

**STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
MEETING MINUTES**

**Date:** March 27, 2026 **Location:** Starke County Government Building, Annex No. 1  
**Time:** 1:00 PM

**1. Call to Order and Roll Call**

The Starke County Board of Commissioners meeting was called to order on March 27, 2026, at 1:00 PM. The proceedings opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Roll Call**

<b>Present</b>	<b>Also Present</b>	<b>Absent</b>
<b>Mike VanDeMark</b> (President)	<b>Michaelene J. Houston</b> (Auditor)	None
<b>Charlie Chesak</b> (Vice-President)	<b>Justin Schramm</b> (County Attorney)	
<b>Don Binkley</b> (Member)	<b>John McCurry</b> (Planning Commissioner)	
	<b>Rachel Kinney</b> (Highway Superintendent)	
	<b>Stanley Budd</b> (IT Director)	
	<b>Jack Rosa</b> (Sheriff’s Dept. / Jail Commander)	
	<b>Maria Booth</b> (Veteran Services Officer)	

A quorum of the Board was confirmed present, and the Board proceeded to address the official agenda and emergency facility requirements.

**I. LITIGATION FUNDING AND SUMMONS REPORT**

The Board reviewed the strategic requirement for a dedicated litigation funding mechanism to provide legal defense for county boards. Standard legal counsel rates do not cover active litigation, which requires a specific appropriation at the professional litigation rate.

**Discussion Points:**

- **Official Summons:** The Board received a summons from the County Clerk regarding petitioner Amber Good.
- **Nature of Action:** The filing involves a judicial review of a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) hearing concerning Jeremiah Patrick.
- **Fiscal Impact:** Legal counsel (Attorney Nathan) has established a litigation rate of \$250.00 per hour for this defense.
- **Funding Analysis:** The Board evaluated the **Solar Expenditure Fund**. While the Board has the authority to update the fund's ordinance, current approved uses are restricted to infrastructure, health, and community initiatives. Litigation is not a "qualifying expense" under the existing language without a public amendment.
- **Resolution:** The Board identified the Cumulative Capital Development (**CUM CAP**) fund as the appropriate source for initial legal expenses.

**Official Action:**

- **MOTION:** Commissioner Chesak moved to approve the use of CUM CAP funds up to \$5,000.00 for the first month of litigation expenses regarding the Amber Good/Jeremiah Patrick matter, seconded by Commissioner Binkley.
- **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (3-0).

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## II. HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT: TRAFFIC CONTROL AND SIGNAGE

The Board addressed its responsibility for public safety through the regulation of traffic control devices on county thoroughfares.

**Status Update:** Superintendent Kinney documented a request for the installation of a 35 mph speed limit sign and a stop sign on **400 S east bound** near the church and cemetery. The Board concurred that these measures are necessary for corridor safety.

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## III. SECURITY EQUIPMENT PROCUREMENT (METAL DETECTORS)

The Board evaluated the necessity of replacing aging security infrastructure at the Courthouse and the Justice Center. The current units are over 10 years old, no longer serviceable by technicians, and frequently fail to detect targets, requiring manual hand-wanding of all entrants.

**Technical Evaluation:** The Board selected the **Garrett PD6500I** (33-zone pinpoint detection) over higher-cost models (\$8,000+). The Garrett unit was selected for its GSA contract pricing, backup battery capabilities, and simplicity of use for security personnel.

**Financial Impact:** The total cost per unit is \$4,308.66. The Board utilized a dual-funding strategy:

- **Justice Center Unit:** Funded via Jail CEDIT.
- **Courthouse Unit:** Funded via CUM CAP.

### Official Action:

- **MOTION:** Commissioner Binkley moved to purchase two Garrett PD6500I units at \$4,308.66 each, with one funded by Jail CEDIT and one by CUM CAP, seconded by Commissioner Chesak.
  - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (3-0).
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## IV. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (CIP) WORKSHOP AND DEPARTMENTAL INPUT

The Board convened a strategic session to transform current fiscal challenges into a structured five-year development plan.

### Departmental Needs Analysis

Department	Critical Need	Strategic Justification
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<b>Coroner</b>	Generator (\$10,000)	Necessary for new cooler addition; current building lacks backup power and communication infrastructure.
<b>Highway</b>	Bridges & Heavy Equipment	6 deficient bridges (costs now \$3M each); requires new loader, lowboy trailer, and excavator.
<b>IT / Security</b>	Cameras & Audio	40 downtown cameras are 15 years old (\$1,500 each); <b>directional microphones</b> needed for meeting rooms to improve public broadcast.
<b>Jail / Justice</b>	<b>Sewer Plan</b>	Update to aging system; estimated at <b>200,000–300,000</b> . Priority: "Sooner the better."
<b>Jail / Justice</b>	<b>ADA Accessibility</b>	No elevator access to 2nd floor (Detectives/Interview rooms); current facility is not handicapped accessible.
<b>Planning/Zoning</b>	Plan & Map Updates	Zoning map dates to 1988; Comp Plan (\$65k) needs 7–10 year refresh for grant eligibility; Ordinance codification required.
<b>Recorder / VSO</b>	<b>Record Preservation</b>	Warehouse needs temperature control to prevent mold/humidity damage to historical records dating to 1850.
<b>Veterans Services</b>	<b>Hour Expansion</b>	Veteran census is rising (approx. 1,261 males, 73 females, 7.4% of population). VSO requires more hours to serve veterans currently traveling to other counties.

**Public Comment Summary:** Community member Larry Wapple Jr. expressed concern regarding the utilization of economic development revenue, stating that "solar money is being used to fight solar money." He specifically cited "malicious intent" regarding the Planning Commission's findings of fact, providing context for potential future litigation.

## V. EMERGENCY COURTHOUSE ROOF REPAIR

The Board addressed urgent structural damage to the Courthouse roof caused by recent wind storms.

**Damage Assessment & Fiscal Strategy:** A drone inspection by the Sheriff's Department revealed four open seams (one inch each) and dislodged clay tiles. The Board noted the county carries a **\$50,000 insurance deductible**; therefore, the estimated repair cost of \$30,000 is more efficiently funded through the **Courthouse Maintenance** fund rather than an insurance claim. **Addis Roofing** provided the estimate and will perform immediate stabilization, including "harping" and sealing. The Board also discussed the long-term necessity of a central support beam for the roof structure.

### Official Action:

- **MOTION:** Commissioner Chesak moved to approve an emergency expenditure not to exceed \$30,000.00 from Courthouse Maintenance funds for Atlas Roofing to perform immediate stabilization and repair, seconded by Commissioner Binkley.

- **RESULT:** Passed unanimously (3-0).

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**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business, Commissioner Binkley moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Chesak. The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 PM.

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**Mike VanDeMark** President

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**Charlie Chesak** Vice-President

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**Don Binkley** Member

**ATTEST:**

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**Michaelene J. Houston** Starke County Auditor