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Starke County Board of Commissioners

Regular Meeting Minutes

Date: November 3, 2025

Time: 5:00 PM (Central)

Location: Starke County Annex Building, Knox, IN

2025003993

MANDY THOMASON, RECORDER

STARKE COUNTY, KNOX, IN

RECORDED AS PRESENTED

12/18/2025 08:58 AM

0.00

I. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order at approximately 5:00 PM.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all present.

II. Roll Call

Present: Commissioners Charlie Chesak, Donny Binkley, and Mike VanDeMark

Also Present: County Attorney Justin Schramm, Auditor Michaelene J. Houston, Department Heads, and members of the public.

III. Agenda Items

1. Starke County Economic Development Foundation – Land Swap Discussion

Mikie from the EDF presented a **land-for-land swap agreement** for parcels within the **Hamlet Industrial Park** to improve marketability.

Attorney Schramm advised that:

- A **resolution** must accompany the land swap per the State Board of Accounts.
 - A **public hearing** is optional but recommended for transparency.
The Board agreed to **table the item until December 1, 2025** to allow for publication and a public hearing. Mike VanDeMark moved to approve seconded by Donny Binkley with 3 ayes..
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2. Planning and Zoning Procedure Clarification

Mikie requested procedural direction regarding **variance or rezoning requests**.

Attorney Schramm clarified:

- **Variances and special exceptions** go directly to the **Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA)**.

- **Rezoning and ordinance amendments** begin with the **Commissioners**, then move to the **Plan Commission** for public hearing and return for final adoption. The Commissioners agreed that future inquiries should first come to their office for direction.
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3. Courthouse Security / Metal Detector Discussion

Sheriff Jack Rosa and Austin Fletcher advised that, due to the **building layout**, installing metal detectors at the Annex 1 entrance is **impractical** without major renovation.

Alternative ideas (manual wand, external vestibule) were discussed but deemed **cost-prohibitive**.

Consensus: **No further action** unless future employee demand or funding changes.

4. Treasurer's Office – Reconciliation Status

Treasurer **Kelly Graham**, reported that reconciliation from **May 2023 through present** remains incomplete.

She proposed rehiring **former Deputy Rhonda Graves** part-time to perform reconciliations at **\$15.65/hour**, paid from her existing budget.

Kay Chaffins offered independent contracting services at **\$30/hour**, requiring bonding.

Discussion included cost, legality, and timeline (estimated 6 months).

Action: **Tabled** until next meeting for both parties to present written proposals and timelines per motion by Donny Binkley and seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes..

5. Office Space Request – Park Department

Parks Superintendent Amie Flora requested temporary workspace in the **Auditor's Office** during the winter due to lack of heat and plumbing at the Bass Lake Beach facility.

Auditor **Michaelene J. Houston** approved. Commissioners authorized temporary use of an existing desk, contingent upon installing a **partition wall** if available from county storage per motion by Donny Binkley and seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes. Amie was also granted **annex key access** for after-hours work.

6. Park Department – Electrical Review

Tom Busch and Amie Flora reported ongoing **electrical evaluation** at **Bass Lake Park** with multiple contractor quotes pending.

The Board recommended consultation with **Building Inspector John McCurrie (Planning Commission Director)** to verify any safety code issues and develop a **prioritized plan** for

compliance before spring 2026.
No immediate violations reported.

7. Financial Approvals

- **Vendor Claims:** \$531,458.87 – Donny Binkley moved to approve seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.
 - **Payroll Claims:** \$330,274.20 – Donny Binkley moved to approve seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.
 - **Minutes from October 20, 2025:** Mike VanDeMark moved to approve seconded by Donny Binkley with 3 ayes.
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8. Other Business

- **Road Vacation Request:** Joe Kraszczyk reiterated interest in deeding part of his property as a county road; awaiting attorney follow-up.
 - **Health Insurance Renewal:** Commissioners scheduled a **special meeting** later that week with First Choice Health Insurance Representative **Holly** to finalize 2026 coverage.
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9. EMS Department – Updates

Director **Jim Garner** presented two items:

1. **Ambulance Electrical System Upgrade:**
 - Replacement of entire wiring system due to incompatibility.
 - Cost: **\$9,095**, covered within 2026 budget.
 - **Donny Binkley moved to approve seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes.**
 2. **Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) Vehicle Purchase:**
 - Purchase of 2016 Ford Explorer for **\$9,200** (from MIH grant funds).
 - Vehicle to be marked “MIH Program” and used for community health outreach and crisis response. Mike VanDeMark moved to approve seconded by Donny Binkley with 3 ayes.
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10. Plan Commission and BZA Appointments

Discussion regarding **board vacancies**:

- Roberta Lee’s resignation created openings on both **Plan Commission** and **BZA**.
- Commissioners agreed that vacated seats require **formal reapplication**.

- Advertisement for open board positions to begin, with **appointments scheduled for January 2026.**
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11. Data Center Inquiry

Commissioners addressed public concern regarding rumors of a **proposed data center project**. Chair Chesak stated:

- No offers, zoning changes, or private meetings had occurred.
 - Any future proposals would require **Plan Commission hearing and public notice**. Attorney Schramm confirmed that the Plan Commission intends to hold a **public hearing later in November** regarding a potential moratorium on data center zoning. Commissioners emphasized transparency and public involvement in any future development discussions.
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IV. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned per motion by Donny Binkley and seconded by Mike VanDeMark with 3 ayes at approximately **6:15 PM**.

Submitted by:

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

Approved by: Starke County Board of Commissioners on 12-1-25.

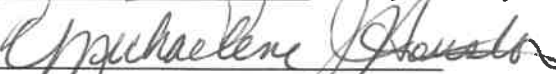
Signatures:


Charlie Chesak, President


Mike VanDeMark, Vice President


Donny Binkley

ATTEST:


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