

# STARKE COUNTY PLAN COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – JUNE 10, 2026

## I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE

The Starke County Plan Commission was called to order on June 10, 2026. Todd Leinbach, serving as Chair Pro Tem, led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

## II. ROLL CALL AND DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Roll call was taken, and a quorum was confirmed to be present to conduct official business.

### Members and Staff Present:

- **Todd Leinbach:** Chair Pro Tem (County Council)
- **Gwen Rentz:** Surveyor
- **Kenny Eagle:** Citizen Member
- **Crystal Keller:** Citizen Member
- **Dale Turner:** Citizen Member
- **Therese Pugh:** Citizen Member
- **John McCurrie:** Director of Planning and Building
- **Amber Janson:** Deputy Administrative Assistant
- **Robby Blodgett:** Secretary PC & BZA

### Members Absent:

- **Mike VanDeMark:** Chair
- **Mark Allen:** Vice-Chair

## III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND PREVIOUS MINUTES

### Agenda Approval

- **MOTION:** To accept the agenda as presented. Moved by Gwen Rentz, Seconded by Dale Turner.
- **RESULT:** Motion passed unanimously.

### Minutes Approval

- **MOTION:** To approve the minutes from the May 20 meeting. Moved by Gwen Rentz, Seconded by Dale Turner.
- **RESULT:** Motion passed unanimously.

## IV. OLD BUSINESS

**1. Zoning Discussion – Residential 3 (R3) Anomalies** Director John McCurrie presented a comprehensive review of current R3 zone maps, highlighting significant anomalies in Bass Lake, Chesapeake Village, English Lake, Ora, Peabody Street, San Pierre, State Road 23, and Toto. The Board noted that the 1991 GIS mapping appears "arbitrary," particularly regarding the English Lake area.

The Board expressed concern that 10+ acre farms in English Lake are currently zoned R3. Under current density regulations, these residents are effectively prohibited from participating in 4-H or raising livestock (such as meat chickens or goats) because the zoning prevents the construction of necessary animal housing structures due to setback requirements.

- **MOTION:** To table this discussion until a comprehensive rezoning review of the identified arbitrary anomalies is conducted. Moved by Todd Leinbach, Seconded by Kenny Eagle.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried.

**2. Resolution 26 PC 13 – Agricultural Structural Permit Exemption** The Commission reviewed Resolution 26 PC 13, which amends Section 6-5-2 of the Starke County Zoning Ordinance. The resolution explicitly repeals Section D to remove the provision that previously allowed for agricultural structures to receive permits without a fee.

- **MOTION:** To move Resolution 26 PC 13 to a public hearing during the August meeting. Moved by Gwen Rentz, Seconded by Dale Turner.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried.

**3. Resolution 26 PC 08 – Fence Ordinance Amendment** The Board discussed amendments to the fence ordinance regarding prohibited materials. The proposed changes remove sheet metal and corrugated metal from the prohibited list while maintaining prohibitions on the use of appliances, scrap metal, car parts, doors, and windows for fencing.

Extensive discussion ensued regarding the prohibition of barbed wire and electric fences in R1, R2, and R3 zones. Board members expressed concerns regarding existing agricultural uses and livestock containment in these areas, particularly within English Lake and other inaccurately zoned parcels.

- **MOTION:** To table Resolution 26 PC 08 for further research regarding the impact of zoning on agricultural fencing needs. Moved by Gwen Rentz, Seconded by Kenny Eagle.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried.

## **V. NEW BUSINESS**

**1. Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Proposal** The Board reviewed the proposed budget for the 2027 fiscal year.

| Position | Proposed Rate | Notes                           |
|----------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| Director | \$65,018      | Status changed to <b>Exempt</b> |

|                                        |                     |                                 |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Deputy Administrative Assistant</b> | \$50,001.80         | Reflects a <b>7.3% increase</b> |
| <b>Secretary PC / BZA</b>              | \$40526.38          | Reflects a <b>3% increase</b>   |
| <b>Board Member Rates</b>              | \$75 (168 meetings) | Per meeting attended            |

#### **Budget Line Discussion:**

- **Legal Services:** An additional \$10,000 was requested for enforcement actions, including judicial warrants and court filings. This is separate from the existing \$1,000 monthly legal retainer.
- **Unsafe Building Fund:** Director McCurrie requested an increase from \$30,000 to \$50,000 for potential demolitions. The Board rejected this increase, advising the Director to maintain the \$30,000 figure and return for additional appropriations only if the fund is exhausted.
- **Utility Services:** A \$1,500 allocation was established for cell phone data and mobile hotspot usage, necessitated by the Director's high data requirements for field inspections and mobile computer synchronization.
- **Reallocation:** The Board directed that the "water machine" expense be moved from the subscriptions/dues line to office supplies for improved transparency.
- **MOTION:** To approve the FY 2027 budget as presented with the directive to reallocate the water machine expense and maintain the Unsafe Building Fund at \$30,000. Moved by Gwen Rentz, Seconded by Crystal Keller.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried.

**2. Amendment to Ordinance 2006-22 – Contractor Registration** The Board reviewed redlines to the contractor registration ordinance. Key changes include:

- Correcting a typographical error requiring a "billion" dollar insurance policy to the intended "million" dollar requirement.
- Transitioning the renewal cycle from a fixed February 15 deadline to a 12-month anniversary-based cycle. This change is intended to eliminate the "undue administrative burden" of processing 500+ registrations within a single 45-day window.
- **MOTION:** To draft the amendment to Ordinance 2006-22 as written. Moved by Gwen Rentz, Seconded by Dale Turner.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried.

## **VI. STAFF REPORTS**

### **Permit and Inspection Summary**

- **May Permit Fees:** \$7,381
- **Year-to-Date Totals:** \$43,430
- Inspections are current; minor discrepancies were resolved via photographic evidence without requiring re-inspection fees.

### **Code Enforcement Updates**

- **Case 5657 (Storage Units/Body Shop):** Stop-work orders were issued for unauthorized industrial use. One shop has vacated; the second has complied with the business permit process.
- **Case 660 (Dupree Property):** Issues involving an out-of-state contractor and water damage. This has been determined to be a civil matter; the Planning Department has provided bond information to the property owners.
- **Case 220 (Mitch Property):** Public nuisance involving junk and debris. Following undeliverable certified mail, newspaper notification was initiated on June 8 to satisfy legal requirements for a Judicial Injunction.
- **Lombardi Lane:** A Judicial Search Warrant revealed severe electrical/plumbing violations and insect infestation. The Department of Child Services (DCS/CPS) has been notified and is coordinating with the Planning Department regarding property abatement, including providing dumpsters and extermination services. A condemnation hearing is set for July 1.

### **Project Updates**

- **San Pierre Dollar General:** Final design releases received; operational status is expected within 60 days.
- **Data Center Ordinance:** Initial drafting is underway for future presentation to the Board.

## **VII. OTHER BUSINESS**

**Resolution 26 PC 06 – Permit Fees and Non-reverting Fund** This resolution establishes a non-reverting fund for permit fees to ensure statutory compliance regarding third-party inspections and required refunds in the event of unmet deadlines.

- **MOTION:** To approve the establishment of the non-reverting fund as a fiscal amendment to Ordinance 2006-22. Moved by Gwen Rentz, Seconded by Therese Pugh.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried.

## **VIII. BOARD COMMENTS AND PROCEDURES**

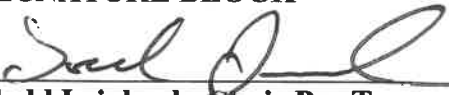
**Hiring Process Subcommittee** The Board discussed the Administrative Assistant vacancy. Director McCurrie emphasized the need for an employee capable of making difficult decisions rather than a standard clerk.

- **MOTION:** To grant the Planning Director the authority to conduct initial interviews. The Director must provide the Board with an executive summary of all candidates, including qualifications and rankings, for the Board to conduct final selections and interviews. Moved by Todd Leinbach, Seconded by Gwen Rentz.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried.

## **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

- **MOTION:** To adjourn the meeting. Moved by Gwen Rentz, Seconded by Dale Turner.
- **RESULT:** Motion carried.

**SIGNATURE BLOCK**

  
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**Todd Leinbach, Chair Pro Tem**

  
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**John McCurrie, Secretary**

