amount of \$500. Councilman Bennett seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Auditor Oesterreich advised Bernadette Manuel will be traveling to the Fidler conference as well and if they could approve her travel as well. Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the travel request. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

EMS- MONTHLY REPORT

Nancy Coad, Starke County EMS Clerk, came before the Board of Commissioners to present her monthly financial report. Commissioner Binkley advised from Attorney O'Hara they received \$918.49 as well as \$790.50. Jim Garner, Starke County EMS Director came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council to present his monthly report. He advised the following:

Operations: Currently we continue operating 4 out of 6 ambulances 1 at ALS level 100% with 2 operating ALS when ALS Staffing permits, along with full time Paramedic chase car staffed daily, 1 Paramedic/ EMS Director car running as a backup as well. 1 Transfer truck also available as an additional Ambulance when not doing transfers. Minimum of 1 ALS staff member at all times scheduled at Medic 3, Knox base, compared to February staffing is 2 or more ALS staffed ambulances 81% which is an increase of coverage from 73%.

Transfers: 37 As of last monthly report in March with 9 lift assists and 16 emergency calls.

Personnel: We have at this time 1 full-time openings for EMT's (11 on schedule) with 3 applications on waiting list, 2 new part-time drivers currently in EMT class hired and are doing well and past the midpoint. 1 new application received, 4 current full-time paramedics as well a 5th starting end of May as 3 paramedic full-time openings.

Training: 03/19/2024 Documentation

Upcoming 03/18 Stoke protocols

04/02 Autism

04/05 Hamilton transport vent training

Safety: Last injury reported was on 03/05/2024 Original chase care accident.

Ambulance Maintenance:

3308-North Judson M1 (2021 Ford Gas Vin:1FXDE4FN2MDC16274 Current mileage: 114591) In service, up to date

4725- Knox Base Medic 2 (2014 F450 Gas Vin: 1FDXE4FS8EDA90672 Current mileage 131627- In Service, up to date

4726- Knox Base M3 (2024 F350 Gas Vin: 1FDXE4FN1RDD21556 Current Mileage: 7951 In service, up to date

0514-Reserve (2015 Ford Diesel Vin:1GB6G5CL5F1268834 Current mileage: 214101) Reserve Unit, up to date

*0085 Reserve Base M5 (2013 Diesel Vin:1GB6G5CL4D1146446 Current mileage:209792) rear step replaced,

0084-Grovertown Base M5 (2012 Chevy Diesel Vin:1GB6G5CLXC1117256 Current Mileage: 129626) Currently in service.

4149- Knox base M-41(2015 Ford Explorer Vin:1FM5K8ARXFGB91482) Current Mileage 53122.

Explorer is currently and stocked as a functioning ALS non-transport vehicle as registered with state EMS and staffed by Shift Captains used as a Paramedic Chase Unit.

4747 EMS -1 (2019 Chevrolet Tahoe Vin: Current mileage: 75075 Directors car as well as fully stocked and state registered ALS non-transport Paramedic unit.

Base Maintenance: Medic 3 (Knox Base) has a roof leak. New door entry systems (key card entry) Still in progress awaiting estimates for install.

Grants: Awaiting response from 2 grants written for training and equipment purchase for \$5000 to assist in new upcoming trauma protocols

Denied on 3 of 4 Grant requests to purchase new Power load Stair chairs at \$18,000 each and total of \$72,000. As always searching for grants, donations have become part of a daily routine.

Donations: None for this reporting period.

PPE: The standing is good for most all personnel protective equipment.

KADE WAGNER – HIGHWAY ROAD INVENTORY REQUEST

Kade Wagner came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council to discuss a Highway Road Inventory Request. He explained where he is located and how the rear of his parcel connects to 800 E. which is an unfinished road currently owned by the Board of Commissioners. He would like to have this road finished. Commissioner Binkley advised that he did go out and look at the roadway but the only way they could make it into a county road is if he gave up some of his property to create a cul-de-sac. It was decided for the Highway Department to go out and measure the cul-de-sac and then it will be discussed further and that Kade will get a survey of the cul-de-sac portion that needs to be deeded off of his property.

FAIR BOARD – MATERIAL REQUEST

Councilman Pearman advised that the Fair Board is requesting grindings for the fairgrounds. He advised that we would normally charge for time and materials as we get the grindings themselves for free. After further discussion it was decided that the highway department will provide those materials to a 501C3 non-profit agency and the time and delivery will be reimbursed to the highway fund. Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the donation of the millings to the Fair Board. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. It was discussed to have an agreement in place in the future for these occurrences.

DWIGHT RYAN – DNR ISSUE KOONTZ LAKE

Dwight Ryan came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council to discuss the Koontz Lake park. He advised that there was activity by his peer recently and he called the DNR to discuss this. He advised he got a call back from the DNR and they stated they no longer have rights to the lake that only the people who live at the lakefront have right to the lake but not the public parkway. He advised that the DNR has moved the peers that sit on the roadway. He advised that he goes to court May 2nd over this issue. He wanted to advise the Board of Commissioners of the issues that are going on with Koontz Lake and the peers. Commissioner Binkley advised that there is nothing the Board of Commissioners can do with the DNR issues and he will have to further discuss this with the DNR. Attorney Schramm explained the DNR appeal process to Mr. Ryan. Mr. Ryan also discussed a tree issue he has at Koontz Lake in front of his house. Commissioner Binkley will have the Highway Foreman to look at the tree. Mr. Ryan advised the tree is at 7954 Tonti Dr., Koontz Lake.

JEROME SCHERF – PLANNING COMMISSION ISSUE

Jerome Scherf came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council to discuss a Planning Commission issue. He advised that he has a problem with the demolition of his home. Commissioner Binkley and Commissioner Chesak stated everything was clear and that the Planning Commission stated everything was cleaned up. Mr. Scherf went on to discuss things that have happened since 1970 when he originally tried to build a subdivision. He also discussed his troubles with the Planning Commission, Bass Lake Fire Department and the Knox Center Township Fire Department. Councilman Pearman discussed what was allowed to be burned and what is not allowed to be burned. Councilman Bailey advised he will talk to the Planning Commission about giving notice to people about what can be burned and what cannot be burned.

HIGHWAY MONTHLY REPORT

Rachel Oesterreich, Interim Highway Superintendent, came before the Board of Commissioners and Starke County Council to present the monthly report as follows:

Spring Operations

Spring operations are in full swing. Mother Nature has kept us busy with all the rain we have had. Below is a road that we had to close a few times; 900 E. between SR 10 and 625 S. This is an area that floods frequently so we will be looking into things we can do to prevent this in the future. We have been hauling in 11's for pug this year. We have also been patching in all areas. This week we will be working on our pugmill machine getting it ready to make the cold mix asphalt for the roads we want to pave this year. As long as everything runs smoothly our goal is to pave 20 miles this year. This is a significant increase from what has been done over the past few years. In other news, the 1-year fuel contract with Starke County Co-Op was put into place earlier this year. So far, we have saved money each month. We

just received a tanker load of diesel last week and we saved 30 cents a gallon compared to the cash market which was a savings of over \$2000.

Training

Purdue Asset Management April 29th & 30th – Purdue Road School Transportation Conference & Expo. At this training they will discuss Asset Management requirements, data collection, data analysis, pavement and bridge preservation, best construction practices, best fleet and equipment practices, lowering life cycle costs.

Bridges

Bridge 137 – CR 300 E over the Yellow River, just South of CR 50 N – Letting will be in 2024. NOFA Grant. I would like to especially thank Melba Shilling and what she does for our community. We would not have been able to move forward with this Bridge design without her.

Bridge 59 – CR 700 S over Bogus Run – Letting will be in 2027. NOFA Grant

Bridge Structural Completion – United Consultants are starting on Phase 1A of the Bridge Inspections. I have listed below the breakdown of phases and how much those phases cost.

Phase I (Oct. 2024): Full inspection of the county. 57 bridges with a full report. Will include a presentation to the commissioners early in 2025 once report is submitted.

Phase IA (Oct. 2025): Only inspect the bridges on the 12-month cycle, typically your bridges on the replacement list. 3 bridges in 2025. Also includes an underwater inspection on Bridge 137.

Phase II (Oct. 2026): Full inspection of the county. 57 bridges with a full report. Will include a presentation to the commissioners early in 2027 once report is submitted.

Phase IIA (Oct. 2027): Only inspect the bridges on the 12-month cycle, typically your bridges on the replacement list. 2 bridges expected in 2027. Also includes an underwater inspection on Bridge 137.

Community Crossings Grants

2023-02 CCMG Grant for Chip Seal Program. The project consists of a total of 15 miles which will include Toto Rd between Hwy 23 and County Line (1200 E). Also, 1150 E. between 225 S. and 625 S. Bids were opened for this on December 18th and the bid was awarded to Central Paving on January 2nd, 2024. This work will begin in the Spring of 2024.

2024-01 CCMG We have been approved for the CCMG grant this round. We have been approved for the full \$1.5 million. This will be used towards an HMA overlay on 600 N in certain areas from 600 E. to SR 23, 400 N from US 35 to 100 E., and an HMA overlay that was just built in Deer View Estates Subdivision (also know as Johnson Subdivision).

Culverts

We have been working on checking culverts all around Starke County. We have come up with the poorest of the poor in culverts. This list below was rated as very poor at this time and these are all 36” and above. We do not have the resources available to change all of these this year but these will be worked on for the next several years.

California

850 S 2000’ East of 400 E

625 S. 1000’ West of 850 E.

125 E. 2000’ South of 700 S.

450 S. 1000’ East of Range Rd.

Center

150 N 2600’ West of 600 E.

Jackson

500 N 2000’ East of Range Rd

600 N. 2600’ West of 300 E.

North Bend

750 S. 2300’ East of 1000 E.

Oregon

Suit Dr. 150’ East of 23

500 N. 1000’ West of 750 E.

500 N. 1700’ East of 1100 E.

Railroad

650 S 1350’ East of 1100 West

400 S. 700’ East of 900 W.

850 W. 2000’ South of Toto Rd.

250 S. Intersection of 725 W.
Washington
200 S. 2600' East of 700 E
200 S. 150' East of 700 E.
25 N. 750' East of 650 E.
(2) 100 N. 2600' West of 800 East
700 E. 2000' South of 100 N.
Wayne
300 W. 200' South of 700 S.
850 S. 1400' East of 600 W.
400 W. 1300' North of Arlington
500 S. Intersection of 400 W.
50 W 2000' North of 900 S.

Further discussion was held regarding the roads in the Next Era area and when the solar farms will start generating power.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the minutes from March 18th, 2024. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Councilwoman Gudeman made a motion to approve the minutes from March 18th, 2024. Councilman Black seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Councilman Pearman advised that they had the Title IV-E discussion at one of their recent meetings and the Judge is receptive to this idea so what the council has in front of them is a change in the salary ordinance reflecting a \$3000 increase in pay for the court employee who will be doing all the IV-E reporting for 2024. Councilman Pearman made a motion to update the 2024 salary ordinance to reflect the \$3000 increase in salary for the individual doing the reporting. Councilman Leinbach seconded the motion. Councilwoman Hine advised she would like to know how much time it is going to take to do the reporting before the salary ordinance is updated. Councilman Pearman advised there is a motion and a second on the floor. The vote was 5 ayes and 1 nay by Councilwoman Hine.

Councilman Leinbach asked what is going on with the Starke County Economic Development Foundation. Councilman Pearman advised that there are a lot of concerns from the Commissioner on the Board and the two Council members who sit on the Board. An application that the SCEDF received for the Director position was rescinded. Commissioner Binkley asked if the Lead Track per car costs was updated. Councilman Pearman advised it has not been yet. He also advised that there is a struggle right now getting people to be at the office to answer phones. He stated that they do have one applicant and they will interview her. Further discussion was held regarding the EDIT tax and how the EDIT/LIT tax could be restructured. Councilman Pearman suggested having an executive session with the Starke County Council, Board of Commissioners, and the Executive Board of the Economic Development Foundation.

Discussion was held regarding the City Court and its functions. Councilwoman Hine advised that she would like to look into something other than City Court using the Sheriff's Department in which all taxpayers pay for the Sheriff's Department building but they do not get to vote on its City Court elected officials. Auditor Oesterreich stated she needs two park board members. It can be two Democrats or one Democrat and one Republican. Councilman Pearman acknowledged the need for the Park Board members and asked Auditor Oesterreich to set up an executive session with the Council, Commissioners, and Executive Board of the SCEDF on Monday, April 22nd at 9:00 AM.

AUDITOR BUSINESS

Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the minutes for April 1st, 2024. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the vendor claims docket for a total in the amount of \$193,985.71. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes. Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the payroll claims in the amount of \$314,987.88 including deductions in the amount of \$84,325.43 for pay period ending 03/30/2024 and payroll date of 04/05/2024. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

Commissioner Chesak made a motion to approve the Interlocal Agreement as presented for the Stellar Pathways between Starke County Government, Town of North Judson, City of Knox, and the Town of Hamlet. Commissioner Binkley seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

With no other business or public comment to come before the Starke County Council, Councilman Bennett made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:29 PM. Commissioner Chesak seconded the motion and the motion was approved with all ayes.

**MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2024
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

Don Binkley, President

Charles Chesak, Vice-President

N/A

Mark Gourley, Member

Rachel Oesterreich, Starke County Auditor
& Secretary to Board of Commissioners

**MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2024
STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL**

Dave Pearman, President

Todd Leinbach, Vice-President

Kay Gudeman

Norman (Bruce) Bennett

Howard Bailey

Anthony Black

Cassandra Hine

Rachel Oesterreich, Starke County Auditor