STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES
Meeting Details Date: June 15, 2026 **Location:** Starke County Government Building, Main Meeting Room **Time:** 8:30 AM

I. CALL TO ORDER
The Starke County Board of Commissioners was called to order in a formal session on the morning of June 15, 2026, by President Mike VanDeMark. The proceedings commenced with the lead of the Pledge of Allegiance, signifying the official opening of the county's executive business. Following the opening ceremonies, the Board proceeded to the verification of attendance and the establishment of a legal quorum.
II. ROLL CALL
Present

- **Mike VanDeMark:** Commissioner President
- **Don Binkley:** Commissioner Member
- **Michaelene J. Houston:** Auditor/Secretary

Absent

- **Charlie Chesak:** Commissioner Vice-President

Also Present

- **Justin Schramm:** County Attorney
- **Rachel Kinney:** Highway Superintendent
- **Jim Garner:** EMS Director
- **Mikie Stogsdill:** Economic Development Director
- **Amie Flora:** Park Board Superintendent
- **Megan Johnson:** Hope Restored Recovery Home
- **Mary Perren & April Wilhelm:** Starke County Humane Society
- **Nathan:** Highway Department Staff

With a quorum established, the Board transitioned to the review and approval of the county's historical records.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
The Board recognizes its duty to maintain precise historical records of all public proceedings to ensure transparency and administrative continuity.
May 18, 2026, Meeting Minutes A specific clarification was entered into the record regarding the May 18th proceedings. President VanDeMark and Auditor Houston noted that while an estimate for a specific contract was discussed and authorized for

pursuit, the Board did **not** approve a binding contract during that session. The minutes were amended to reflect that no contractual obligation was formed on that date.

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve the minutes as amended. President Mike VanDeMark seconded the motion.
- **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.

June 1, 2026, Meeting Minutes

- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve the minutes of the June 1st meeting. President Mike VanDeMark seconded the motion.
- **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.

IV. FINANCIALS: CLAIMS & PAYROLL

The Board of Commissioners exercises fiduciary responsibility through the regular audit and authorization of county expenditures, ensuring that all disbursements align with budgetary allocations and legal requirements.

- **Vendor Claims:** Approval of claims in the amount of **$932,184.62**.
  - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve. President Mike VanDeMark seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.
- **Payroll (Pay Period Ending 5-23-2026):** Totaling **$344,527.92**.
  - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve. President Mike VanDeMark seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.
- **Payroll Claims (Pay Period Ending 6-6-2026):** Totaling **$362,934.67**.
  - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve. President Mike VanDeMark seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.

Total financial obligations approved during this session amounted to **$1,639,647.21**.

V. EMS MONTHLY REPORT

EMS Director Jim Garner presented the monthly status report. The Board maintains active oversight of emergency medical service metrics to ensure public safety and the efficient delivery of critical care.

- **Financial Audit:** The Board acknowledged receipt of a check from the **O'Hare Law Office in the amount of $753.79**.

- **Operational Status:** Equipment availability is currently at 4 out of 5 ambulances. A new unit is scheduled to enter service immediately.
- **Staffing Levels:** May staffing reached 90% (a 3% increase), maintaining two ALS units. Transfers represented 16.1% of call volume (43 out of 267 total calls). Recent hires include three part-time EMTs and one part-time paramedic.
- **Training:** Staff completed intensive trauma care training involving lifelike scenarios and realistic simulated injuries.

Board Actions on EMS Requests:

- **DEA Conformance Narcotic System:** Purchase of a mandatory narcotic maintenance and log system ($38,346.83) utilizing Restricted Opioid Funds.
  - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve. President Mike VanDeMark seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.
- **Color Printer:** Purchase of an off-lease color printer for $3,500 (under existing maintenance program).
  - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve. President Mike VanDeMark seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.
- **EMS Skid Unit:** Purchase of a removable medical skid unit for the Polaris vehicle ($3,550) from the donation fund.
  - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve. President Mike VanDeMark seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.

VI. PUBLIC HEARING: SHEWSKI ROAD / BASS LAKE ACCESS
The Board opened a hearing regarding the strategic conflict between public land access and private property concerns at Shewski Road.
Public Testimony & Legal Citations:

- **Legal Precedent:** Dr. Jakub Skorupa cited the **2012 Commissioner Meeting minutes** where former Attorney Lucas established that Shewski Road is a county road and must be treated as such.
- **Historical Easement:** Resident George Lawson presented documentation regarding an **1852 easement** tracing back to President Millard Fillmore, granting a perpetual easement to the water’s edge for residents of Lot 3.
- **Community Impact:** Residents testified that privatization would diminish property values by 50–70% and impede fire services in an area without hydrants. Residents reported intimidation by a neighboring owner, including unauthorized filming of families.

Board Determination: Highway Superintendent Kinney confirmed Shewski Road is on the county inventory and receives state funding. Attorney and Superintendent consensus established that a public road cannot legally be gated.

- **Consensus:** The Board formally determined that **no gate will be installed**. The Board will explore "No Parking" signage and towing enforcement to ensure fire department access is maintained.

Several Members of the public spoke regarding keeping the Shewski Road access open to the public.

VII. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT
Mikie Stogsdill appeared before the commissioners and Economic development initiatives were reviewed to assess their impact on long-term fiscal health and workforce growth.

- **Project Updates:** Project Linback has navigated the BZA and is moving forward. Project Power On remains in the preliminary stages.
- **Business Retention:** A retention visit was conducted with J.W. Hicks to assess the needs of a major employer.
- **Workforce Development:** Stark Tank funds have been distributed to local student teams.
- **Administration:** The Economic Development budget for the new fiscal year will be finalized on June 29, 2026.

There is a full report on file in the Auditor's office.

VIII. FUNDING REQUESTS: OPIOID SETTLEMENT & COMMUNITY GRANTS
The Board evaluated requests for the allocation of settlement and grant funds aimed at recovery and welfare.
Hope Restored Recovery Home:

- **Details:** Request for $104,000 to cover a two-year salary for the Director of the North Judson recovery home from restricted opioid funds.
- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve pending final County Council approval. President Mike VanDeMark seconded.
- **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.

Starke County Humane Society:

- **Details:** Request for $54,250 for a thrift store building, HVAC systems, and veterinary care.
- **Fiduciary Oversight:** Auditor Houston reported that the Humane Society already has an existing **$4,000 appropriation in the Commissioner's budget (County General)** that has remained un-invoiced since October 2024.
- **Action:** The Board took the request under advisement. Commissioners will conduct a site visit to assess the facility and the status of existing funds before proceeding.

IX. HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT BUSINESS
The Board addressed infrastructure challenges, including material costs and emergency response policies.

- **Bituminous Oil Pricing:** Superintendent Kinney reported a transition to Bitmat due to quality issues with Asphalt Materials. The price increased to $3.56/gal (from $2.25/gal) because the county did not order during the winter, forcing "on demand" purchases during rising oil prices. This creates a 100K to 150k paving budget variance.
- **Toto Road Extension:** Paving a gap from SR 23 to SR 17 ($75,000).
  - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to approve. President Mike VanDeMark seconded.
  - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.
- **Take-Home Vehicle Policy:** A debate occurred regarding the "Personnel/Operational Risk" of removing take-home trucks. Nathan (Highway Staff) provided testimony that without these vehicles, response time would increase by over an hour, stating he would not risk his family's safety by traveling to the shop in a personal vehicle during a storm. Superintendent Kinney emphasized that these staff are essential emergency responders. Both Emergency Management and Emergency Medical Services were in full support of the take home vehicles due to response time in an emergency. The storms the other day would have seriously hindered response time if the highway department had not been able to respond so quickly to remove trees from the road for EMS to respond to their emergency. The extra time it would take could mean someone’s life. The matter was tabled until a full Board is present.
- **Air Conditioning:** Rachel reported that the air conditioning at the garage is not working and it is so old that parts can not be found to fix the unit.

X. MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

- **America 250 Committee:** Approved a public reading of the Declaration of Independence on July 8th, 5:00 p.m. at the Veterans War Memorial.
- **SBA Update:** Residents have until August 7th to apply for disaster assistance following March storms.
- **Recorder's Office:** Confirmed a $42.00 tax exemption refund was deposited.
- **Park Department Update:** Amie Flora reported that United Consulting will be doing the RFP for the Electrical upgrade at the Bass Lake Campground.
- **Charging Station Bill:** Bussy Electric invoice ($3,798.97) for the ambulance station.
    - **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to pay from the Commissioner's fund, to be reimbursed by future ambulance trailer sale proceeds. President Mike VanDeMark seconded.
    - **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.
- **Surf Internet Complaint:** IT Director Stanley Budd brought a complaint regarding Surf Internet failing to honor initial claims of price lock for life not lining up with their current marketing. Since the price lock for life guarantee was part of their argument to secure the $500,000 grant from Starke County. Joann Bailey complained that they failed to honor their rollout commitments in Railroad Township despite receiving a $500,000 grant. The Board will investigate the status of the letter of support and project milestones.
- **Towing:** Commissioner VanDeMark asked that if we can track someone down for leaving boats and other such items along the sides of the road that have to be towed away, are we able to fine them. Attorney Schramm will prepare an ordinance. The ordinance will also pertain to people who block accesses.
- **Bank Reconciliation:** Kelly Graham reported this is going well and should be done by June 30.

XI. ADJOURNMENT
There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Mike VanDeMark, President

Charlie Chesak, Vice-President

Don Binkley, Member

ATTEST: ___________________________ Michaelene J. Houston, Auditor