

STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL MINUTES

9-15-25

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 Cassandra Hine absent and Dave Pearman via zoom and the following proceedings were held to Wit:

IN RE: BANK RECONCILIATION

Kelly Graham informed the council that the commissioners told her to pause the work being done by Crowe on her bank reconciliation. They want her to find out how much more time is needed and the cost involved. She reported on the progress and that we were \$5,000 + over the original cost approved.

Todd Leinbach asked if the commissioners had the authority to pause this as the council funded it.

Bruce Bennett stated that this should have been taken care of with the previous treasurer's bond. Justin Schramm, County Attorney, will check to see if we can still go against her bond for this fee.

Howard Bailey feels Crowe should give us some kind of total cost and Dave Pearman agrees. Dave feels Crowe led us to believe 50 hours was enough.

Bruce Bennett stated that if Laurie Venkas volunteered to do it for free, why didn't she do it in the first place.

Kelly reported an original discrepancy of over \$400,000 for one month and it is now down to \$20,000.

There was much discussion on the problem and if the bond could pay and what the estimate would be with a not to exceed amount. Bruce Bennett feels this is not fair to the taxpayers.

Howard Bailey read an excerpt from an anonymous letter the council received stating that the minutes from March 17th said the amount was “not to exceed” the figure requested.

Sandy Bennett from the public asked how you can do one and a half years of work in 50 hours.

Kay Gudeman moved to table until we hear from Crowe and Justin Schramm checks into the bond seconded by Bill Crase with 6 ayes.

IN RE: NJ-SP SCHOOL MASONRY PATHWAY

Kelly Shepherd, NJ-SP School Superintendent, stated that they have 9 kids so far, so the Masonry Pathway is off the ground. They do have some unfunded needs in the amount of \$17,614.10.

Todd Leinbach wondered if anyone reached out to some of the construction companies for help. Kelly stated that they have and some are helping. They have a lot of good connections and in-kind donations.

Bruce Bennett said that he had asked him to come and ask the council for help because it is a tremendous program.

Bruce Bennett moved to approve \$17,614.10 out of CEDIT seconded by Dave Pearman with 6 ayes.

IN RE: OPIOID RESTRICTED FUND REQUEST

Shawn Matraw requested \$50,000 out of the Opioid Restricted Fund to sustain services from Tim Gearhart for Court Services. He has never increased the price or gone over the allotted amount. Bill Crase moved to approve the \$50,000 out of the Opioid Restricted fund seconded by Kay Gudeman with 6 ayes.

IN RE: CAMPGROUND AT BASS LAKE BEACH

Amie Flora and Teresa Trout submitted consulting fees for a new electrical system at the campgrounds. The current system is very outdated and went out a few

times when they were at maximum capacity. Nipsco has increased substantially. They have had to put umbrellas over the boxes and have fans on them to keep them working.

The quote submitted is just for consulting fees from United Consultants in the amount of \$17,800.

Todd Leinbach stated that every site needs their own meter.

Amie stated that there are 60 sites—7 are weekends but the majority are seasonal.

Dave Pearman asked why we didn't just do an RFP instead of a consulting firm. Todd stated that we need a design but that there are contractors who will design and do the work.

Gene Pugh feels that they also need to expand the campgrounds as more and more people are camping.

Teresa said that Rick Green informed them that the wires are too small for the amount of electricity going through them.

There is a high percentage of seasonals that return every year and there is a waiting list. It won't take long to recoup the money, but the upgrade will be costly.

There was much discussion on the cost and the need, but the council feels that they would be throwing away \$17,000 for consulting fees. They just want it bid out.

Public comment was that they should increase the seasonal rates.

Don Binkley said he talked to Nipsco and they will not read the meters as it would cost too much.

Dave Pearman suggested tabling this and talking to the commissioners about getting another plan. Bill Crase moved to approve tabling seconded by Bruce Bennett with 6 ayes.

IN RE: TRANSPORT VAN FOR THE JAIL

Nathan Caudill and Austin Fletcher from the jail requested \$108,030 for a Ford Van from Lochmandy and outfitting from Driverge. The current transport van has \$130,000 miles on it and is 13 years old. They are hoping the new one will last 10 years. Nathan stated that potentially it could be used 5 days a week. It is used for everything other than local courts. He further stated that it is the county's responsibility to transport to state facilities.

There are sufficient funds in Jail CEDIT and the current van would be used for work release.

Dave Pearman would like to know if they checked into used-low mileage vans. Nathan stated that he would like new.

Howard feels it is a lot of money and is reluctant to spend that much of taxpayer money. He knows the current vehicle won't last that much longer.

Dave Pearman asked if it was bid and Nathan said he got several quotes.

The council asked Justin Schramm, County Attorney, if they need 3 bids from 3 different companies and if what Nathan submitted is compliant. Justin said you would have to at least reach out to 3 different companies and request a bid. Austin said he reached out to Bluebird, GM and Lochmandy. They can submit paperwork proving that for State Board of Accounts.

Dave Pearman asked if they reached out to Sourcewell and or Bid.Gov. They do all the work to get the best bids and they do honor manufacturing warranties.

Bruce Bennett moved to table until they make sure we are compliant seconded by Kay Gudeman with 6 ayes.

IN RE: SOLAR ORDINANCE

Justin Schramm, County Attorney, explained about the Planning Commission attorney creating a solar ordinance. They have until February to get it created. It will cost approximately \$4,000 due to public hearings, etc. that are required.

Howard Bailey wants it strict and fair to everyone.

Bill Crase moved to approve \$4,000 out of Solar funds seconded by Bruce Bennett with 6 ayes.

IN RE: PUBLIC HEARING FOR ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS & TRANSFERS

Bill Crase moved to open the public hearing seconded by Kay Gudeman with 6 ayes.

Salary Ordinance # 18 had no public discussion.

Additional Appropriation Ordinance #20 had no public discussion.

Additional Appropriation Ordinance #21 had no public discussion.

Transfer between categories Ordinance #22 had no public discussion.

Since there was no public comment on any of the above ordinances, Bruce Bennett moved to close the public hearing seconded by Bill Crase with 6 ayes.

Kay Gudeman moved to approve ordinance #18 seconded by Howard Bailey with 6 ayes.

Kay Gudeman moved to approve ordinance #20 seconded by Bill Crase with 6 ayes.

Bruce Bennett moved to approve ordinance #21 seconded by Bill Crase with 6 ayes.

Kay Gudeman moved to approve ordinance #22 seconded by Bill Crase with 6 ayes.

Bruce Bennett moved to approve the 8-18-25 council minutes seconded by Bill Crase with 6 ayes.

IN RE: EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION DINNER

The employee appreciation dinner is the same price as last year and for the same amount of people. It will be December 12, 2025 at 1:00 PM. The price is \$17 per person totaling \$2,295 for 135 guests. Bruce Bennett moved to approve the \$2,295 for the dinner seconded by Kay Gudeman with 6 ayes.

IN RE: BUDGET ADOPTION

Howard Bailey moved to approve the Auditor salary to what the previous auditor was making plus the 3% raise. Motion died for lack of a second.

Todd Leinbach moved to make it only a 3% raise over 2025's salary. Motion died for lack of a second.

Howard Bailey moved to give the Auditor a \$4,000 increase plus the 3% raise seconded by Bruce Bennett with 5 ayes. (Dave Pearman had to leave the meeting.)

Kay Gudeman moved to approve the Starke County Budget seconded by Bill Crase with 5 ayes.

Bruce Bennett moved to approve the North Judson-San Pierre School Budget seconded by Bill Crase with 5 ayes.

Howard Bailey moved to approve the Starke County Airport Budget seconded by Kay Gudeman with 5 ayes.

IN RE: DONATION BY MAMMOTH

There was a public comment stating that Mammoth had donated \$35,000 for the Bass Lake Fire Dept. to purchase an ATV, a trailer and a spray rig.

There being no further business to come before the board, Howard Bailey moved to adjourn seconded by Kay Gudeman with 5 ayes. (Dave Pearman had to leave meeting early)

Todd Leinbach, President

Bruce Bennett, Vice-President

Kay Gudeman

Dave Pearman (via Zoom)

Howard Bailey

Bill Crase

ABSENT

Cassandra Hine

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