

JOINT Council-Commissioner Minutes

March 12, 2025

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Board of Commissioners and the Starke County Council and meet in special session at 1:00 p.m. in the Annex meeting room, Knox, Indiana, with Mike VanDeMark, Howard Bailey and Cassandra Hine absent (Mike VanDeMark on zoom) and the following proceedings were held to wit:

Charles Chesak called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.

IN RE: INSURANCE ON COUNTY VEHICLES, SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND SAFETY TRAINING

Mark Ennis and Connor Cox with Bliss McKnight and Carrie Block with 1st Choice insurance appeared before the boards to discuss county owned vehicles with non-employee passengers, safety committees and safety training.

Don Binkley asked are non-employee passengers in county vehicles going to cost the county more money? Connor Cox said no, just increases our risk.

Dave Pearman asked if other counties have riders regarding this.

Connor Cox stated that if a driver is at fault it is the county's responsibility for injuries, and due to the loss history, the premiums will go up.

Dave Pearman brought up safety meetings and if they would help reduce the premiums. He also asked if we had any non-employee claims. Carrie Block and Mark Ennis both said no.

It was stated that sometimes the planning commission might have a non-employee when going to an inspection, or if another employee had business to take care of with a non-employee. Todd Leinbach said that anyone doing business with a board member, employee, etc. should be covered.

State employees have their own worker's comp. if riding with any county employee.

Todd asked if all vehicles stayed here, not allowed to be taken home, and if GPS is installed to monitor speeds, etc., would that lower our premiums? Carrie stated that all things promoting safety would be considered at renewal time.

Don Binkley stated, regarding take home vehicles, should we stop them from taking their kids to school, etc., and would that make a difference? Connor stated he has seen this done a lot of different ways, like in emergencies there should NOT be any non-employees allowed.

Sheriff's vehicles are all take home and they are allowed to have family members in their county vehicles, but it does increase our liability which could cause an increased premium.

Dave Pearman asked what other counties do about Sheriff's vehicles leaving the county. Mark Ennis stated that most counties do not allow the vehicles out of the county unless it is on county business.

Carrie Block reported that we have had a lot of auto claims recently. Some are our fault and some were not, but even if they weren't our fault, it can impact our premium.

Mark Ennis discussed more safety training meetings and stated that they had a lot of resources. He would like to see some things scheduled, and most importantly, right now, driving training.

Dave Pearman said that highway, EMS and EMA can be called out at all hours due to emergencies and need their vehicles at home with them. He further stated that mileage should be reported.

Bruce Bennett stated that whenever there is an accident, people always go to the person they think has the deepest pockets. He asked if there is something we can do to track driving habits. Mark Ennis stated that putting GPS in all the vehicles would help. Don Binkley suggested cameras.

Rachel Oesterreich, Highway Superintendent, stated that there is a policy for the highway regarding take home vehicles. They have cameras, and it only detects things like speed, phone use, sudden stops, etc. and costs \$1800 a month.

Carrie Block stated that GPS has been helpful regarding claims. Mark Ennis stated that sometimes the county is accused of rocks falling off trucks causing broken windshields, but with GPS they can prove where their vehicles were at the time.

Todd Leinbach stated that some vehicles don't need to be taken home and that it is just wasting fuel, as those offices don't get called out.

Mark Ennis reminded the county that there is no cost for their training.

Todd Leinbach asked about a smart card. He stated that it lists hazards that you might face and what you are going to do to protect yourself. You are supposed to do this every day. It can be done on a smart phone, a computer or a laptop.

Dave Pearman stated that we need to have safety checklists posted everywhere. Rachel Oesterreich stated that they do at the highway.

Bruce Bennett asked if our highway drivers did a walk around to check out their vehicles. Rachel stated that they do this every evening, checking it off, signing it and turning it in.

Todd Leinbach wants a "hands free" policy. No phones while driving as it is against the law.

Jim Garner, EMS Director, asked about getting driver's records. Mark Ennis stated that they can be gotten from the License Branch.

Carrie Block stated that having policies on seat belt use and hands free-no phones can all be discussed and resolved in a safety committee meeting and training session. She further stated that the county needs to have a strong safety committee and alternate-one month a committee meeting and the next month, safety training. She stated that our worker's comp was reduced by almost half when the safety trainings started in the past.

Todd Leinbach stated that safety is also more than just driving--offices need it as well. Such as leaving file cabinet drawers open, etc.

Bill Crase said that they kept up with losses when they had safety committee meetings and that they had training sessions based on the losses.

Frank Lynch stated that he remembered having safety training in 2023.

Carrie Block stated that in 2024, safety meetings kept getting canceled.

Don Binkley wants me to send out to Department Heads regarding a safety committee and safety training needs.

Mark Ennis submitted a list of training resources available. Carrie Block stated that they are happy to help with any of these trainings.

Dave Pearman stated that he remembered when Bill Crase headed the safety committee meetings. Dave asked about deer hits and what could be done to avoid them. Mark Ennis stated we could be rich if we could figure that out. Carrie Block further stated that deer hits are comprehensive, but it still affects the premiums and it goes against our losses, and that includes windshields.

Connor Cox stated that Illinois and Indiana are paying 80% more claims on municipal vehicles in 2023 and 2024.

Dave Pearman asked if we have a risk of going to an exchange for Worker's Comp. losses. Carrie Block stated that the Worker's Comp. looks pretty good right now, and premiums could reflect that.

Dave Pearman asked about small losses. Carrie stated that we have \$1,000 deductible and anything less could just be fixed and not reported to the insurance unless it involves other people's injuries, property or vehicle. Then it needs to be reported.

Carrie Block said they want all claims reported immediately and then investigated. Mark Ennis stated that it causes a potential problem with mitigation if it is not reported.

Bruce Bennett stated that he doesn't want property damage to others ignored.

Mark Ennis stated that the seat belts and no phone policy created would have to be signed by the employees. Dave Pearman asked if the county would still be liable if they didn't abide by the policy. Mark said that they would be.

Dave Pearman and Bruce Bennett asked if there was anything we could do to reduce premiums. Mark Ennis stated that implementing policy procedures and enforcing the policies and having safety training could, but it wouldn't happen overnight.

Dave Pearman stated that if we keep track of where the most deer hits are so signs could be put up, that might help.

Carrie Block and Mark Ennis will both be at the department head meeting on April 3rd.

Rachel Oesterreich stated that in the past all department heads, one commissioner and one council person were on the safety committee. The commissioners and the council both want to be involved, they just need to take turns in order to avoid a quorum. Bill Crase will take charge and keep the Auditor informed.

Jim Garner stated that he gets reports from the EMS vehicles' cameras every morning.

Don Binkley moved to approve the joint meeting minutes of March 7, 2025, seconded by Charles Chesak with 2 ayes.

The council did not have a quorum, but those who were present at said meeting signed the minutes.

There being no further business to come before the board Don Binkley moved to adjourn seconded by Charles Chesak with 2 ayes.

March 12, 2025 Joint meeting

COUNTY COUNCIL

Todd Leinbach, President

Bruce Bennett, Vice President

Kay Gudeman

David Pearman

ABSENT
Howard Bailey

Bill Crase

ABSENT
Cassandra Hein

Michaelene J. Houston, Auditor and
Secretary to the County Council

March 12, 2025 Joint meeting (cont.)

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Charles Chesak, President

ABSENT (on zoom)
Mike VanDeMark, Vice President

Don Binkley

Michaelene J. Houston, Auditor and
Secretary to the Commissioners