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STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

2026000199

JENNIFER MADSEN, RECORDER
STARKE COUNTY, KNOX, IN
RECORDED AS PRESENTED
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REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

January 5, 2026 – 5:00 p.m.

Starke County Annex – Meeting Room 1

53 E. Mound Street, Knox, Indiana

Call to Order

President **Charles Chesak** called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Roll Call

Commissioners Present:

- President Charles Chesak
- Vice President Mike VanDeMark
- Donny Binkley

- **Justin Schramm** – Starke County Council
- **Michaelene Houston** – Starke County Auditor, Commissioner's Secretary

A quorum was confirmed with all three Commissioners in attendance.

Annual Board Reorganization

Election of Officers

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to nominate Mike VanDeMark as President of the Board of Commissioner's for calendar year 2026.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0).
- **Result:** VanDeMark elected President for 2026.
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- **Motion:** Commissioner VanDeMark moved to appoint Charles Chesak as Vice-President for the calendar year 2026.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Donny Binkley.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0).
- **Result:** Chesak appointed Vice-President for 2026.

Commissioner Departmental Assignments

The Board reviewed and approved the following annual liaison assignments:

- **Courthouse and Annex Buildings**
 - **Motion:** Commissioner Binkley moved that Commissioner Charlie Chesak continue oversight of County Courthouse and Annex buildings.
 - **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Mike VanDeMark.
 - **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.
- **Jail, EMS, and Emergency Services**
 - **Motion:** Commissioner Mike VanDeMark moved that Commissioner Donny Binkley continue oversight responsibility for the County Jail, EMS, and emergency services for 2026.
 - **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
 - **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.
- **Highway Department**
 - **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved that Commissioner Mike VanDeMark remain responsible for oversight of the Highway Department for 2026.
 - **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Mike VanDeMark.
 - **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Benjamin Callender – Annexation North Judson

Benjamin Callender is asking for an annexation into town of North Judson requesting to revert to Wayne Township.

Attorney Justin Schramm explained that a petition for dis-annexation would need to be filed with the North Judson Town Council then return before the commissioners.

Highway Department – Quotes for Brush Chopper & Mower

The Highway Department presented quotes for brush chopper equipment. After discussion regarding lead times and vendor service considerations, the Board took action to table the matter.

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to table both brush-chopper quotes until the next regular meeting so a demo could be completed and funding verified.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried. Item tabled.

Tractor Quote Review

The Board reviewed a tractor quote totaling **\$82,094.72**. Purchase would be dependent upon funding confirmation by Rachel Kinney and application of John Deere auction proceeds.

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to approve the tractor quote contingent upon funding confirmation.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried conditionally.

TRUCK PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Surveyor **Gwen Rentz** addressed the Commissioners regarding several options for a new truck. Either the truck would be used by the Surveyor, Planning Department or Maintenance.

Discussion detail from the transcript reflects that:

- Ms. Rentz had researched options for purchasing a new truck that would better serve the Surveyor's Office or Planning Office.
- She presented the idea that, if a new vehicle was acquired for the Surveyor or Planning Commission, the current Surveyor truck could then be reassigned for continued economic use by another county department.

Options discussed included:

- transferring the current Surveyor truck to the **Maintenance Department, Planning Commission** or reassigning it to the **Highway Department** as a secondary vehicle.

The Commissioners engaged in informal discussion concerning:

- budget timing for 2026 vehicle purchases,
- proper departmental need assessment, and
- the benefit of maximizing use of existing assets before disposing of them.

Statutory Board Appointments

Planning Commission Appointments

The Commissioners considered citizen-member appointments as required by statute.

1. Democrat Seat

- **Motion:** Commissioner Mike VanDeMark moved to appoint **Christine Lotter** as a Democrat citizen member for a one (1) year term.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Donny Binkley.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0).
- **Result:** Motion carried. Lotter appointed.

2. Independent Seat

- **Motion:** Commissioner Binkley moved to appoint **Dale Turner** to a two (2) year term.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0).
- **Result:** Motion carried. Turner appointed.

3. Republican Seat

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Tom Bush** for a two (2) year term.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Mike VanDeMark.
- **Vote:**
 - VanDeMark – Aye
 - Donnie Binkley – Aye
 - **Charles Chesak – Nay**
- **Result:** Motion carried 2–1. Bush appointed.

4. Independent Seat

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Kenny Lone Eagle** as Independent Citizen Member for a one (1) year term.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Staff noted that additional board staggering and one remaining appointment would be handled at the first regular **Planning Commission meeting of 2026** once that Board reorganizes.

BZA Appointments

Additional Citizen Appointment

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Eugene Pugh** as Citizen Member to the Board of Zoning Appeals.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Mike VanDeMark.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

The Board acknowledged that political affiliation does not govern BZA seats. Any remaining replacements would be reviewed at a later date.

Planning Commission Dual Appointment

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved that **Kenny Lone Eagle** serve as the required dual representative from the Planning Commission to the Board of Zoning Appeals for a one (1) year term.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.

- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Health Board

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Deb Hansen** as Citizen Member to the Board of Health.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.
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- **Motion:** Commissioner Mike VanDeMark moved to appoint **Angela Stacy-Flagg** as Citizen Member to the Board of Health.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Donny Binkley.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Starke County Library

- **Motion:** Commissioner Charles Chesak moved to appoint **Steve Dodge** as Citizen Member to the Library Board.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Donny Binkley.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Hospital Board

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Kathy Norem** as Citizen Member to the Hospital Board.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.
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- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Dolores Bennett** as Citizen Member to the Hospital Board.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Alcoholic Beverage Board

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Kenneth Peverelle** as Citizen Member to the Alcoholic Beverage Board.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Starke County Drainage Board

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Matt Lawrence** as Citizen Member to the Drainage Board.

- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.
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- **Motion:** Commissioner Mike VanDeMark moved to appoint **Justin Hazelton** as Citizen Member to the Drainage Board.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Donny Binkley.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried
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- **Motion:** Commissioner Charles Chesak moved to appoint **Greg Troike** as Citizen Member to the Drainage Board.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Donny Binkley.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried

K.I.R.P.C

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Brandi Ecker** as Citizen Member to the K.I.R.P.C Board.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.
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- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to appoint **Bill Crease** as Citizen Member to the K.I.R.P.C Board.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Starke County Park Board

Judge reappointed Richard Ballard

Arrowhead Grant Application

Arrowhead grant of \$5,000.00 every year and Commissioner Donny Binkley suggested the Park Board apply. Grant Application was given to Park Superintendent, Amie Flora.

Invoices regarding Hamlet Annexation

Two invoices for the Hamlet Annexation, one for \$133.00 and one for \$57.00. These invoices are for the attorney fees for advice regarding the annexation.

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to approve the Invoices to be paid from Cum Cap.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried

Approval of Financial Claims

Vendor Claims

Commissioner Don Binkley had a question regarding a treasurer claim of \$3900.00. This check was not a claim but a refund for a tax surplus. Surplus taxes occur when duplicate property tax payments are made and later refunded upon verification.

Commissioner Mike VanDeMark would like clarification on Amazon orders. The commissioners would like to see a spreadsheet or description of what is being ordered in each department. The Auditor's office will send a detailed description along with the claims to be approved to the commissioners before each meeting.

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to approve vendor claims totaling **\$985,100.74**.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Payroll

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to approve payroll claims totaling **\$332,296.00**.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

Prior Meeting Minutes

- **Motion:** Commissioner Donny Binkley moved to approve minutes from the December 15, 2025 meeting.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Charles Chesak.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.

EMS Director Jim Garner – Property to Purchase

Jim is looking to purchase property for a new EMS base in Hamlet. Jim has located a 2.92-acre lot north of the railroad tracks in Hamlet, near Old State Road 30, across from the former Goble building and near the old gas station. Property is currently zoned as residential with two points of ingress/egress providing access to Main Street and State Road 30. Asking price is \$20,000.00. Legal counsel advised that the purchase would require: Two independent appraisals, adoption of an ordinance or resolution identifying the property, and compliance with statutory limits prohibiting offers above the average of the two appraisals.

Jim was directed to: Speak with the property owner to determine willingness to hold the property, report back on the owner's interest in a non-binding letter of intent, and seek placement on the next Hamlet meeting agenda if zoning discussion are required.

Public Comment

Starke County Clerk Bernadette Manuel

The Clerk reminded all elected officials that required financial disclosure statements are due **January 21 by 12:00 p.m. (noon)**. Filings submitted after noon will be considered late and may be subject to fines. The Clerk advised that, pursuant to Indiana Code, responsibility for delivering and retrieving election equipment rests with the **Board of Commissioners**.

The Clerk noted that the equipment is now substantially larger and heavier than in prior years (approximately **56 pounds per unit**, increased from approximately 20–22 pounds), and is no longer portable by individual inspectors. Due to statutory changes, election inspectors are **no longer permitted** to transport the equipment.

As a result, delivery and retrieval must be handled by a **bipartisan team** or a contracted **moving service**. Use of jail trustees for this purpose is prohibited by statute. Coordination with the Highway Department was mentioned as a possible option, though associated costs would need to be considered. At the request of the Commissioners, the Clerk agreed to prepare a **summary reference sheet** for an upcoming meeting outlining:

- Number of machines assigned to each vote center
- Delivery timelines
- Pickup timelines (including contingencies for equipment issues)
- Variations based on election type

This document will be provided to assist the Commissioners in planning and decision-making prior to the next election cycle.

Adjournment

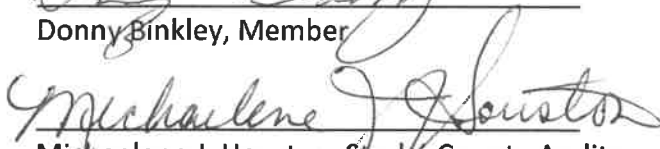
With no further business before the Board, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made.

- **Motion:** Commissioner Charles Chesak moved to adjourn the meeting.
- **Second:** Seconded by Commissioner Donny Binkley.
- **Vote:** All in favor (3–0). Motion carried.


Mike VanDeMark, President


Charles Chesak, Vice President


Donny Binkley, Member


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