

Starke County Plan Commission Minutes
Regular Meeting and Public Hearing
March 12, 2025

- ❖ **Call to Order** –President Lawrence called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.
- ❖ **Pledge of Allegiance** - Led by President Lawrence
- ❖ **Roll Call:** Matt Lawrence, president and citizen member; Mark Allen, vice-president, trustee; Howard Bailey, councilman; Phil Woolery, extension educator; Mike VanDeMark, commissioner; Gwen Rentz, Surveyor (Absent); Timothy Bookwalter, commission counsel; Wallace (Boz) Williams, building commissioner; Robby Blodgett, code enforcement officer; and Mary Beever, administrator. There were 4 visitors present.
- ❖ **Approval of the minutes-**
 - February 12, 2025 Tech. Comm. Mtg.
 - Member Woolery made a motion to approve the minutes as written seconded by Vice-Chairperson Allen.
 - Motion carried 6-0.
 - February 12, 2025 Plan Comm. Mtg.
 - Member VanDeMark made a motion to approve the minutes as written seconded by Member Woolery.
 - Motion carried 6-0.
- ❖ **New/Old Business**
 - Atty. Bookwalter’s contract
 - The board discussed with Atty. Bookwalter the terms of his contract, and Atty. Bookwalter agreed that he’d be willing to take the position for the same agreed upon amount that Atty. Schramm had previously agreed to.
 - Member VanDeMark made a motion to approve Atty. Bookwalter’s contract. Vice-President Allen seconded that motion.
 - Motion carried 6-0.
 - BZA Plan. Comm. Appt.
 - P.C. Admin. Beever discussed with the board the information that was sent from the SBOA regarding the issue of Vice-President Allen’s appointment to the BZA with him also being a Trustee. Member Allen added that from the information that they sent there is no true guideline. He went on to state that he is township elected and the township funds are what he’s paid out of and not the county. Atty. Bookwalter stated that he also went over it and spoke with County Atty. Schramm as well regarding the matter. He went on to add that as long as the funds don’t come out of the county general fund for the township then he doesn’t see an issue with it. Member Bailey asked if Vice-President Allen could then stay on. Vice-President Allen stated that is what the Attorney General said, and that he’d like to stay on. He went on to add that he was put on the board initially due to his location in the county to Koontz lake and his knowledge of living in the area over the years.
 - Member Bailey made a motion that the planning commission re-appoint member Allen to the Board of Zoning Appeals again.
 - P.C. Admin. Beever stated he doesn’t need re-appointed because he was never taken off. She went on to state that it just needed cleared up and they wanted to be sure. She went on to state that her and Atty. Schramm went through every member on the board to make sure everyone is where they need to be.
 - Member Lee stated that there are only two new members on the BZA and they are going to need his help. Vice-President Allen added that he’d be more than happy to help and share any information he can with them. He went on to state that he hopes that everyone will work together on that board.
 - Tech Comm. Appt.
 - P.C. Admin. Beever stated that we will need another volunteer for the Tech. Committee. Vice-Chairperson Allen asked if that is Isaiah’s spot. P.C. Admin. Beever responded yes. Vice-Chairperson Allen stated that he has no interest doing it because it’s during the day and he wouldn’t be able to do it. Member Lee stated that all she

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knows about the tech committee is the solar stuff and asked if there is more to it than that. Member Woolery answered yes and went on to state that it's a place to have discussions, and develop ordinances to bring back to the planning commission. Member Lee asked how often they meet. P.C. Admin. Beever stated that with solar it's been more frequently. She added that also in the solar ordinance it requires the Tech. Comm. to review the engineer's findings. Member Lee went on to state that she'd be willing to do it. P.C. Admin. Beever stated that most of the meetings for it happen during the day. Member Lee stated she has that flexibility and she'd be open to it if nobody else wants it.

- Member VanDeMark made a motion to appoint Roberta Lee to the Technical Advisory Committee. Vice-President Allen seconded that motion.
 - Motion carried 6-0.
- Member VanDeMark asked if that ends at the end of the year or how it works. Vice-President Allen stated it's every year.

➤ Electronic Meetings ordinance

- P.C. Admin. Beever stated that at the previous meeting the board instructed her to take the city of Knox's Electronic Meeting ordinance that Atty. Schramm had helped them prepare and to modify it for the Planning Commission Board and BZA. She went on to add that they had agreed as well at that meeting that they wanted the members to be present at the meetings in order to vote and to be able to be paid. She added that hopefully they can review this and then have the public hearing next month. There was discussion on an e-mail of some possible changes that Member Lee brought up to the board regarding section 4a. There was discussion regarding the rules of attendance and voting while attending meetings electronically.
- Member VanDeMark made a motion to add reference to the rules of procedure to the electronic meeting ordinance. Seconded by Member Lee.
 - Motion carried 6-0.
- There was discussion on whether to have the public hearing on the electronic meeting ordinance scheduled for the following month. The board agreed that a public hearing should go forward the following month. The board furthered discussed adding a reference to the rules and procedure regarding attendance with Atty. Bookwalter.

➤ CSES/BESS Ordinance Discussion

- The board discussed why the last versions of the ordinance failed in January. There was discussion regarding the Keramida firm proposal and the steps to get approval for funding through the commissioners and council. Member VanDeMark volunteered to reach out to Keramida to possibly have them come to a meeting and go over their proposal with the board to show what all they can provide. Member Lee brought that the commissioners had mentioned possibly putting together some type of committee from the public. Member VanDeMark asked if Member Bailey would possibly approach the council on seeing if this is something they would even entertain paying for. Member Bailey agreed to talk to the council president about it and getting on the agenda for it. P.C. Admin. Beever volunteered to ask the auditor's office to put it on the agenda for Member Bailey. There was also discussion on board members could share concepts with each other with out having to set up a meeting each time legally and whether or not information could be shared electronically. Atty. Bookwalter advised them that one or two members can meet up anytime, as long as they don't have a quorum, he added that they can share information with the entire board via e-mail as long as they are not making any decisions that way. P.C. Admin. Beever added that she's had board members send her things to share with the entire board as well over e-mail. There was discussion on whether the board could send her suggestions to then compile them for the next meeting. P.C. Admin. Beever stated that is what a Tech. Comm. Mtg. is for and suggested that if they wanted to compile

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their ideas they do it through the Tech. Comm. Mtg. There was discussion regarding how the Tech. Comm. Mtg. process works.

- Plotter expense
 - P.C. Admin. Beever explained that there is a large format printer device that is shared between the Planning Commission, Recorder's office, and the Surveyor's office. She went on to discuss with them that the commissioner's paid for it for the first year and that she'd like to use funds from the planning commission penalty fund to pay for the planning commission portion of the bill.
 - Member Woolery made a motion to use the planning commission penalty fund to pay for the planning commission portion of the plotter expense. Member Lee seconded that motion.
 - Motion carried 6-0.
- Quotes for devices.
 - P.C. Admin. Beever discussed with the board about possibly getting tablet devices for the board members to use at the meetings instead of their physical binders. She explained that she got some quotes from IT that she included for them to review. The board reviewed and discussed the quotes for the devices. There was discussion to look into pricing from Amazon on possibly getting a better price, the number of tablets needed, and possibly approving a budgetary amount that wouldn't exceed a certain amount. Member Lee brought up and discussed looking into possibly seeing if the devices that were bought for the county council could be repurposed. The board decided that they would prefer one of the Samsung tablets.
 - Member VanDeMark made a motion to approve P.C. Admin. Beever going before the Commissioner's and Council for approval to buy the tablets. Vice-President Allen seconded the motion.
 - Motion carried 6-0.
- ❖ Code Enforcement Officer report
 - Case 324 – Jerry Tolson, E.P.N. ordinance violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that they are still making monthly payments
 - P.C. Admin. Beever informed the board that she was recently informed the owner had passed away. She went on to state that were she looks up the property it comes back with multiple owners on it. She added that with the death she's unsure if the payments will continue or not.
 - Case 393 - Joshua Whitfield, E.P.N. ordinance violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated she has to send the new attorney the paperwork on it.
 - Case 220 - Joseph Misch, E.P.N. ordinance violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated she has to send the new attorney the paperwork on it.
 - Case 543- David & Jenny Richert, RV violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that the case is closed.
 - Case 521 – Robert Hurt, RV violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that the case is closed.
 - Case 527- Shelia Pendersen, RV violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that the case is closed and they are waiting for the weather to get better to remove the RV.
 - Case 524- Norine Mejean, E.P.N. ordinance violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that they are actively cleaning it up and the case is closed now.
 - Case 522 – Rex Edel, semi-trailer violation and E.P.N. ordinance violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that he removed the shipping container and RV but the case is still pending for him to clean up some of the trash out there.
 - Case 462- RV violation and E.P.N. ordinance violation Steven Reinholt, Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that there is a lot of junk and debris on the property but he is still living in the RV so the next step will be to go to the attorney as well.

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- Case 515- Robert Reed, E.P.N. ordinance violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that this case is closed.
- Case 516 – Carolyn Balchunas, RV violation, Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated this case is closed.
- Case 539 – Alvaro Mendez, failure to obtain a permit violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated there was a complaint of no permit and they did come in and get a permit so the case is closed.
- Case 525 – Freedom Mortgage Corp. E.P.N. ordinance violation Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that this case is closed
- Case 523 – Bradley Ross semi- trailer violation complaint Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated this was a complaint of semi-van trailers and all were plated and on wheels and this case is closed.
- Case 534 – Edgar Hernandez semi- trailer violation complaint Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated this was a complaint of semi-van trailers and all were plated and on wheels and this case is closed.
- Case 532 – Shirley Sitek E.P.N. ordinance complaint Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated she talked with the owner and the owner stated she made the squatters leave and the property is for sale and the case is now closed.
- Case 492 - Dorthy Nelson RV ordinance complaint Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that the owner agreed that when the family members come to stay in it that they will get a temporary RV permit and that they got plates for it and the case is now closed.
- Case 531- Crystal Darling E.P.N. ordinance complaint Code Enforcement Officer Blodgett stated that she sent out a reminder that there is no burning of trash on the property and the case is now closed.
- Case 512 - Greg Wireman 4104 S SR 39 North Judson, IN 46366
 - P.C. Admin. Beever explained to the board that she gave them a copy of the letter that she sent out requesting him to attend a meeting. Member Lee asked what particularly they are needing him to come to a meeting for, if it was in regards to the trucking company, or the other issues like the storage container. P.C. Admin. Beever responded they are needing to discuss all of it. There board discussed their options in regard to if the owner of the property does not attend a meeting, and what constitutes a business. There was discussion pertaining to the zoning of the property and its location. P.C. Admin. Beever added that the property is zoned AG. The board discussed as to if parking trucks on a property would constitute a business or not, that there are no customers actually coming there to his property, and the civil problems between the neighbors. Member VanDeMark mentioned to Atty. Bookwalter looking into possibly an ordinance that defines a business better and seeing possibly what other counties have come up with.
- Case 357 –Anthony Joseph Magiera 9780 E. 500 N. Grovertown, IN 46531
 - P.C. Admin. Beever explained that she included the unsafe letter that was sent out on February 28, 2025 that gives him 60 days to demolish things. Member VanDeMark stated that really in the 60 days there really isn't anything they can do.
- Case 471 – Harshreel LLC 2340 E US 30 Hamlet, IN 46532- *Economy Inn*
 - P.C. Admin. Beever explained that she included the unsafe letter that was sent out on February 28, 2025 that gives him 60 days to demolish and that we are waiting on that one too.

❖ **New/Old Business**

- P.C. Admin. Beever brought up the Thomas DeCola properties and asked them since there is an attorney now for the board what they would like to do because his time frame has lapsed to demolish the buildings and clean up the properties from the public hearing in February 2024. The board discussed the properties and the locations of them with Atty. Bookwalter. There was discussion as well of the combination of several of the properties. The board then discussed their next steps with these properties with Atty. Bookwalter. P.C. Admin. Beever advised the board and Atty. Bookwalter a motion was made back on February 14, 2024 that they were wanting to put a five thousand dollar

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fine on each property along with the seven-hundred-dollar administrative fee if he failed to clean them up with-in the allotted time frame. Atty. Bookwalter added that the next step would be to issue the fine short of taking him to court.

- Member Lee asked if there are any training funds for the planning commission members. P.C. Admin. Beever responded that there is a training fund but it's not for board members. Member Lee then brought up a discussion regarding a link that she sent out to everyone for some training through Purdue about a virtual class that is being offered on planning and whether or not anyone was interested in it and or if that is something that is typically done or not. The board discussed the class, the cost of the class, how to possibly pay for it, and to have Member Lee attend it.
- Member VanDeMark made a motion for \$200.00 for Member Lee to take the training class with Purdue per her request. Motion was seconded by Member Bailey.
 - Motion carried 6-0.

❖ **End of the month**

- Board reviewed the reports from February 2025

❖ **Next Scheduled Meeting-**

- The next scheduled Planning Commission Meeting will be Wednesday, April 9, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.

❖ **Additional Comments**

- Audience Member Tom Busch asked about pier permits and whether they'd be required this year and what was going on with it. P.C. Admin. Beever responded it was put on the back burner with everything going on with solar and there will not be anything required this year. Member Bailey added that it was something going on with the DNR. Member Lee asked if it's something that is being held off for the rest of this year. P.C. Admin. Beever responded that in her opinion that it is something that should probably be brought back up in the next few months for the following year, she went on to explain that if they do put something into effect requiring a permit for piers then it needs to go into effect at the first of the year due to people putting their piers into the water as soon it gets nice enough out to so. The board discussed inspection of the piers and whether or not this is something really required or not.
- Audience member Kline and representative from Doral asked if they were still thinking about having some sort of public advisory group of citizens for the solar ordinance input and whether or not they were going to get a consultant on board as well with that group. He went on to add that they would like to have possibly one of their farmers or landowners be part of that. Member VanDeMark agreed those are great ideas and informed him that is a ways out still, and the board still needs to get there traction on it first. Audience member Kline extended an offer out to the board come and visit anytime.
- Audience member Barlog asked if the board if they go paperless if the electronic device can write notes. P.C. Admin. Beever added that the board may bring their own notebooks still to take notes on and Member VanDeMark added most devices have capabilities to take notes on them as well.

❖ **Adjournment-**

- With no further business,
 - Vice-President Allen made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Member Woolery.
 - Motion carried 6-0.

This meeting was recorded and will be on file in the Starke County Plan Commission Office.

Unless stated otherwise all Plan Commission meetings will be held on the second Wednesday of every month at 5:30 p.m. with the Board of Zoning Appeal meeting on the same night the latter of 6:30 p.m. or the conclusion of the Plan Commission meeting.

❖ **Approval of the minutes at the April 9, 2025 meeting**

- Member Rentz made a motion to accept the minutes from the March 12, 2025 meeting as written, seconded by Member Lee.
 - Motion carried 6-0.

Prepared by:

Mary W. J. Beever

Planning Commission Administrator/Floodplain Admin.