

JOINT Council-Commissioner Minutes

August 7, 2025

Pursuant to adjournment comes now the Starke County Board of Commissioners and the Starke County Council and meet in special session at 5:00 p.m. in the Annex 1 meeting room, Knox, Indiana, with Commissioner Charles Chesak, Councilwoman Kay Gudeman, and Councilman Howard Bailey absent, and the following proceedings were held to wit:

Mike VanDeMark called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

IN RE: ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR SHERIFF/JAIL

The additional appropriations the Sheriff submitted were discussed. They were questioned about why the jail maintenance is so high. There was much discussion on the maintenance needed. One of the items is the cost of approximately \$150 every week or so to suck out the garbage the offenders put down the sewer.

Nathan Caudill, Jail Warden, was asked to check on prices to solve the problem.

Bruce Bennett asked if commissary prices could be increased in order to pay for the problem.

Nathan stated that the Sheriff can set whatever price he wants on commissary items, but if he sets them too high, they won't be purchased and will sit on the shelves. Therefore, he feels that is not a logical solution.

IN RE: SHERIFF/JAIL BUDGETS FOR 2026

There was much discussion on the Sheriff and Jail salaries and the matrix that was submitted by the department.

Dave Pearman stated that the state is pushing for us to raise the LIT tax and add a wheel tax. He stated the council needs to discuss where funds for safety can come from and to discuss if we can use solar funds.

Todd Leinbach is talking to Baker Tilly tomorrow about solar funds. Todd said that Baker Tilly told him we are not going to make enough off of solar.

Dave Pearman discussed using Jail CREDIT for some of these things needed by the Jail.

Bruce Bennett stated that if we can use Jail CREDIT for these items then he is for this.

April Wilhelm, Matron, spoke about Jail CEDIT and the shortages in their general fund budgets.

Wayne James, First Deputy, said there are 10 patrolmen, 2 detectives and 1 chief detective.

There was a lot of discussion on the salary matrix that was submitted. They are trying to correct the differences between years of experience by a patrolman to one who would start tomorrow.

There was discussion about paying off the jail and getting rid of Jail CEDIT and raise the LIT tax as that could be used for more than what Jail CEDIT can.

House Representative, Jim Pressel, informed Dave Pearman that there are still restrictions on how the Jail CEDIT can be spent.

The council wants to look into getting some counsel on possibly bonding the jail or just paying it off through Jail CEDIT.

The council stated that all jail maintenance should be coming out of Jail CEDIT. The jailers should also come out of Jail CEDIT.

There are 9 dispatchers for 911. Three were being funded out of ARPA and 1 paid out of Jail CEDIT. Since ARPA will be no more in 2026, they want those 3 dispatchers moved to Jail CEDIT.

The Sheriff was instructed to move the 3 dispatchers being paid out of ARPA, 2 jailers, and all Jail maintenance to Jail CEDIT. The council also wants the remainder of 2025 maintenance moved to Jail CEDIT.

Dave Pearman discussed creating a LIT tax for public safety that could be used for the Sheriff's department.

Dave Pearman stated that some of the fire departments are going to be asking for help from the county. Todd Leinbach stated that they should create fire districts like the Davis Fire Department did.

Dave Pearman moved to appropriate \$20,000 to Jail CEDIT seconded by Bruce Bennett with 5 ayes.

IN RE: HEALTH DEPARTMENT BUDGET FOR 2025 AND 2026

Frank Lynch, Public Health Nurse and Office Manager, would like to increase the part time nurse to \$30 per hour, as he is having trouble finding anyone to work at the current hourly rate. The range is currently at \$20 to \$25 per hour.

Bill Crase moved to approve making the salary range \$25 to \$35 per hour at Frank Lynch's discretion starting now seconded by Bruce Bennett with 5 ayes.

Don Binkley also moved to approve the salary range increase seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS BUDGET

The state is taking away the Community Corrections grant for the person who takes care of the offenders who wear ankle bracelets. The cost for an ankle bracelet is \$8 per person, but if they have to be incarcerated, it is \$35 a person.

Todd Leinbach told Shawn Matraw that if this program is done away with, these people would have to be in jail and would cost the county even more money. Shawn told Todd that 90% of the people with home detention are not repeat offenders. This is a \$70,000 a year position which includes benefits. The council asked if this would be a contract or a paid employee.

Dave Pearman stated that we bypassed a Health Link grant.

There was much discussion regarding this position. Todd told Shawn he would need to come to a meeting with a job description and a request for the employee.

IN RE: AUDITOR'S BUDGET

There was much discussion regarding the Auditor's salary that was cut for 2025. The Auditor was asking for it to be put back to the 2024 salary with the 3% increase for 2026. Cassandra Hine moved to table this as she would like a full board here for the discussion, seconded by Bruce Bennett with 3 ayes.

There being no further business to come before the council, Bill Crase moved to adjourn seconded by Cassandra Hine with 5 ayes.

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

August 8, 2025 Joint meeting

COUNTY COUNCIL

Todd Leinbach, President

Bruce Bennett, Vice President

August 8, 2025 Joint meeting (con't)

COUNTY COUNCIL (con't)

ABSENT
Kay Gudeman

David Pearman

ABSENT
Howard Bailey

Bill Crase

Cassandra Hein

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

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

ABSENT
Charles Chesak, President

Mike VanDeMark, Vice President

Don Binkley

Michaelene J. Houston, Auditor and
Secretary to the Commissioners