

STARKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

7-7-2025

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Commissioners and meet in regular session in the meeting room of the Starke County Annex #1, Knox, IN at 5:00 PM, with all members present and the following proceedings were held to wit:

IN RE: WABASH VALLEY POWER

Jessica Watson with Wabash Valley Power submitted the agreement made for crop damages. She submitted the check per the agreement.

IN RE: CALIFORNIA TOWNSHIP

Shari Bartoli, California Twp. Trustee, wanted speed bumps on CR 210. The commissioners stated they are willing to put up a radar sign but not speed bumps. Shari requested that patrolmen come around a couple of times a week to catch the speeders.

Shari informed the commissioners that they decided to wait on the pier being moved and will keep using the slip at the beach. She asked if a little piece of the property easement could be deeded to them to use for 1st responders or at least to lease it to them. They would like it to be gated. The commissioners are not in favor of closing off the easement. Mike VanDeMark would like a sketch of what the length and width needed would be and what kind of pier-specs and location. Tom Bush with the Park Board asked if they would need a permit with the DNR.

IN RE: PADDED CELL INSTALLATION AT THE JAIL

Austin Fletcher and Nathan Caudill reported that the 2nd padded cell that was supposed to be at the jail was never finished as a padded cell. They are requesting permission to have this completed using CEDIT-special jail funds. He submitted quotes for the job.

They would like the 2 cells to be identical so there can't be cause for complaint as to why this person was put in one cell and another in the other. The quotes are fairly close.

Mike VanDeMark asked if they had any feedback on the companies. They said that Marathon did the 1st one and he has gotten positive feedback on them. They prefer Marathon to the other companies as well.

Marathon's quote is \$28,970 with a 9.25% discount if paid in full upon the signing of the contract. Mike wants to know if we could get the discount if ½ was paid down and the rest paid upon completion. Nathan doesn't think they will but he is going to try.

Don Binkley wants to know when they can start and when they would be finished.

Mike VanDeMark moved to approve Marathon pending a down payment and in full on completion and the negotiation of the discount seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes.

Don Binkley moved to approve changing the window in the current padded cell at a cost of \$960 out of CEDIT-special jail seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.

IN RE: NORTH BEND TWP. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Lynn Vessley, North Bend Twp. Trustee, is interested in doing a Capital Improvement Plan. She has very little paperwork on the cemeteries and the only thing done to the cemeteries in the last 30 years is mowing. She would like the plan in order to update the cemeteries. She has been diligent in looking things up. She has sold 2 lots, but is not sure if someone is already buried there. There is very little paperwork on the cemeteries.

She needs approval from the commissioners to proceed with the plan. Then it will go before her board and then the state for final approval. Mike VanDeMark moved to table seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes. It is to be put on the next agenda.

IN RE: EMS

Jim Garner, EMS Director, wants to sell an old ambulance through Gov. Deals. The money would go back into his maintenance fund. Mike VanDeMark moved to approve seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes.

IN RE: VENDOR CLAIMS

Don Binkley moved to approve the vendor claims excluding the Clevenger Attorney claim as they want to know why it is so high. The motion was seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.

One of Rachel Oesterreich's highway claims was also questioned as to whether she was happy with the work. She was not totally happy with it but she is satisfied with it.

Clevenger's claim needs to come with the claims for the next meeting.

IN RE: PAYROLL CLAIMS

Mike VanDeMark moved to approve the payroll claims seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes.

IN RE: 6-16-25 MEETING MINUTES

Don Binkley moved to approve the 6-16-25 minutes seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.

IN RE: KRBC APPOINTMENT

Gwen Rentz, Surveyor, came before the board regarding the appointment they made to the KRBC in January. It was not on the appointment list to be reappointed and was not up until June 30. She is officially submitting her letter requesting this position as due to her being surveyor she feels she should be on this board to keep up with what is going on with the river. Bill Crase was appointed as the previous surveyor, but he resigned due to illness but had kept his place on the board.

The commissioners are going to talk to Bill about giving it up to Gwen.

Gwen stated that it is not in the by-laws, but it is usually the county surveyor who sits on the board.

Mike is going to talk to Bill and requested that it be put on the next agenda.

IN RE: SOLID WASTE APPOINTMENT

Don Binkley moved to appoint Christine Lotter to the Solid Waste Board as long as she meets the criteria. Mike VanDeMark seconded it with 3 ayes.

Auditor's note-after the meeting it was found that Christine did not meet the criteria as it has to be a town board member.

IN RE: HIGHWAY DEPT.

Mike VanDeMark asked Rachel Oesterreich questions regarding the John Deere tractor with the blown transmission. She reported that it would cost about \$25,000 to fix. They are checking to see if they have a used model that can be switched over. Mike stated that the life expectancy is about 7,000 hours and then they get too expensive to keep up. They are charging us \$4,000 for checking to see what was wrong with the mower. It will drive but it is dragging. It has 6,300 hours on it.

Don Binkley said that if John Deere doesn't get back with us on different tractors, she needs to go elsewhere.

Mike VanDeMark moved to move the tractor back to the highway garage seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes.

Rachel reported that there is a culvert west of here that she would like to extend and put a berm in and to make it a little wider. She said it needs to be done and there is a dip on the north side just east of there that needs fixed as well.

She is also going to restripe CR 50S between CR 100E and 200E. Mike would like an estimate on what it will cost. Rachel stated she would be able to work it into her budget. Mike VanDeMark moved to approve seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes.

Rachel informed the commissioners that INDOT cannot do the final inspection on CR 300E-Bridge 137-until July 27. It will be about 2 weeks after that before it can be reopened.

Mike and Rachel both have been getting complaints about Toto Rd. between St. Rd. 23 and CR 1150E. It is starting to liquify due to the excessive heat. You can hear your tires sticking to the road and the rocks are peeling up as you drive. Rachel said that some bleeding is expected but not like this.

Don Binkley wants the company to come in and fix it. Don and Mike don't feel we should be responsible.

Rachel said sand helps for about 4 or 5 days. Mike said it is wild to see what is going on. The commissioners feel the company is responsible as it was taxpayer money that paid for this to be done.

Mike VanDeMark moved to give them until our next meeting to come before the board and provide a solution seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes.

Roberta Lee asked how much the sand cost and Rachel said it took about \$50 worth of sand.

Gwen Rentz asked about the oil leaking out at the highway garage and Rachel explained what is being done to clean it up.

IN RE: THE NEW WALL IN THE RECORDER'S OFFICE

Mike asked about the Recorder's wall and what the other commissioners' thoughts were. He feels we should see it through as originally decided and Charlie and Don agreed.

IN RE: PLANNING COMMISSION AND BZA

Mike VanDeMark, as President of the Planning Commission Board, said they are talking about consolidating the Planning Commission to 3 full time positions- Inspector, secretary or assistant, and administrator with all 3 dividing up the duties.

The secretary would be the code enforcer and BZA and fill in at the planning commission when needed. All 3 would need to know all jobs.

Robbie Blodgett, Code enforcement officer, has been taking care of the office and has consistently gone over the 35 hours a week. She is turning in 80 hours a pay period. The commissioners want her to take a lunch. Mike wants it the same for everyone. The commissioners have given her temporary permission to work full time.

Gwen Rentz said that she stepped up when the previous surveyor (the one before the last one) resigned due to illness. She stepped up and took over until a new one was appointed. She further said all offices are 8-4 with a one-hour lunch and should be that way for everyone. It shouldn't have anything to do with how far away she lives. She also asked if Robbie was going to get disciplinary action for going against the policy.

Mandy Thomason stated that they stay in for lunch but only clock 35 hours.

It was stated that she was only hired part time and now she is doing 3 jobs. Everyone knows Robbie is doing a great job stepping up, but Mike feels others will want special treatment, too.

Don feels we should just change the hours on a temporary basis.

There was much discussion on all of this, and the commissioners feel that Robbie has been very accommodating and this will only last about another month.

Mike said that he talked to her and told her it is 8-4 with a lunch hour and to keep it at 35 hours. The payroll turned in at 80 hours is to be paid this time.

Mike VanDeMark moved to approve making the office hours from 8-3 or 9-4 temporarily, but not flipping from one to other but keeping it that way without lunch hours and capped at 35 hours until the 1st meeting in August. She will get paid for the meetings she attends at the meeting pay rate. This motion was seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes.

The commissioners feel that this is a special circumstance and is only temporary.

IN RE: FARM LAND OWNED BY THE COUNTY

Mike VanDeMark asked about leases regarding the farm ground owned by the county. He wants to sit down and have a quick meeting to discuss this. The auditor is to get the IC code from Justin Schramm, County Attorney, and set up a meeting within the next month.

Mandy Thomason, County Recorder, stated that she has researched leases and has no information regarding the farm land owned by the county.

Mike would like it posted to take bids for leasing it.

IN RE: STARKE COUNTY FLOAT IN THE 4TH OF JULY PARADE

Don Binkley asked who authorized a Starke County Government committee. He didn't like the parade float without commissioner approval. He feels that half the people on the float were trouble makers and felt that it affected him. It should have come before the commissioners.

Mike feels it was done with good intentions, but next year to come to the commissioners.

Don just didn't want it said Starke County Government if not approved ahead of time.

Gwen stated that she was hoping to do a Starke County float for the Bass Lake Parade and again open it to all employees. Mike is for it as long as everyone is invited. Don said that he did not want Starke County Government, but it could say Starke County employees. Gwen said to just drop it as trying to do something positive turns into a negative.

IN RE: RECORDER'S NEW WALL

Jen Madsen, Deputy Recorder, wanted to know what is going on with their new wall as there is no walkway between the offices. They don't want the walkway closed off for safety reasons.

The commissioners are keeping it as is for now. They stated that it could be changed down the road if necessary.

IN RE: PLANNING COMMISSION APPOINTMENT

Dale Turner had submitted a request to be appointed to the Planning Commission board and asked if the commissioners had made a decision. The commissioners stated that they are still working on it and will decide at their next meeting.

There being no other business to come before the board, Don Binkley moved to adjourn seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.

Charles Chesak, President

Mike VanDeMark, Vice President

Don Binkley, Member

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