

STARKE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

DATE: February 11, 2026 **TIME:** 5:30 PM **LOCATION:** Starke County Government Center

I. ADMINISTRATIVE OPENING AND ATTENDANCE

The establishment of a quorum and the formal opening of a public meeting are fundamental requirements for ensuring transparency and maintaining the legal integrity of county governance. These proceedings ensure that all legislative actions are conducted in view of the public and that the Commission operates within its statutory authority.

Call to Order The meeting of the Starke County Planning Commission was formally called to order on February 11, 2026. The session commenced with the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call The following members and staff were recorded as present or absent:

- **Present:** Mark Allen, Gwen Rentz, Todd Leinbach, Kenny Eagle, Crystal Keller, Theresa Pugh, Mike VanDeMark, John McCurrie, Amber Janson, Robby Blodgett,
- **Also Present:** Nate Viz (Legal Counsel).
- **Absent:** Dale.

A quorum was declared present to conduct official county business. Following the call to order, the Commission transitioned to the review of the administrative record.

II. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes from the previous session were distributed via email and reviewed by the board members prior to the meeting.

Official Action

- **MOTION:** Gwen moved to approve the minutes as presented; seconded by Todd.
- **RESULT:** The motion passed unanimously.

The Board transitioned to the presentation of departmental activity reports for the month of January.

III. PERMITS AND INSPECTIONS REPORT

Permit Issuance

- **Staff Report:** Departmental staff reported a decrease in permit volume for January, citing inclement weather as the primary factor impacting development activity.
- **Primary Activity:** Activity was focused on processing contractor registrations for the upcoming 2026 calendar year.

Inspection Results

- **Performance:** Despite the low volume of activity due to weather conditions, the department achieved a 100% pass rate for January, with zero failed inspections recorded.

Official Action: Swearing-In of Members The newly appointed member Theresa Pugh of the Planning Commission was formally sworn in. The following oath was administered:

"I solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the State of Indiana, and I will faithfully, honestly, and impartially discharge the duties in the office of the Starke County Planning Commission according to the law to the best of my skill and ability."

Following the swearing-in, the Commission transitioned to the review of the department's fiscal standing.

IV. MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT

The Planning Commission holds a fiduciary responsibility to monitor departmental revenue and ensure that expenditures remain aligned with the approved annual budget.

Revenue Summary (January 2026)

- Building Permits/Contractor Registrations/Fees: \$4,990.00
- Code Enforcement: \$600.00
- **Total Revenue:** \$5,590.00

Expense Summary

- Meetings/Per Diem: \$1,125.00
- Legal/Consultations: \$2,842.00
- **Total Monthly Expenditure:** Approximately \$4,200.00.
- **Note:** Fleet and fuel expenses from the County Highway Garage have not yet been determined and are currently excluded from the expenditure total.

Budgetary Analysis The department has utilized 10% of its \$41,205.00 annual budget (excluding salaries). The board expressed satisfaction with the current spreadsheet format for financial tracking.

The Commission transitioned to the discussion of active code enforcement and public nuisance cases.

V. CODE ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLAINT LOG

Code enforcement plays a critical role in protecting property values and ensuring the health and safety of county residents by addressing non-compliant structures and environmental hazards.

Case Status Updates

- **Unsafe Structure:** Closed.
- **Staff Work Order:** Open.
- **Environmental Public Nuisance:** Open.
- **Failure to Obtain Permit:** Closed.
- **Miscellaneous Complaint:** Closed.

Lombardi Property Discussion the Commission discussed persistent trash and nuisance issues at the Lombardi property. Legal counsel clarified that while the Commission lacks authority for direct eviction, it may

enforce cleanup through specific administrative steps. Public testimony indicated the nuisance has persisted for three years, with recent evidence showing 13 bags of trash remaining on site. The case is currently at Step 7 of an 8-step administrative process.

Action Plan the Board authorized moving forward with an administrative hearing to be placed on the March 11 agenda. Legal counsel will proceed with demand notices. If the nuisance is not abated, the county may seek legal action to enter the property for a forced cleanup and subsequently lien the property for costs.

The Commission transitioned to upcoming legislative and departmental objectives.

VI. FUTURE OPERATIONS AND LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Responsible land-use planning requires regular amendments to local ordinances to ensure they remain in compliance with shifting state laws and community standards.

Legislative Impacts (HB 1005) State House Bill 1005 requires a restructuring of the county fee schedule to allow for refunds if private inspectors are utilized. The proposed breakdown for fee itemization is:

- Inspections: 50%
- Plan Reviews: 25-30%
- Administrative Costs: 20-25%

Ordinance Amendments and Upcoming Items

- **Fencing Ordinance:** The department is drafting a list of prohibited materials (e.g., roofing materials, car parts, hubcaps) to address line-of-sight and aesthetic concerns regarding "scrap" fencing.
- **San Pierre Dollar General:** Building plans have been submitted to the state; construction will commence upon state approval.
- **Data center Ordinance:** Data collection from regional counties is ongoing; drafting will commence following the resolution of moratorium issues.

The Commission transitioned to the formal Public Hearing portion of the meeting.

VII. PUBLIC HEARING: BATTERY STORAGE MORATORIUM EXTENSION

Moratoriums serve as a temporary pause on specific developments, allowing the Commission time to research and draft comprehensive ordinances that protect the county's long-term interests.

Resolution Presentation the Commission considered a resolution to recommend that the Board of Commissioners extend Ordinance 06-0F-2025, placing a temporary moratorium on Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), through July 25, 2026.

Public Comment The floor was opened for public comment with a three-minute limit per individual. No comments were recorded regarding the battery moratorium extension.

Official Action

- **MOTION:** Gwen Rentz moved to approve the resolution for extension; seconded by Theresa Pugh
- **RESULT:** The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

The Commission transitioned to the subsequent hearing regarding solar energy systems.

VIII. PUBLIC HEARING: COMMERCIAL SOLAR ENERGY MORATORIUM EXTENSION

The intent of extending the solar moratorium is to allow for a line-by-line review of the proposed Commercial Solar Energy Systems (CES) ordinance to ensure it meets county-specific requirements.

Resolution Presentation A proposal was presented to recommend the extension of Ordinance 07-2025, the temporary moratorium on commercial solar energy systems, through July 25, 2026.

Board/Public Discussion Public inquiry and board discussion clarified that this hearing was strictly regarding the extension of the moratorium, not the adoption of the final ordinance language.

Official Action

- **MOTION:** Theresa Pugh moved to support the extension; seconded by Gwen.
- **RESULT:** The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote. Signatures from all members were obtained following the vote to certify the recommendation to the Board of Commissioners.

The Commission transitioned to concluding board business and public comments.

IX. OTHER BUSINESS AND PUBLIC COMMENT

This portion of the meeting provides a forum for the public to raise concerns on non-agenda items and for the Board to address miscellaneous administrative matters.

Property Updates An update was provided regarding a property on County Road 210. The case has been closed as the owner provided valid registrations for all boats and trailers on-site, bringing the property into full compliance.

Meeting Scheduling A special meeting was scheduled for **February 25, 2026, at 5:30 PM**. The agenda will include:

1. Discussion/Approval of departmental administrative structure and job descriptions.
2. A line-by-line review of the proposed Solar Ordinance.

The Commission transitioned to the final adjournment of the session.

X. ADJOURNMENT

The February 11, 2026, meeting of the Starke County Planning Commission was formally concluded following the completion of all agenda items.

Official Action

- **MOTION:** Teresa Pugh moved to adjourn; seconded by Kenny Eagle.
- **RESULT:** The motion passed unanimously.

February 11th 2026 Approval of Meeting Minutes

SIGNATURE BLOCK **Date:** _____

President

Vice-President

Member

Member

Member

Member

Member

Member