

STARKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

8-4-25

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 Charles Chesak absent and the following proceedings were held to wit:

IN RE: BID OPENING FOR SMALL STRUCTURE OVER CEDAR LAKE AT CR 350E

Only one bid was received and it was from Reith Riley Construction Co. out of Laporte, Indiana. Their base bid was \$311,649. This bid includes installation, the box and the culvert. The highway department already has the box. Don Binkley moved to reject the bid in order to get more bids and so that Reith Riley can adjust their bid to remove the box. The motion was seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: SEED GRANT FOR E-911 GIS SYSTEM

Rhonda Milner with WTH and Becca Hardel, 911 director, submitted a SEED Grant Proposal for the commissioners' consideration. The grant is fully funded by the state with no cost to the county. The county will receive and pay the invoice and then bill the state and be reimbursed. It is in order to convert all addresses into a national database. They will not be changing any one's address. Don Binkley moved to approve with Justin Schramm's approval seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes. Justin looked over the proposal and approved said proposal.

IN RE: KOONTZ LAKE FIRE LANES AND PUBLIC ACCESS SITES

Patrick Russell stated that the fire lanes and public access sites at Koontz Lake are being taken over by adjoining land owners. He read a statement regarding the encroachments and the safety issues involved. There are 23 easements and the Fire Department President informed him that only 2 of these easements are accessible to the fire trucks. Patrick would like the accesses opened up.

Don Binkley stated that they have been working on this for a year now. The accesses all need to be located and identified as public access, fire lane or both.

Mike VanDeMark stated that we need to get to the council and get the money budgeted to start the process. Mike stated he will also bring this up to the Planning Commissioner and the Code Enforcer. He further stated that the surveys were quite costly.

IN RE: MILLINGS FROM THE HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT FOR THE KAYAK LAUNCH

Aime Flora, Park Board Director, and Rachel Kinney, Highway Superintendent, appeared before the board asking permission to use the highway department's millings for the Highway 23 Kayak Launch parking lot.

Rachel stated that the millings came from state projects at no cost to the county.

The commissioners asked if they could bid the hauling of the millings. Don Binkley stated that he will make a few calls to see if anyone will bid on the hauling.

Aime Flora, Park Director, and Tom Bush, Park Board Member, stated that they will double check on everything.

They will need 325 tons of the milling from the Highway Department.

Don Binkley moved to approve seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF ANNEX 2

Frank Lynch, County Health Nurse, stated that the sidewalk in front of Annex 2, beyond where the remodel was done, is choppy and needs replaced. He has the money to do this and has received 2 bids for the job. Kingsmen bid \$2,960 and Herford bid \$3,500.

Mike VanDeMark moved to approve Kingsmen seconded by Don Binkley with 2 ayes.

IN RE: MONTHLY HIGHWAY REPORT

Rachel Kinney, Highway Superintendent, submitted a note she received from a resident in Monterey thanking her for their road being paved.

She also submitted her monthly report which is attached.

She reported that there is an escrow shortage on the lease for the International Harvesters. She has the money to pay for this. She could not find any

documentation on this increase and reported that nothing has been paid on the increase. She further reported that the previous superintendent approved this without the commissioners' knowledge and now we are obligated for the payment.

Don Binkley moved to approve subject to council approval seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

Rachel also submitted the report from United Consulting regarding Toto Road. The report is attached.

Mike VanDeMark feels the stone may help, but the road should be on the short list for repaving. Rachel Kinney stated that she is ready to do the road but needs a really hot day.

Rachel reported that she has containment around the pug pile with a secondary berm in case the first one breaks. The cleanup is done and the contaminated material disposed of.

IN RE: KOONTZ LAKE ISLAND ROAD AND BRIDGE

Patty Fitzpatrick, the designated spokesperson for the island residents and Tippecanoe Road residents, regarding the condition of the Koontz Lake Island Bridge and road. She stated that it has never been maintained. Information is attached.

Rachel Kinney, Highway Superintendent, confirmed that it is on the INDOT inventory and that the state should have inspected the bridge every 4 years.

The island is private, but the bridge has not been documented as private or public. This is not on the county's official inventory, but Rachel stated that we are receiving money for it.

The bridge is 69 years old. Right now, the residents work together to maintain the road by their driveways and they plow the bridge in the winter. They would greatly appreciate the commissioners' consideration in this matter.

Don Binkley moved to table any decision until they can look into this further seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: LAND SWAP WITH THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

The development foundation has 2 pieces of property separated by commissioner owned property. They would like to do a land swap so that their 2 pieces of property are adjacent, which will make it easier for them to sell.

Kelly Graham asked if the area is being farmed and if we are collecting money for that purpose.

Mike VanDeMark stated that local farmers should bid for use of the property and pay for the use.

Mike VanDeMark is not opposed to swapping, but would like to look at it further.

Don Binkley moved to approve seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: VENDOR CLAIMS AND PAYROLL CLAIMS

Don Binkley moved to approve the vendor claims seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

Don Binkley moved to approve the payroll claims seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes

IN RE: COMMISSIONER MINUTES FOR 7-21-25

Don Binkley moved to approve the 7-21-25 commissioner minutes seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

Don Binkley moved to wait until the minutes are approved before sending them to the media seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: KEY FOR AMBER JENSEN, PLANNING COMMISSION ADMINISTRATOR

Don Binkley moved to approve the key for Amber Jensen seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: CODE ENFORCER IN PLANNING COMMISSION

The code enforcer, Robbie Blodgett, has been working full time and needs to go back to part time as we are closing in on the deadline where we will have to pay her benefits, at least until the new budget in 2026.

Dale Turner, Planning Commission board member, asked if she could be part time for a while and go back to full time before the 2026 budget.

Mike said that this would be a planning commission decision and that he would check with HR on if that is possible.

Mike VanDeMark moved for Robbie to go back to part time effective immediately until we can clarify hours she can work seconded by Don Binkley with 2 ayes.

IN RE: REQUEST TO PURCHASE COUNTY PROPERTY

Kari Yoder's request to purchase county property is to be put on the next agenda.

IN RE: EMS

Jim Garner, EMS Director, stated that it is the 2nd anniversary of the death of Mike Wilcox and they are having a community service at approximately 8 PM, Tuesday, August 5, at the Medic 3 base in Knox. It is open to the public.

Jim reported that he looked into property for the Grovertown base and can only find some at the Hamlet Industrial Park. This is on the wrong side of the tracks and too far from the Koontz Lake area. He is still researching possibilities.

IN RE: PURCHASE ORDERS

Kelly Graham, Treasurer, stated that Purchase Orders could be done through our financial software vendor, Low, and she will get a price for the commissioners.

IN RE: RECONCILING TREASURER RECORDS

Mike VanDeMark asked Kelly Graham how the reconciling of the bank records was progressing. Kelly said that Crowe has made it through May of 2023. She said there was no time limit and that Crowe is moving forward.

IN RE: PUBLIC COMMENT

It was asked if the Koontz Lake bridge were to be worked on, what would be an alternative method for the island residents to get to their property.

The commissioners stated that the Koontz Lake bridge would be quite an undertaking.

8-4-25 COMMISSIONER MINUTES

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

ABSENT

Charles Chesak, President

Mike VanDeMark, Vice President

Don Binkley, Member

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