

STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MEETING MINUTES

DATE: February 2, 2026 **LOCATION:** Starke County Government Building, Meeting Room
TIME: 8:30 AM

CALL TO ORDER The meeting of the Starke County Board of Commissioners was called to order at 8:30 AM. The assembly stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

- **Present:** Commissioner Donny Binkley, Charlie Chesak, Mike VanDeMark and Auditor Michaelene J. Houston.

I. SURVEYOR'S REPORT: SECTION CORNER ORDINANCE

The Board proceeded to discuss the legal necessity of re-initiating the Section Corner Ordinance process. Due to a prior administrative failure to properly advertise the ordinance—originally reviewed in October 2024—legal counsel advised the Board to restart the proceedings to ensure full compliance with Indiana Code. This procedural reset is intended to satisfy public notice requirements before the second reading.

- **Compliance Standards:** The ordinance remains unchanged from the previous version, establishing that the unlawful alteration or movement of monuments is prohibited in accordance with state law.
- **Notification Requirements:** Property owners or contractors are mandated to notify the County Surveyor at least 20 business days prior to any necessary movement or alteration of monuments.

MOTION: Donny Binkley moved to approve the new ordinance and re-start the formal process; seconded by Charlie Chesak. **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (3-0).

The Board then transitioned to administrative staffing updates within the Planning and Building Department.

II. PLANNING AND BUILDING: REORGANIZATION AND JOB DESCRIPTIONS

The Board reviewed a strategic reorganization of the Planning and Building Department. This initiative is designed to improve office efficiency and accountability by establishing a clear hierarchy of authority and defining distinct roles for administrative officials.

The Board defined the three key roles as follows:

1. Director:

- Maintains full control of the office and final authority over all employees.
- Responsible for both Planning and Zoning administration and Building administration.

2. Deputy Administrative Official:

- Holds authority for daily office tasks and the zoning division.
- Possesses the authority to issue fines and stop-work orders specifically for zoning violations.
- Holds no authority over Building administration.

3. Secretary (BZA/Code Enforcement):

- Serves as Secretary for the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) and acts as the Code Enforcement Officer.
- Handles inspections, case preparation, follow-ups, and BZA minutes.
- Possesses no authority to issue fines or stop-work orders.

MOTION: Charlie Chesak moved to approve the Director position; seconded by Donny Binkley. **RESULT:** Passed 3-0.

MOTION: Charlie Chesak moved to approve the Deputy Administrative Official position; seconded by Donny Binkley. **RESULT:** Passed 3-0.

MOTION: Charlie Chesak moved to approve the Secretary position; seconded by Donny Binkley. **RESULT:** Passed 3-0.

The Board noted that these job description updates were administrative in nature and required no formal signatures. Commissioner Donnie inquired regarding the authority for hiring and firing; it was clarified that such authority was previously delegated to the Planning Commission via existing ordinance.

III. TREASURER'S REPORT AND OFFICE OPERATIONS

Treasurer Kelly Graham provided an update regarding the operational security of the Treasurer's office and the ongoing efforts to reconcile 2023 financial records.

- **Reconciling Update:** A staff member, Rhonda, is currently performing the reconciliation using existing part-time budget funds. May 2023 is complete, and she is more than halfway through June 2023.

- **Remote Work:** The Treasurer requested a county laptop to allow Rhonda to work from home to expedite the project. The Board denied the request, citing County Handbook policy and concerns regarding the accountability of hours worked outside the office.
- **Office Security:** The Treasurer raised concerns regarding public foot traffic passing behind the Treasurer's desk to access the IT department. The Board took the relocation of the IT department under consideration, with potential moves to Annex 2 or available space within the Courthouse.
- **Daily Balancing:** The Treasurer agreed to provide monthly reports of daily auditor balances to the Auditor's office to ensure fiscal transparency during the reconciliation process.

State Board of Accounts (SBA) Consultation: The Board discussed the possibility of "writing off" minor, long-standing reconciliation discrepancies to avoid further administrative costs. Auditor Michaelene J. Houston was directed to contact the SBOA to determine if state guidelines permit such an action.

The Board then proceeded to reports from community service organizations.

IV. COMMUNITY SERVICES OF STARKE COUNTY ANNUAL UPDATE

Shari Bartoli, representing Community Services of Starke County, presented the 2025 year-end data, emphasizing the organization's role in maintaining county transportation and food security.

Service Category	2025 Statistics (Jan 1 – Nov 30)
Transportation	957 individuals served; 6,090 trips; 73,170 miles driven
Food Pantry	4,286 individuals (1,617 families) served; 68,985 lbs distributed

Shari requested that the Board and County Council consider budget increases for the upcoming cycle to offset potential grant reductions.

V. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION CONTRACT

Mikie Stogsdill and Tara Palmer submitted the contract with the changes requested at \$110,000 a year for 2 years for signatures as the contract was approved at the last meeting.

Mikie asked what the commissioners would like to see in her monthly reports.

VI. NORTH BEND TOWNSHIP: PUBLIC SAFETY AND GOVERNANCE

Residents and officials from North Bend Township addressed the Board regarding emergency infrastructure and the transparency of township meetings.

- **Weather Siren:** Residents expressed a public demand for a weather siren. The Board suggested researching Homeland Security and federal grants to mitigate costs for the township.
- **Fire Protection Contract:** Public concern was raised regarding the current 6-month fire contract between North Bend and California Township. Residents expressed fear that a contract lapse could lead to a significant increase in homeowner insurance rates.
- **Meeting Accessibility:** Following complaints regarding meetings held in private residences, it was announced that the February 28th meeting will be held at the "old schoolhouse" at 10:00 AM.
- **Statutory Compliance:** County Attorney Justin Schramm clarified the statutory requirements for public meetings, noting that meetings must be recorded, made available upon request for six months, and posted three days prior to the assembly and in three public places. The County agreed to post township meeting dates on the official County website to assist with transparency.

The Board then transitioned to financial support for vocational education.

VII. FLEX TIME

It is a Federal Mandate that flex time must be used within 7 days.

VIII. FOUNDATION / SCILL PROGRAM CONTRACT

The Board reviewed a partnership between the County, the Starke County Community Foundation, and local schools to support vocational (CDL/Automotive) and adult education.

- **Strategic Context:** The Board noted that the County Economic Development Income Tax (CEDIT) fund is currently in a strong position with a balance of approximately \$4.2 million, allowing for the support of these educational initiatives.
- **Contract Language:** The "rolling" language previously found objectionable by the Board was removed. The revised contract requires a representative to appear before the Board for renewal prior to December 31, 2027.
- **Funding Request:** The request involves \$42,000 annually for two years to offset building rent (calculated at \$3,500 per month).

MOTION: Donny Binkley moved to approve \$42,000 in funding for two years, sourced from the CEDIT fund; seconded by Charlie Chesak. **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (3-0).

IX. MAINTENANCE: COURTHOUSE REPAIRS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Maintenance Director Rick Green presented quotes and infrastructure updates regarding the immediate needs of the Courthouse and Jail.

- **Fire Suppression (Sprinkler) System:** The Board reviewed a quote from VFP (Fort Wayne) for the replacement of 4-inch sprinkler piping in the Courthouse attic. VFP provided a quote 20% lower than competitors and will utilize galvanized pipe for increased longevity.
- **Infrastructure Alerts:** The Board was advised that the Jail roof is 47 years old and constitutes a "flat roof" or "flat tube" type of infrastructure. A replacement estimate of \$600,000 was noted, and Rick was authorized to seek quotes for a professional moisture test.
- **Boiler/Condensate Pump:** The Board noted a recent \$3,000 expenditure for the 3rd-floor courthouse pump.

MOTION: Donny Binkley moved to pay \$1,383.13 for emergency Saturday repairs, sourced from the Cumulative Capital (Cum Cap) fund; seconded by Charlie Chesak. **RESULT:** Passed 3-0.

MOTION: Donny Binkley moved to approve \$42,383.00 for the full attic pipe replacement, sourced from the Commissioner Appropriation fund; seconded by Charlie Chesak. **RESULT:** Passed 3-0.

X. PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS AND CLAIMS

The Board fulfilled its duty to fill critical service vacancies and approve county expenditures.

- **Veteran Service Officer:** The Board selected Maria Booth for the position.
 - **MOTION:** Donny Binkley moved to appoint Maria Booth; seconded by Charlie Chesak. **RESULT:** Passed 3-0.
- **Planning Commission:** A vacancy was filled for a term ending at the conclusion of the current year.
 - **MOTION:** Charlie Chesak moved to appoint Terese Pugh for the 1-year term; seconded by Mike VanDeMark. **RESULT:** Passed 2-1 (Donny Binkley).

Financial Approvals:

- **Payroll Claims:** Approved in the amount of \$334,332.02 (Period ending 1-17-2026). Motion made by Donny Binkley and seconded by Charlie Chesak with 3 ayes.
- **Vendor Claims:** Approved in the amount of \$597,664.11. Motion made by Donny Binkley and seconded by Charlie Chesak with 3 ayes.

Minutes Approvals:

January 20, 2026: Motion made by Donny Binkley and seconded by Charlie Chesak with 3 ayes.

January 30, 2026, emergency meeting: Motion made by Donny Binkley and seconded by Charlie Chesak with 3 ayes.

Bicentennial Update: The Board received an update on the "Bicentennial Bison." A correction was made to the flag design to reflect nine stars. Historically, the county consisted of 12 townships; however, three were given to LaPorte County due to the river boundary, leaving the nine current townships. The Board is researching protective display strategies, including enhanced camera coverage and a native walnut display case, to prevent vandalism.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

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

MOTION: Donny Binkley moved to adjourn; seconded by Charlie Chesak. **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.

SIGNATURES:

____ Mike VanDeMark, President

____ Charlie Chesak, Vice-President

____ Donny Binkley, Member

____ Michaelene J. Houston, Auditor