

STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Details:

- **Date:** May 4, 2026
- **Location:** Starke County Courthouse / Commissioner's Room
- **Time:** Evening Session; 5:00 PM

Call to Order The Starke County Board of Commissioners met in a regular evening session to conduct official county business. President Mike VanDeMark called the meeting to order, establishing a quorum and welcoming those in attendance to the Commissioner's Room. The session was formally opened with the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, maintaining the procedural rigor and atmosphere of civic duty expected of the Board.

Roll Call The following members and officials were recorded as present or absent for the record:

- **Present:**
 - Mike VanDeMark, President
 - Don Binkley, Member
 - Michaelene J. Houston, Commissioner Secretary and County Auditor
- **Also Present:**
 - Justin Schramm, County Attorney
 - Emalee Tauberschmiudt, Highway
 - Lane Davis, Representatives from the Small Business Administration (SBA)
 - Bruce Johnson, Petitioner
 - Sheri Bartoli, Calif. Twp. Trustee
- **Absent:**
 - Charlie Chesak, Vice-President

I. VENDOR CLAIMS AND EXPENSE POLICY REVIEW

The Board maintains a standard of meticulous fiscal oversight to ensure the responsible stewardship of public funds and to prevent adverse findings during State Board of Accounts audits. A key component of this oversight involves defining "tolerable" office expenditures. The Board engaged in a discussion regarding the "gray area" of certain claims, specifically expenditures for items such as coffee and cookies. President VanDeMark and Commissioner Binkley noted that while these may be necessary for specific court or meeting functions, the lack of granular detail and itemization creates a risk. The Board demanded increased detail, including dates

and specific purposes for all such claims, and expressed intent to further define acceptable-use policies at the next meeting.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve vendor claims in the amount of \$368,708.31.
- **SECOND:** Mike VanDeMark.
- **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).

II. PAYROLL CLAIMS

The Board recognizes the necessity of timely payroll processing to ensure the continued operational integrity of county departments. The claims presented represent the labor costs for the bi-weekly cycle essential to county functions.

- **PAY PERIOD:** Ending April 25, 2026.
- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve payroll claims in the amount of \$340,338.26.
- **SECOND:** Mike VanDeMark.
- **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).

III. APPROVAL OF PRIOR MINUTES

In accordance with legal requirements for accurate record-keeping of legislative sessions, the Board reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting.

- **RECORD REVIEWED:** Meeting minutes for April 20th.
- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve the April 20th meeting minutes.
- **SECOND:** Mike VanDeMark.
- **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).

IV. SBA DISASTER RECOVERY REPORT

Contextualizing the county's response to the tornado events of March, a representative from the Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience presented a report on available federal recovery resources. Although the damage in Starke County was largely concentrated in rural areas affecting approximately 10 homesteads, the SBA emphasized that federal loans of up to \$2 million are available at low fixed rates with 30-year terms. These loans feature a 12-month deferment on interest and payments. The Board directed that coordination continue with Tori [Last Name Unknown], Emergency Management Director, to ensure the affected residents are reached.

V. COMMUNITY SERVICES FUNDING REQUEST

The Board evaluated a request from Community Services of Starke County for \$80,000 to support general operations and senior centers. The request involved a procedural disagreement regarding the funding source. It was proposed as a "wash" against a budget line item previously earmarked for the SCILL program, which was no longer being utilized. The Board expressed concern over the significant increase from the historical \$10,000 annual appropriation and requested more granular data on the proposed allocation.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve \$80,000 for current year operations.
- **RESULT:** The motion died for lack of a second.
- **ACTION:** The matter was tabled to allow for further research and the presence of the full three-person Board at the next meeting.

VI. PROPERTY VACATION PETITION

Adhering to the statutory process for vacating public property, the Board reviewed a petition from Bruce Johnson. Legal counsel advised that a public hearing must be advertised 10 days prior to formal action.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to set the petition for a public hearing at the next evening meeting, pending legal notice.
- **SECOND:** Mike VanDeMark.
- **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).

VII. CCMG ROAD PROJECT BID ACCEPTANCE

The Board reviewed bids for infrastructure maintenance under the Community Crossings Matching Grant (CCMG) program. The projects include work on State Road 23 to 1150 East and 900 South from U.S. 35 to Main Street. Emalee Tauberschmidt presented the bids for review.

- **LOW BIDDER:** EMV Paving (Rochester) at a total of \$937,737.
- **FUNDING SPLIT (80/20):** State portion: \$750,189.60; Local portion: \$187,547.40.
- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to accept the bid from E&B Paving.
- **SECOND:** Mike VanDeMark.
- **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).
- **NOTE:** Contract acceptance is finalized pending the retrieval of Vice-President Charlie Chesak's signature.

VIII. EMERGENCY SERVICES PIER AUTHORIZATION

California Township Trustee, Sheri Bartoli, requests authorization to install a 160-foot pier at Bass Lake for emergency rescue purposes only. To prevent public misuse and liability issues, the pier will be gated, signed "Fire Department Only," and owned by the township. The pier will be situated near the beach area to ensure it does not obstruct public recreation while providing critical access for rescue personnel.

- **MOTION:** Mike VanDeMark moved to approve the pier and gating for emergency services only.
- **SECOND:** Don Binkley.
- **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).

IX. CONGRESSIONAL SCHOOL FUND REPORT

Reflecting the Board's duty to report the status of historical funds to the state, the Auditor presented the annual report for the Congressional School Fund. The fund remains at a static balance with no current activity.

- **FUND BALANCE:** \$14,764.61.
- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve the report as presented.
- **SECOND:** Mike VanDeMark.
- **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).

X. COURTHOUSE SECURITY EQUIPMENT FUNDING

Following the failure of a security scanner and wand at the courthouse entrance, the Board discussed procurement. To bypass the delay of public hearing advertisements required for the Cumulative Capital fund, the Board decided to reallocate the expenditure to the Commissioner's budget in the EDIT fund. The one for the jail will be paid out of Jail Cedit as originally discussed.

- **EXPENDITURE:** \$4,158.66.
- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to change the funding source to the Commissioner's budget and approve the purchase.
- **SECOND:** Mike VanDeMark.
- **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).

XI. CORONER'S OFFICE EXPANSION AND ARPA FUNDS

The Board reviewed a \$5,000 engineering proposal from Lee Nagai for the proposed addition to the Coroner's office. Discussion ensued regarding the availability of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, which were recently transitioned to "Lost Revenue" within the County General fund to meet federal deadlines.

- **ACTION:** The Board tabled the matter to conduct research into fund availability and legal appropriation requirements from the General fund before proceeding with the engineering contract.

XII. HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT OPERATIONAL UPDATE

The Highway Department reported a status update regarding the recently acquired "chopper" machine. Current operators have expressed discomfort with the advanced, technologically integrated control systems of the equipment. The department is seeking a part-time operator with specific expertise in modern machinery controls to ensure the asset is utilized effectively.

XIII. RECORDER'S OFFICE TRAINING AND TAX EXEMPTION CLAIM

The County Recorder requested approval for "Fidlar" software training in Illinois. The request included a fiscal nuance: Illinois does not recognize Indiana's sales tax exemption for lodging. The expenses, totaling \$735.78 including the Illinois tax, will be paid from the Recorder's Perpetuation Fund, which is legally designated for such educational and preservation purposes.

- **MOTION:** Mike VanDeMark moved to approve the claim of \$735.78 to include the Illinois tax.
- **SECOND:** Don Binkley.
- **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

Upon completion of the agenda, the Board moved to conclude the session.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to adjourn.
 - **SECOND:** Mike VanDeMark.
 - **RESULT:** Passed (2-0).
 - **ADJOURNMENT TIME:** 6:10 PM.
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SIGNATURE BLOCK

Mike VanDeMark, President

Charlie Chesak, Vice-President

Don Binkley, Member

Attest: _____ Michaelene J. Houston, Starke County
Auditor