STARKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES
Date: July 6, 2026 **Location:** Starke County Government Building **Time:** 5:00 PM
CALL TO ORDER The meeting of the Starke County Board of Commissioners was called to order by President Mike VanDeMark. The proceedings commenced with the lead-in of the Pledge of Allegiance, led by the President.
ROLL CALL

- **Present:** Mike VanDeMark (President), Charlie Chesak (Vice-President), Don Binkley (Member), and Michaelene J. Houston (Secretary/Auditor).
- **Also Present:** County Attorney Justin Schramm Schramm, Rachel Kinney (Highway Superintendent), 2 members of the county council-Todd Leinbach and Bruce Bennett, and various members of the public.
- **Absent:** None.

I. CLAIMS AND MINUTES APPROVAL
In accordance with statutory requirements, the Board reviewed the financial claims and previous meeting records necessary to ensure the continued lawful operation and transparency of county business.

- **Vendor Claims:** Totaling $424,364.56.
- **Payroll Claims:** For the period ending June 20, 2026, totaling $347,065.01.
- **Commissioner Minutes:** Approval of the record from the June 15, 2026, meeting.

MOTION: Don Binkley moved to approve the claims and minutes as presented; seconded by Charlie Chesak. **RESULT:** Passed unanimously.
With financial and record-keeping obligations met, the Board proceeded to state-mandated certifications.

II. COVERED BRIDGE CERTIFICATION
The Board addressed the annual state requirement to file State Form 56491 regarding covered bridges within the county's jurisdiction. Discussion confirmed that while Starke County does not currently possess any covered bridge structures, the State of Indiana requires an annual certification to this effect to remain in compliance with reporting standards.
MOTION: Charlie Chesak moved to approve the certification of State Form 56491; seconded by Don Binkley. **RESULT:** Passed (Aye: 3, Nay: 0).
Following this certification, the Board turned its attention to items of significant public interest.

III. SHEWSKI ROAD PUBLIC ACCESS DISPUTE

A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to public concern regarding a county road and fire lane at Shewski Road providing lake access.

- **Status Update:** The Board noted the absence of "Bob Harper," a primary party in the dispute, who may be seeking legal representation.
- **Legal Summary:** County Attorney Justin Schramm Schramm provided a summary of a title search conducted by McKesson, which traced the dedication history back to 2005. While an assertion was made that the road was never properly dedicated, the county currently receives INDOT funding for the route.
- **Public Testimony:** Residents emphasized the road's critical history as a fire and water rescue lane, citing an incident approximately 30 years ago where lake access was vital for scuba divers to recover a drowning victim.
- **Board Position:** The Board reaffirmed that Shewski Road is currently in the county inventory and will remain a public county road unless a court of law orders otherwise.

SECRETARY'S NOTE ON STRATEGIC IMPACT: County Attorney Justin Schramm advised the Board and the public to limit specific legal commentary. From an administrative perspective, this restriction was enforced to protect the county's legal position, ensuring the public record does not provide testimony that could be used as discovery or "briefed against" the county in potential litigation.

IV. HVAC AND EQUIPMENT PROCUREMENT

The Board reviewed maintenance needs for county infrastructure, noting the difficulty in securing competitive bids for specialized systems at the Highway Garage.

- **HVAC Investigation:** An estimate was received from McGrath for a complete system replacement. Other vendors, including All Seasons, Apex, and J&R, were either unresponsive or not accepting new clients. Maintenance will conduct further review of parts availability for the existing system before a final decision.
- **MOTION:** Don Binkley moved to table seconded by Charlie Chesak. **RESULT:** Passed.
- **Equipment Purchase:** A 2009 bucket truck with 264,000 miles was identified at auction for $10,000. Following inspection, the truck was deemed sound and superior to current equipment.
  MOTION: Charlie Chesak moved to approve the purchase of the 2009 bucket truck for $10,000 (plus a 10% auction fee) to be paid from LRS funds; seconded by Don Binkley. **RESULT:** Passed.
  MOTION: Charlie Chesak moved to auction the current bucket truck with a $5,000 reserve; seconded by Don Binkley. **RESULT:** Passed.

V. HIGHWAY AND PERSONNEL POLICIES

Traffic safety and internal department policies were reviewed following recommendations from engineering experts.

- **Intersection Safety:** Based on LTAP engineering recommendations and a recent accident occurring just a few weeks ago, the intersection of CR 700 East and 200 North will be converted to a four-way stop. President VanDeMark initiated this review following citizen contact.
- **Personnel Policy:** The Board discussed the "Take Home Vehicle" policy. Despite previous debate, the Board decided to maintain the status quo.
- **MOTION:** Charlie Chesak moved to approve the intersection change seconded by Don Binkley. **RESULT:** Passed.
  MOTION: Charlie Chesak moved to approve the take-home vehicle policy; seconded by Don Binkley. **RESULT:** Passed (Aye: 2, Nay: 1 President VanDeMark in the negative).

VI. HUMANE SOCIETY, CORONER'S OFFICE AND INSURANCE PRESENTATIONS

The Board received updates on facility improvements and optional employee benefits.

- **Humane Society:** The Board moved to table until they could go out and look at the facility.
- **Coroner's Report:** The Coroner reported that the proposed pole barn addition requires "Class 1" permitting. Due to rising costs (increasing from $47,000 to $62,000) and permitting complexities, the Board suggested evaluating a new building versus an addition to the current structure, which already features ventilation and recent floor coatings.
- **Supplemental Insurance:** Patty Enfield of Globe Life presented supplemental insurance options available to employees at no cost to the county. The Board directed HR to gauge employee interest before proceeding.

VII. EASEMENT AND PROPERTY PETITIONS

The Board heard requests from individual citizens regarding land use and access rights.

- **Colonial Estates Road Easement:** Terry Ferch requested to vacate a "future road" easement. Counsel advised that a formal petition must be filed for a public hearing.
- **Boa Drive Inquiry:** Debbie Mix inquired about the "Boa Drive/Boa Shores Park" triangle, noting that a landlocked designation was hindering a mortgage. County Attorney Justin Schramm noted the property is listed as "Park District"

property with Lynn Vessley (Township Trustee) as the contact. As it is exempt property not directly under county control, Counsel recommended private legal counsel for this civil matter.

VIII. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND OFFICE SPACE
Administrative efficiency and the oversight of county-funded projects were discussed.

- **Contract Dispute:** A heated discussion occurred regarding the "SCILL" contract payments ($50,000 vs. $70,000). Council members Bruce Bennett and Todd Leinbach provided testimony regarding instructions to the Auditor to cease payments. **DIRECTIVE:** The Auditor was instructed to provide a full spend-down report at the next meeting to clarify all issued payments.
- **Office Relocation:** The Board decided to move the IT office from the Annex 1 building into the former Commissioner's office in the courthouse.

MOTION: Don Binkley moved to complete the office relocation by July 31 with the middle office that used to be IT being the commissioners' office; seconded by Charlie Chesak. **RESULT:** Passed.

IX. TOWING ROTATION AND POLICY DISPUTE
The Board evaluated the county's towing rotation policy. Steve Hauser (Hauser Towing) argued for an area-based rotation, while vendors TNT, Pitstop, and Howard Coffin discussed call volume balance. Sheriff Rosa, exercising statutory discretionary authority over the rotation, agreed to implement a 50/50 rotation for "heavy" calls between the two primary providers capable of such work to ensure fairness.

X. PUBLIC ACCESS MAINTENANCE (TREE REMOVAL)
A resident at 5408 S CR 210 reported a dangerous tree on the public access at Williams Street. The Board directed the Highway Department to use the new bucket truck to inspect the tree. If removal is beyond the department's internal capabilities, quotes will be sought from outside contractors.

XI. AUDITOR'S REPORT AND PUBLIC COMMENT

- **Treasurer's Update:** Kelly Graham, Treasurer, reported that 2025 bank reconciliation was complete ahead of schedule and reported that the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) has re-engaged. The county is expected to be "auditable" by the end of the current week. The target completion date for the audit is the second week of August.
- **Public Comment:** Resident Deb Wappel provided an update on the Economic Development Foundation, highlighting the "Starke Tank" program's impact on

local businesses like BC Bakes and A1 Disposal, and the revenue potential of solar projects.

XII. ADJOURNMENT
There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.
MOTION: Don Binkley moved to adjourn; seconded by Mike VanDeMark. **RESULT:** Passed.
Approval Signatures:

Mike VanDeMark, President

Charlie Chesak, Vice-President

Don Binkley, Member
Attest:

Michaelene J. Houston, Starke County Auditor