# STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

# MEETING MINUTES

**Date:** June 1, 2026 **Location:** Starke County Government Building **Time:** 5:00 PM

## CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

The Starke County Board of Commissioners met in regular session to execute the legislative and executive functions of the county. The meeting was formally called to order by the presiding officer, followed by the collective recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. This procedure establishes the official commencement of the record and serves as the foundational act for all subsequent legislative determinations.

**Roll Call**

- **Present:** Mike VanDeMark (Commissioner President), Donnie Binkley (Commissioner), Charlie Chesak (Commissioner Vice-President), Michaelene (Auditor).
- **Also Present:** Justin Schramm (County Attorney), Lee Nagai (Engineer), April Wilhelm (Coroner), John McCurrie (Planning Commission), Kelly Graham (Treasurer), Bob Harper.

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## I. CLAIMS AND PAYROLL

The Board of Commissioners exercises its fiduciary oversight through the systematic audit and approval of all county expenditures. This process ensures that disbursements for vendor services and personnel compensation are consistent with statutory requirements and the budgetary appropriations authorized by the County Council.

**Vendor Claims** The Board reviewed vendor claims in the amount of $507,739.82.

- **MOTION:** Donnie
- **SECOND:** Charlie
- **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)

**Payroll Claims** The Board reviewed payroll claims for the pay period ending May 23, 2026, totaling $344,527.92.

- **MOTION:** Donnie
- **SECOND:** Charlie

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

*Upon the authorization of financial claims, the Board proceeded to the verification and authentication of the public record.*

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## II. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

The maintenance of a precise and factual public record is a primary administrative safeguard against institutional liability. The Board conducted a review of previous minutes, emphasizing that the written record must serve as a definitive and legally defensible account of Board actions to ensure transparency and prevent unauthorized administrative precedents.

During the review, Mike VanDeMark identified a critical error regarding a proposal from a "roofing guy." The draft minutes erroneously indicated a 3-0 unanimous approval. The Board moved to remand the minutes to the Auditor’s office for correction, specifically to void potential unauthorized contractual reliance by the vendor and to ensure the record reflects that the project must still undergo a formal bidding process.

*With the corrective measures for the minutes established, the Board shifted focus to a scheduled public hearing regarding property infrastructure.*

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## III. PUBLIC HEARING: VACATION OF ROADWAY (DEER VIEW ESTATES)

The vacation of a public roadway is a formal legislative act that terminates the county’s interest in a dedicated right-of-way and reverts the property to private ownership. This public hearing provides a transparent forum for the Board to evaluate the impact of the vacation on local access and emergency service routes.

The Board opened a public hearing regarding a petition to vacate a 60-foot future roadway within Deer View Estates. The petitioner stated the land was originally dedicated for potential development that is no longer pursued. No public comments were offered. The Board approved the vacation with the specific legal stipulation that the petitioner bears full financial responsibility for any survey work required by the Auditor’s office to complete the land transfer.

- **MOTION TO OPEN PUBLIC HEARING:** Donnie; **SECOND:** Charlie; **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)
- **MOTION TO CLOSE PUBLIC HEARING:** Donnie; **SECOND:** Charlie; **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)
- **MOTION TO APPROVE ORDINANCE:** Donnie; **SECOND:** Charlie; **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)

*Following the resolution of the property vacation, the Board addressed the operational requirements of the Coroner's Office.*

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## IV. CORONER'S OFFICE FACILITY PROJECT

Strategic infrastructure planning requires the Board to evaluate whether existing facilities meet the escalating service demands of the county. The Coroner's Office reports a substantial increase in annual calls—rising from 44 to 87—which has exceeded the capacity of the current two-person cooler and the facility's overall footprint.

Engineer Lee presented a $9,500 proposal to facilitate a construction design release from the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, covering electrical, foundation, structural, and architectural drawings for an addition. However, the Board and Coroner April discussed the inefficiencies of expanding the current "lean-to" structure, which lacks original state permitting. The Board determined that the long-term utility of a purpose-built facility outweighs the cost of modifying the existing undersized barn. The Coroner was directed to prepare a comprehensive proposal and budget for the County Council to seek funding for new construction.

*Having concluded the discussion on facilities, the Board moved to address regulatory compliance for donation-based funds.*

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## V. STATE BOARD OF ACCOUNTS (SBOA) COMPLIANCE: DONATIONS

To ensure institutional integrity and adhere to the Uniform Compliance Guidelines of the State Board of Accounts (SBOA), the county must maintain strict internal controls over miscellaneous funds. The transition of the "Farm Fund" to the "Grove Fund" necessitates a standardized reporting structure to prevent the commingling of assets and ensure that private contributions are utilized for their designated public purpose.

The Auditor reported that SBOA mandates Commissioner approval for all donations. The Board approved a procedure where a log of all donations—detailing donors, dates, and amounts—will be submitted to the Commissioners monthly. This reporting structure satisfies SBOA internal control requirements while permitting departments like the Sheriff's Canine Fund to receive small-scale public contributions efficiently.

- **MOTION TO APPROVE DONATION REPORTING PROCEDURE:** Donnie
- **SECOND:** Charlie
- **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)

*The Board then initiated a review of multiple resolutions submitted by the Planning Commission.*

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## VI. PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTIONS (PC-07 TO PC-11)

The Planning Commission serves to modernize the county's regulatory framework in response to evolving state statutes and industrial developments. These resolutions are designed to balance private property rights with the county's obligation to ensure public safety and environmental protection.

- **Resolution 2026-PC-07 (Residential Inspections):** This resolution aligns county code with Indiana's mandate allowing private inspectors. It establishes a fee breakdown of 50% for inspections, 30% for plan review, and 20% for administration, while instituting a 12-day mandate for plan reviews to limit administrative liability and prevent backlogs.
    - **MOTION:**; Charlie **SECOND:** Donnie; **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)
- **Resolution 2026-PC-08 (Fencing Ordinance):** The Board debated the inclusion of galvanized and metal roofing materials as "unapproved." Commissioner Donnie noted concerns regarding over-regulation of aesthetics. The Board moved to remand the resolution to the Planning Commission to refine the definition of "authorized materials" and ensure it does not prohibit common, well-maintained fencing.
    - **MOTION TO REMAND:** Donnie; **SECOND:** Charlie; **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)
- **Resolution 2026-PC-09 (Carbon Capture Moratorium):** A 12-month moratorium on carbon capture and sequestration applications was approved to allow the county time to develop specialized zoning ordinances for this emerging technology.
    - **MOTION:** Charlie; **SECOND:** Donnie; **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)
- **Resolution 2026-PC-10 (Commercial Solar):** The Board approved a comprehensive 60-page rework of the solar ordinance, effective July 25, 2026. The Board noted that while the Road Use and Emergency Management Agreements are still being refined, the ordinance can be amended post-adoption as those specific details are finalized.
    - **MOTION:** Donnie; **SECOND:** Charlie; **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)
- **Resolution 2026-PC-11 (Battery Energy Storage - BESS):** To mitigate lithium-ion fire hazards, the Board approved 2,000-foot setbacks and the creation of an Emergency Response Fund. This fund requires an initial $250,000 deposit, a $200,000 annual replenishment fee, and a 3% annual inflation adjustment to ensure the long-term solvency of emergency response resources.
    - **MOTION:** Charlie; **SECOND:** Donnie; **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)

*Analytical Note: The adoption of these resolutions represents a significant shift in the county's regulatory landscape, particularly regarding the fiscal and safety burdens placed on renewable energy developers.*

*Following the planning agenda, the Board received a report on the county's financial audit status.*

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## VII. TREASURER'S OPERATIONAL UPDATE

The county's "unauditable" status with the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) represents a significant risk to the county's eligibility for state and federal grants. While the Treasurer reported progress, a clear discrepancy remains between the Treasurer's optimistic outlook and the Auditor's warnings regarding the severity of the SBOA communication and the potential for frozen funding.

Treasurer Kelly reported that bank reconciliations for 2023 and 2024 are complete, with March 2025 currently in progress. The Treasurer targetted June 30, 2026, for completion to coincide with the SBOA's return. To expedite this, the Treasurer requested laptop and VPN access for staff. The Board noted that while the "unauditable" status is a major concern, the current pace of reconciliation must be maintained to restore the county's financial standing and inter-governmental relations.

*Having addressed financial standing, the Board opened the floor for other county business.*

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## VIII. OTHER BUSINESS & PUBLIC COMMENT

The Board utilizes this session to address localized infrastructure concerns and internal policy matters that affect departmental efficiency and taxpayer liability.

- **Shewski Road Fire Access:** Bob Harper requested a gate on Shewski Road to prevent illegal parking from obstructing emergency vehicles. The Board directed the Auditor to contact Fire Chief Darryl Crase and Assistant Chief Jim Garner for a formal recommendation to ensure emergency access is not compromised.
- **Grovertown EMS Building:** The Board discussed the deteriorating condition of the Grovertown EMS facility. Options involving state-owned land and the impact of the "30 corridor project" were addressed, with the Board prioritizing the maintenance of this critical emergency infrastructure.
- **Highway Department Vehicles:** The Board debated the "take-home" truck policy, citing concerns over fuel theft, liability, and vehicle depreciation. A proposal was made to restrict take-home privileges to the Superintendent and Foreman. The Highway Superintendent is expected to provide a formal recommendation at the next session.
- **Equipment Update:** The Board acknowledged the utility of the new "chopper" for brush management, noting its success in improving road visibility for school bus routes.

*Analytical Note: The move toward restricting take-home vehicles reflects a strategic attempt to mitigate taxpayer liability, though the Board must balance this against the potential impact on employee retention and emergency response readiness.*

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## IX. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned.

- **MOTION TO ADJOURN:** Charlie
- **SECOND:** Donnie
- **RESULT:** Passed (3-0)

**SIGNATURES:**

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*Mike VanDeMark, President, Starke County Board of Commissioners*

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*Charlie Chesak, Vice-President, Starke County Board of Commissioners*

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*Donnie Binkley, Member, Starke County Board of Commissioners*

**ATTEST:**

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*Michaelene J. Houston, Auditor and Secretary to the Board of Commissioners*