

**STARKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS’
EXECUTIVE SESSION 8:45 AM
9-15-25**

I, Michaelene J. Houston, Starke County Auditor, do hereby certify that nothing was discussed other than what was posted. IC 5-14-1.5-6.1 (b) (2) (D).

Witness my hand and seal this 15th day of September, 2025.

Michaelene J. Houston, Starke County Auditor

**STARKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS’ MEETING
9-15-25**

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 9:30 AM, with all members present and the following proceedings were held to wit:

IN RE: BIDS FOR CR 350E SMALL STRUCTURE

Rachel Kinney, Highway Superintendent, received 3 bids for the small structure on CR 350E. Rachel suggests taking the lowest bid subject to United Consultants Review.

Hill Excavating, Knox, IN—Alternative Bid #1 \$341,798.45
Alternative Bid #2 \$260,798.45
Alternative Bid #3 same as option 2

Rieth-Riley, Laporte, IN—Alternative Bid #1 304,612.00
Alternative Bid #2 195,262.00
Alternative Bid #3 same as option 2

Laporte Construction, LaPorte, IN—Alternative Bid #1 320,514
No bids for the other two alternatives

IN RE: EMS REPORTS

Nancy Coad submitted the receipt report for August in the amount of \$102,847.29.

Jim Garner, EMS Director, submitted his August report. Report attached.

IN RE: OPIOD RESTRICTED FUND REQUEST

Shawn Matraw with Community Corrections submitted a funding request for Opioid Restricted Funds for Starke County Court Services in the amount of \$50,000. Proposal attached. The base money has not increased over the years. Don Binkley moved to approve seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.

IN RE: KEY FOR TEMPORARY WORKER AT PURDUE EXTENSION OFFICE

Julia Miller with Purdue Extension, requested a key for a temporary person, Bonnie, who will be filling in for Danielle's maternity leave. This will just be until Danielle returns. Don Binkley moved to approve seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.

IN RE: JUNK CARS

Justin Schramm, County Attorney, reported that he still has not received the invoice for the junk cars.

IN RE: TRANSPORT VAN FOR THE JAIL

Nathan Caudill and Austin Fletcher from the Jail requested a new transport vehicle for the jail. They submitted proposals (on file in the Auditor's Office). They prefer the Ford Transport Van at \$108,030.

Mike VanDeMark moved to approve the Ford Transit at \$62,080 out of Jail CEDIT seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes.

Mike VanDeMark moved to approve the Driverge to outfit the van for \$45,950 out of Jail CEDIT seconded by Don Binkley with 3 ayes.

IN RE: SURVEYING OF EASEMENTS AT KOONTZ LAKE

Lee Nagai submitted a proposal to survey two public accesses at Koontz Lake-Circle Avenue and Dogwood, and also at Tippecanoe Road. Lee researched these specific areas and he will need other recorded surveys and original plats. He said it will be quite an undertaking and that he can get started right away. He said it would be done by the end of the year.

When he is done Rachel Kinney, Highway Superintendent, is to put signs up stating public access.

The cost will be \$7,000, plus expenses, total for both. Don Binkley moved to go forward to be paid out of their appropriations in Cum. Cap. Dev. seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.

The commissioners asked the Sheriff if Code Enforcement would be able to give tickets and the Sheriff stated he didn't see why not and wondered why they weren't issuing tickets already.

The commissioners want adjoining property owners notified so that they know a surveyor will be out there working. Justin Schramm, County Attorney, will draw something up for the Auditor to send out and Lee said he would provide the Auditor with the addresses of the adjoining property owners.

Lee stated that he would let Rachel know when he is done so that she can post the needed signs.

IN RE: CAMPGROUNDS ELECTRICAL

Amie Flora and Teresa Trout stated that the electrical system at the campgrounds at the Bass Lake Beach does not hold up when they are at capacity. Their Nipsco bill has gone up 40%. The current system is very inefficient and not set up for modern RVs. Some of the sites have 50 amps and some have 30, but the modern RVs need 50 amps.

Mike VanDeMark asked if Nipsco could handle that much power and was told that United Consulting did not see a problem with this.

United Consulting sent a proposal to design a new system. The proposal is attached. The total proposal is \$17,800. It is not in their budget, so they will have to go before the council for an additional appropriation.

Rick Green stated that the breaker boxes are heating up. He also stated that they are looking at approximately \$300,000. He is surprised there hasn't been a fire.

Mike VanDeMark is worried that we need to shut the campgrounds down.

Teresa Trout said that they are hoping to make it to the end of the season which is October 31st.

Mike VanDeMark would like to see a full report from the Building Inspector. He doesn't want to move forward until there is a good overview.

Don Binkley moved to move forward and have Gene Pugh go out and inspect and report to the commissioners as soon as possible. Rick Green will also inspect as he is a state certified electrician.

Rick Green reported that the main breaker that feeds the camper breakers is heating up.

Charles Chesak seconded Don Binkley's above motion with 2 ayes 1 nay (MV).

At this point in the meeting Charles Chesak had to leave.

IN RE: BANK RECONCILIATION

Kelly Graham reported that she meets with Crowe every other Monday in a team meeting. She submitted a report which is attached. She stated that the trouble in the beginning was with the bank. They are working on May of 2023. Crowe said the biggest problem was establishing a pattern.

Kelly stated that they have gone over the 50 hours. She requested the overage from Crowe and asked why she wasn't notified that it was going over. She further stated that she talked to the LaPorte Treasurer as they had the same problem. They informed her it took 2 years to get it done.

Don Binkley is concerned that we've gone over the 50 hours and have only completed approximately 2 months and they weren't notified. Don wants Kay Chaffins, a former County Treasurer, to do the reconciliation. Kelly Graham stated that any one who works in the Treasurer's office has to be bonded.

Mike VanDeMark asked Kelly if she could move forward on her own. She stated that the contract includes training for her and her deputy on the reconciliation.

Mike wants an estimate on what's going on and wants to put this on pause until further research can be done. Don Binkley moved to put this on pause and have them come and talk to them. Kelly said that would cost \$132 for them to come to a meeting. Kelly said it should have come out of Laurie Venkas' bond. Michaelene Houston asked the attorney that since Laurie was covered at the time, why it couldn't come out of the bond. Justin Schramm is going to check on this. Mike VanDeMark seconded Donny Binkley's motion with 2 ayes.

IN RE: FRONTAGE ROAD NORTH OF HIGHWAY 30 IN DAVIS TWP.

Joe Kraszyk, a property owner in Davis Twp. stated that they put the county road in his name on the map. He has been plowing it but doesn't want to anymore. Another property owner is cussing him out all the time over this.

Rachel Kinney, Highway Superintendent, came up and showed the commissioners the area on the GIS system. She stated that the highway does not take care of it because it is a private road located west of Highway 35 and north of Highway 30.

Joe stated that the state put the road in when they redid Highway 30.

Mike VanDeMark asked if he could deed the road to the county. Rachel said yes, but then the county would have to take care of it.

Joe is willing to deed it to the county and was told he would need a petition to get permission from the other property owners to change from private to public.

Joe stated that his was the first house there and the original grant of the road from the state was to Joe's cousins.

Mike VanDeMark asked Justin Schramm, County Attorney, if Joe would need an attorney to work with Justin and Justin stated that ideally, yes, he would. Mike stated that legally the other property owners have no access to their property.

Justin stated that the commissioners should not accept a quit claim deed for this. Justin could itemize a transfer and closing title commitment splitting the cost with Joe.

Don Binkley asked Rachel to go look at it. Mike VanDeMark feels it should be a county road so the other property owners have access to their property.

IN RE: BIDS RECEIVED FOR CR 350E SMALL STRUCTURE

Rachel Kinney, Highway Superintendent, said that bid 1 is for a concrete box culvert and bid 2 if for a pipe arch.

IN RE: MONTHLY HIGHWAY REPORT

Rachel Kinney, Highway Superintendent, submitted her monthly report. The report is attached.

The commissioners asked if the bond for Mammoth could be released. Justin Schramm said his original thought is to hold off until the funds are received. Rachel Kinney stated that the grant was approved and is irrevocable and the \$200,000 from Mammoth has also been received. Mammoth has held up their end, so the bond can be released, since they have complied with the agreement and the grant is irrevocable by the state. Rachel stated that the bond was for the road agreement only, not the culvert.

Don Binkley moved to release the bond for the road agreement seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

Mike VanDeMark stated that in his opinion that portion of Toto Road east of highway 35 should not have been chip sealed, and cold mix will not hold up.

Mike asked about the Koontz Lake Bridge, and he would like it to stay private so that we aren't obligated to take care of the bridge. Rachel said that it needs taken off of the road inventory and that the property owners need to bring it up to INDOT specifications.

Don Binkley moved to remove it from our road inventory seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

The commissioners asked about the Hamlet Industrial Park Road. Rachel Kinney informed them that it is not on our road inventory. Don Binkley would like it to be put on the inventory in case a company should come in they could have access. Rachel stated that if it is made public, anyone can use the road.

Don Binkley moved to table this until the next meeting seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: VENDOR 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 9-2-25

Don Binkley moved to approve the 9-2-25 commissioner minutes seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: METAL DETECTORS AT ANNEX 1

Mike VanDeMark talked to the sheriff about putting in metal detectors at Annex 1 due to all the trouble in the country. Jack Rosa, Sheriff, stated that there are grants for metal detectors. The commissioners asked Jack to present this at the next meeting.

IN RE: SOLAR ORDINANCE

The planning commission has agreed to pay an outside attorney to draft a solar ordinance at a cost of approximately \$4,000. An outside attorney was suggested so there wouldn't be any questions about bias. They are hoping to have this done really quick and can start immediately.

This would need to get approved through public hearings and could take up to a month and a half. It is to be paid out of solar funds.

Don Binkley moved to approve the approximate \$4,000 for the solar ordinance out of solar funds seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 2 ayes.

IN RE: AUDITOR/RECORDER AGREEMENT REGARDING LOW SOFTWARE

Teresa Trout, Deputy Auditor, informed the commissioners about the agreement between the Auditor and Recorder. She stated that the Auditor complied but the Recorder has not. Teresa stated that Charlie agreed to put the work station back in the Auditor's office. The commissioners feel Charlie should be here for this and tabled it to the next meeting.

IN RE: ANNEXATION OF THE HAMLET WATER TOWER TO THE TOWN OF HAMLET

Dave Kasvormas, Hamlet Town Board President, wants to annex the water tower into the town of Hamlet's town limits. All the water lines are ready to go. He stated that they sell a lot of water to Nipsco and contractors. He is asking for it to be incorporated into the town of Hamlet.

Justin Schramm, County Attorney, stated that it is not hard to do.

Mike VanDeMark asked if the town should have a separate attorney as Justin is the attorney for the county and the town of Hamlet. Justin stated that if both parties agree, he can prepare the documents with a note in them on the conflict.

Dave stated that this would not take taxes away from any body and they are not taking property from any one.

Justin informed everyone that you can not forcibly make someone be annexed. A homeowner has to petition to be annexed.

The commissioners said that annexing the water tower makes sense, but they would like to research the matter. Dave stated he would like to get it done as soon as possible. He said it does need some improving.

IN RE: COMPLAINT REGARDING E-911

Anna, from Public Comment, requested E-911 info regarding the complaint she made at an earlier meeting. Don Binkley informed her that he had told Becca to send it to her.

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

Charles Chesak, President

Mike VanDeMark, Vice President

Don Binkley, Member

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