

## STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES

### I. CALL TO ORDER

The Starke County Board of Commissioners officially convened for a regular meeting on April 6, 2026. The meeting was called to order by President Mike VanDeMark. In accordance with statutory protocol, the proceedings commenced with the Pledge of Allegiance. This Call to Order serves as the formal legal commencement of county business, ensuring that all subsequent discussions and actions are recorded as part of the county's official public record.

### II. ATTENDANCE

The following individuals were present to conduct the business of the county:

**Present:**

- **Mike VanDeMark:** Commissioner President
- **Charlie Chesak:** Commissioner Vice-President
- **Don Binkley:** Commissioner Member

**Also Present:**

- **Michaelene J. Houston:** County Auditor and Commissioner Secretary
- **Justin Schramm:** County Attorney
- **Dave Pearman:** County Council Vice President
- **Jim Garner:** EMS Director
- **Tori Chessor:** EMA Director
- **Kelly Graham:** County Treasurer
- **Becca Hardel:** 911 Director

### III. FINANCIAL APPROVALS: CLAIMS AND PAYROLL

As part of their fiduciary responsibility, the Board reviewed the county's recent financial obligations. The Board noted that timely approval of claims is essential to maintaining vendor relations and workforce stability, ensuring that public funds are disbursed in strict accordance with county budgetary guidelines.

**1. Vendor Claims** The Board reviewed vendor claims totaling \$920,405.10.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve; Charlie Chesak seconded.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.

**2. Payroll (Period Ending 03-14-2026, Paid 03-20-2026)** The Board reviewed payroll for the mid-March period totaling \$345,118.63.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve; Charlie Chesak seconded.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.

**3. Payroll (Period Ending 03-28-2026, Paid 04-02-2026)** The Board reviewed the payroll cycle totaling \$338,607.65.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve; Charlie Chesak seconded.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.

#### **IV. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The Board reviewed the minutes from four previous sessions to maintain legislative consistency and historical accuracy.

- **Minutes Reviewed:** March 16, 2026; March 20, 2026; March 27, 2026 (Department Head meeting); and March 27, 2026 (Joint meeting with Council).
- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve all four sets of minutes as presented; Charlie Chesak seconded.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.

#### **V. ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS**

The Board addressed the management of political signage on county property, specifically focusing on the aesthetic and functional integrity of the Courthouse lawn during election cycles.

**Ordinance 11 of 2026: Prohibiting the Placement of Campaign Signs at the Starke County Courthouse Lawn** This ordinance was introduced to enforce the prohibition of political signage on the specific grounds of the county courthouse. The County Attorney advised that because the ordinance carries no assessed penalties, it does not require publication and takes effect immediately upon signature.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to adopt Ordinance 11 of 2026 on first reading; Charlie Chesak seconded.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously. The ordinance takes effect immediately.

#### **VI. EMS MONTHLY REPORT**

Director Jim provided an update on the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) department operations and equipment procurement.

- **MIH Program Funding:** The department is managing \$120,000 in grant funds for the Mobile Integrated Healthcare (MIH) program. These funds are earmarked for equipment and must be expended by the end of June.
- **Equipment Acquisition:** A new cardiac monitor was purchased for \$11,000, representing a significant discount for a unit still under a five-year warranty.
- **Fleet Update:** A new ambulance has arrived and is currently being wrapped. Director Jim is attending the FDIC conference to negotiate for a Type 1 4x4

ambulance. He noted an option to purchase a "Horton box" in excellent condition from a local fire department for approximately 8,000–10,000. This box is specifically designed for bariatric use and can be remounted on an F-450 chassis.

- **Operational Transition:** The department is shifting from "Standard Operating Procedures" (SOPs) to "Standard Operating Guidelines" (SOGs).

**Board Discussion:** The Board concurred that the transition from "Procedures" to "Guidelines" provides necessary professional flexibility. Unlike rigid procedures, guidelines allow responders to adapt to the unpredictable variables of emergency scenes while remaining within a structured safety framework.

## **VII. EMA, EMERGENCY SERVICES COORDINATION AND 911**

EMA Director Tori Chessor discussed inter-agency cooperation and regional emergency preparedness.

- **Healthcare Coalition Membership:** The Board reviewed the annual membership contract for the coalition, which facilitates coordination between EMS, fire, health departments, and elected officials.
  - **MOTION:** Mike VanDeMark moved to approve the membership; Charlie Chesak seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.
- **Weather Radio Initiative:** The EMA is tracking grants to provide free weather radios to residents, particularly in areas with siren coverage gaps.
- **Mobile Command Strategy:** The Board discussed replacing the decommissioned 23-year-old command trailer with a mobile command unit based on a repurposed ambulance. The trailer currently requires repairs estimated at \$7,500 (with minimal labor included), making it no longer fiscally or operationally viable.
- **Sale of Trailer:** The trailer will be sold at county auction.
  - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to sell the trailer with a \$2,500 reserve, with proceeds directed to the Cumulative Capital (Cum Cap) fund for ambulance equipment; Charlie Chesak seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.

**Board Discussion:** The transition to a self-propelled ambulance unit improves response efficiency, as the existing trailer requires a specialized tow vehicle and hitch that are not always immediately available during rapid-onset emergencies.

## **VIII. TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS**

**1. 911 J&K Quote for North Judson Site:** 911 Director Becca Hardel reported storm damage at the North Judson site. A quote was presented for diagnosing and stabilizing

storm damage at the North Judson tower site. The Board noted the quote was only valid until April 14th.

- **MOTION:** Charlie Chesak moved to approve the quote of \$2,255 to be paid from Cum Cap; Don Binkley seconded.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.

**2. GIS System Access Agreement:** The Board reviewed an annual renewal for GIS system access.

- **Note:** This agreement represents \$750 in **revenue** paid to the county by the user for system access.
- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve the agreement; Charlie Chesak seconded.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.

## **IX. TREASURER’S RECONCILIATION REPORT**

Kelly Graham provided a status update regarding financial reconciliation ahead of the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) audit.

- **Progress and Velocity:** The Treasurer’s office successfully moved seven months of reconciliation in the last month (advancing from December 2023 to June 2024). July 2024 is projected for completion by the following morning.
- **Timeline:** The target for full reconciliation catch-up is May 15th.
- **Constraints:** The current software system restricts entry to a single user at a time, which prevents simultaneous reconciliation tasks by multiple staff members.

## **X. HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT AND TOWNSHIP UPDATES**

- **CCMG Project:** The project received no bids. The scope will be revised and re-released in July.
- **Equipment:** The brush chopper has arrived; staff training is being scheduled.
- **North Bend Township:** The Board noted that representatives have been absent for several months. A directive was issued to place the township on the next agenda to address the lack of a formal siren infrastructure plan.

## **XI. PUBLIC COMMENT: PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB**

Larry Wickert, representing the Prairie Trails Club, requested highway millings for the English Lake trail parking lot, noting a lease arrangement with Walter Block for the property.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve the release of four loads of millings to the 501(c)(3) organization, with the club responsible for hauling; Charlie Chesak seconded.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.

**XII. BICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE AND SPECIAL PERSONNEL ACTION**

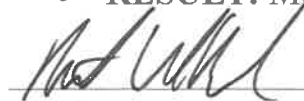
The Board addressed the cultural heritage of the county and the upcoming Bicentennial Buffalo project unveiling.


- **Dedication:** The Board discussed honoring the late Jim Schilling, former county historian.
  - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to dedicate the bison display area to Jim Schilling; Charlie Chesak seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.
- **Unveiling Event:** Scheduled for April 20th, from 8:30 AM to 9:30 AM.
- **Special Holiday Declaration:** To ensure labor law compliance and avoid "ghost employment" (paying employees for time not worked), the Board acted on the advice of the County Attorney to formally designate the event time as a holiday.
  - **MOTION:** Charlie Chesak moved to rescind the previous motion regarding building closure and instead declare a 1.5-hour "Starke County Day" holiday for employees on April 20th, with county buildings opening to the public at 9:30 AM; Don Binkley seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.


**XIII. ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business, the Board moved to adjourn.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to adjourn; Charlie Chesak seconded.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried unanimously.

 4-20-2026, Mike VanDeMark, President

 04/20/2026, Charlie Chesak, Vice-President

 4/20/26, Don Binkley, Member

 , Michaelene J. Houston, County Auditor  
And secretary to the Board of Commrs.