

STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL MINUTES

5-19-25

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Council and meet at 6:00 PM in the Annex Building #1 meeting room, Knox, Indiana, with Dave Pearman on zoom and Commissioners Mike VanDeMark and Don Binkley in attendance and the following proceedings were held to Wit:

IN RE: TOTAL RESPONSE DISPATCH SOFTWARE FOR E-911

Stacey Noonan submitted 3 quotes for the Total Response Dispatch Software. Becca Hardel informed the council on the current system. The commissioners approved the quote for \$57,799 from Caliber with a yearly maintenance fee of \$7,289. This was also the system that Stacey preferred. Cassandra Hine moved to approve contingent on commissioner approval seconded by Kay Gudeman with 6 ayes.

IN RE: STARKE COUNTY YOUTH CLUB

Mark Vendl with the Starke County Youth Club submitted the shortfall of what is not covered by grants. Their radiothon brought in \$47,000. The commissioners approved \$10,000. Bruce Bennett moved to approve the \$10,000 seconded by Bill Crase with 6 ayes.

IN RE: TEXT ALERTS

Victoria Chessor, EMA Director, presented an update on Text my Gov text alerts for emergencies. She got the company to reduce the cost from \$6,500 to \$4,500 with a \$500 installation fee. Todd Leinbach wants to know if it has to be a 3-year contract. Tori stated that they were firm on the 3-year contract. She also reported that there is no change in services due to the reduced cost, but in order to get the reduced cost it needs approved by May 29.

Mike VanDeMark stated that they have had questions on what EMA does, and this is a step forward in that direction. We need to let her bolster what EMA does in the county.

It was asked if it was going to send alerts for every little thing and was told it is only for emergencies but other things could be added if they wanted.

Tori stated that they will help her with getting people set up and answering questions. She stated that personally she would recommend emergencies only. It could include emergency road closures if they want.

There was discussion on what it would cover and what should be included. Bill Crase moved to approve with \$5,000 for the first year and \$4,500 for the next 2 years out of Cum. Cap. Seconded by Bruce Bennett with 6 ayes.

IN RE: PUBLIC HEARING OF ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATION ORDINANCE #10 OF 2025

Cassandra Hine moved to open the hearing for public comment seconded by Kay Gudeman with 6 ayes.

Todd Leinbach read the requests. Deb Wappel asked if patrol car computers was an allowable expense out of solar and was told by Justin Schramm, County Attorney, that it is allowable.

Kay Gudeman moved to close the public hearing seconded by Howard Bailey with 6 ayes.

Kay Gudeman moved to approve all the additional appropriations seconded by Cassandra Hine with 6 ayes.

IN RE: JOINT MEETING MINUTES FROM APRIL 28, 2025

Bruce Bennett moved to approve seconded by Bill Crase with 6 ayes.

IN RE: PUBLIC COMMENTS

Todd Leinbach opened the meeting for public comment stating that each person only had one minute.

Deb Wappel asked why the EDA for Dunns Bridge was never acted upon. Todd Leinbach moved to not have a hearing. Motion died for lack of a second.

Dave Pearman stated we have not had a revised EDA submitted and would like Justin Schramm, County Attorney, to contact their attorney.

Deb stated and repeated several times that we are losing a \$1,000,000 by not acting upon this. Todd told her she had her one minute.

Dave Pearman would like a revised EDA submitted and have Justin look into it as it will help the tax rate. We'll get the benefit of all the revenue.

Bruce Bennett asked if it would increase the taxable property, helping the taxpayers.

There was not a study done for Next Era, but from other studies done it is more economical to go with an EDA.

Todd asked Justin if two EDAs came in and Justin said that he thought so. One was for the project and one was for battery storage. Todd stated that only one permit was issued.

Todd stopped all comments from Deb Wappel as she kept bringing up her previous comments and she had already had her one minute.

There was much discussion on the EDA for Next Era (Dunns Bridge). It was said that the offset is better with the EDA than just letting the taxes fly.

Cassandra would like them to come back to a meeting.

Howard stated that we can spend solar money at the council's discretion without state approval, but feels the money should be spent carefully. He is not in favor of spending all of it, but putting some in a perpetual fund for later use. He also would like to see a better line of communication with them and he would like a new clean EDA.

Todd stated that just because we did one EDA doesn't mean we have to continue doing them. He further stated that they would need to come back to the commissioners first. Dave Pearman stated that EDAs are the responsibility of the fiscal body. He further stated that there is a timeline because they are getting ready to start and once they start they can't get an EDA.

Justin stated that maybe an independent attorney would better serve in this instance instead of the county attorney, but he is willing to do it if they want him to do it.

Bruce would like to see in black and white how it would affect all taxpayers.

There was a lot more discussion on this.

Todd brought up that two EDAs were submitted but only one permit was issued and there is only one project. He feels something isn't right. Justin said that he remembers two EDAs and that he reviewed them. Todd stated that we probably need a new one submitted because there is only one project and one permit.

Cassandra said that there is a court case on whether solar panels qualify for EDAs and there hasn't been a decision made.

Todd said that Next Era needs to come before them and explain why there are 2 EDAs for only one project and one permit.

Dave would like them to engage with us regarding a new EDA, because if they start construction in July it will be too late.

Bruce would like to know how this will impact taxpayers if we don't approve the EDA.

Mike VanDeMark talked about the tax rates in Marshall County being affected by the Union Twp. taxes due to the homes on Lake Maxinkuckee in Culver which lowered the tax rates for the rest of the county.

Dave feels we need to take a hard look and study this.

Todd says to have them come back to discuss this.

Cassandra has a company in mind to do a study. Justin Schramm, County Attorney, found a company before and he was asked to reach out to them.

Bruce will not vote on an EDA until he knows the impact.

Sandy Bennett said maybe use the same company that did Hoosier Solar's study, and Cassandra stated that they were not impartial. She would like a person doing the study to be approved by all the council not just one or two. They should be independent and impartial.

IN RE: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

David Sinn with the Park Board submitted a conflict of interest statement for approval by the council. He stated that Johnston Landscape Services could be used by the Park Board and Lakeside Design for a fundraiser. Bruce Bennett moved to approve seconded by Howard Bailey with 6 ayes and with the stipulation that David would have to abstain from voting on these matters.

There being no further business to come before the board, Bill Crase moved to adjourn seconded by Kay Gudeman with 6 ayes.

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Todd Leinbach, President

Bruce Bennett, Vice-President

Kay Gudeman

Via Zoom

Dave Pearman

Howard Bailey

Bill Crase

Cassandra Hine

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