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JENNIFER MADSEN, RECORDER
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STARKE COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Date: **June 15, 2026** **Location:** County Government Building
Time: 4:30 pm

I. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

The Starke County Council meeting was called to order on June 15, 2026. The proceedings commenced with the Council and public body standing for the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Status	Name	Title / Role
Present	Bill Crase	Council President
	Dave Pearman	Council Vice-President (via zoom)
	Kay Gudeman	Council Member
	Cassandra Hine	Council Member
	Howard Bailey	Council Member
	Todd Leinbach	Council Member
	Bruce Bennett	Council Member
Also Present	Michaelene J Houston	County Auditor and Council Secretary
	Justin Schramm	Legal Counsel
	April Wilhelm	Coroner
	Jim Garner	EMS Director
	Julie Miller	County Extension Director
	Amie Flora	Park Superintendent
	Jose Valtierra	Regional Operational Leader (Extension)
	Don Binkley	Commissioner Member

The Chair established a quorum and transitioned the assembly to the first item of scheduled public business regarding fiscal appropriations.

II. PUBLIC HEARING: ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATION ORDINANCE NO. 12 of 2026

The Council addressed the strategic necessity of Ordinance No. 12 of 2026, which facilitates vital funding for community services and critical security upgrades for the county courthouse. These appropriations are essential for maintaining public safety infrastructure and ensuring the continued delivery of community-based support programs.

During the analytical discussion, it was noted that the Planning Commission's request for $10,000 in attorney fees was legally restricted to $5,000, as that was the amount specified in the public advertisement. The department was advised to submit a subsequent request for the balance. Furthermore, the community services funding was adjusted from the advertised $80,000 to $70,000 to reflect a prior $10,000 distribution. Funding for the jail and courthouse metal detector was confirmed at $4,158.66.

Official Actions:

- **MOTION:** To open the Public Hearing for Ordinance No. 12 of 2026.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Bruce Bennett; Seconded by Kay Gudeman. Passed unanimously.
- **MOTION:** To close the Public Hearing for Ordinance No. 12 of 2026.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Dave Pearman; Seconded by Bruce Bennett. Passed unanimously.
- **MOTION:** To approve Ordinance No. 12 of 2026, amended to $70,000 for community services.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Dave Pearman; Seconded by Bruce Bennett. Passed unanimously.
- **MOTION:** To approve the Jail CEDIT Fund appropriation in the amount of $4,158.66 for the metal detector.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Howard Bailey; Seconded by Todd Leinbach. Passed unanimously.
- **MOTION:** To approve the Cum. Cap. Development Fund in the total amount of $11,958.66.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Cassandra Hine; Seconded by Kay Gudeman. Passed unanimously.

The Council then proceeded to review township-specific requests.

III. NORTH JUDSON WAYNE TOWNSHIP LIBRARY APPROPRIATION

The Council reviewed a request for a $65,000 appropriation from the North Judson Wayne Township Library's rainy day fund. These funds are designated for the repair of the library's elevator, a necessary expenditure to maintain facility accessibility. The Council conferred with Nathan (Treasurer) and Dave Altman (President) regarding the necessity of this formal approval. Because the library board is an appointed body, the Council confirmed that this appropriation is a required procedural formality to allow the library to utilize its own existing funds.

Official Actions:

- **MOTION:** To open the Public Hearing.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Bruce Bennet; Seconded by Kay Gudeman. Passed unanimously.
- **MOTION:** To open close the Public Hearing.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Todd Leinbach; Seconded by Bruce Bennett. Passed unanimously.

- **MOTION:** To approve the $65,000 appropriation from the North Judson Wayne Township Library Rainy Day Fund.
    - **RESULT:** Moved by Todd Leinbach; Seconded by Dave Pearman. Passed unanimously.

The Council then turned its attention to a report regarding county facilities.

IV. CORONER'S OFFICE REPORT & BUILDING PROJECT

The Coroner presented a report detailing severe space limitations and a doubling of caseloads since the 24' x 32' facility was built. The existing structure faces state permitting issues that have stalled planned additions. The facility is currently inadequate for cold storage and meeting with grieving families.
The Council evaluated a $9,500 engineering/permitting fee and issued a directive to seek three competitive quotes, noting the fee appeared high for the project's scope. Discussion followed regarding ARPA funding, which was moved to the County General fund but remains available for re-appropriation. The Council debated the merits of a 12' x 32' addition versus a new 40' x 46' building. Council leadership requested the Coroner return with updated quotes for both engineering and construction to ensure fiscal responsibility.
Proceeding to the next item of scheduled business, the Council received an update from the EMS Department.

V. EMS MONTHLY REPORT & EXPENDITURES

EMS Director Jim reported on departmental requirements for EDA compliance and off-road rescue capabilities. The Council reviewed these expenditures against the current Restricted Opioid Fund balance of $355,384.89 and the Unrestricted balance of $101,820.54.
Expenditure Detail:

- $38,346.83 for a DEA compliance package.
- $3,550.00 for a Polaris rescue slide and skid from donation funds.

Official Actions:

- **MOTION:** To approve the expenditure of $38,346.83 from the Restricted Opioid Fund for EDA compliance.
    - **RESULT:** Moved by Bruce Bennett; Seconded by Cassandra Hine. Passed unanimously.
- **MOTION:** To approve the expenditure of $3,550.00 from the EMS Donation Fund for the Polaris rescue slide.

- **RESULT:** Moved by Kay Gudeman; Seconded by Cassandra Hine. Passed unanimously.

The Council then transitioned to a grant request from a local recovery home.

VI. OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUND REQUEST: HOPE RESTORED RECOVERY HOME

Megan Johnston, Board President of Hope Restored Recovery Home, requested salary support for the facility's full-time director. The recovery home provides a structured environment for men battling addiction, boasting a 50% success rate.
The Council evaluated the Opioid Committee's two-year recommendation but opted for a one-year funding model of $52,000 (effective July1st). This ensures fiscal oversight and performance review before further committing restricted funds. The Council noted the substantial restricted fund balance ($355,384.89) made this appropriation feasible while supporting the mission and future goals of establishing a female recovery home.
Official Actions:

- **MOTION:** To approve a one-year $52,000 appropriation from the Restricted Opioid Fund for Hope Restored Recovery Home.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Bruce Bennett; Seconded by Kay Gudeman. Passed unanimously.

The Chair then recognized the Purdue Extension representatives for their personnel update.

VII. PURDUE EXTENSION OFFICE UPDATE

The Purdue Extension office is restructuring into 12 regions to enhance community support. The Council reviewed the following leadership transitions:

- **Jose Valtierra:** Appointed as Regional Operational Leader (effective June 1, 2026).
- **Julia Miller:** Continuing as the 4-H Youth Development Educator for Starke County.

The Council acknowledged the new regional structure and the upcoming budget collaboration.

VIII. PARK BOARD REPORT: CAMPGROUND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Park Board addressed 60 years of infrastructure neglect at the county campground. A modernization plan is underway through a Request for Proposal (RFP).

The Council evaluated the intent to hire United Consulting for electrical design. By installing individual meters to recoup utility costs, the Park Board expects to fund future maintenance and achieve a potential 4:1 return on investment. The Council expressed support for the RFP process to modernization efforts.
The Council then moved to judicial matters.

IX. KNOX CITY COURT STATUS & COMMITTEE FORMATION

The Council discussed the impending expiration of the City Court contract. A key concern is the "disenfranchisement" of non-Knox residents who cannot vote for the presiding judge despite county funding.
The Council analyzed a transition to a Superior Court model, which could cost approximately $500,000 and require state legislation, versus hiring an additional magistrate. Due to the fiscal and legal complexities, the Council opted for further investigation.

Official Action:

- **MOTION:** To create a committee to investigate judicial options and funding for the City Court transition.
    - **RESULT:** Moved by Bruce Bennett; Seconded by Dave Pearman. Passed unanimously.

The Council then proceeded to final administrative and fiscal oversight.

X. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION AUDIT & TAX ABATEMENTS

Auditor Houston reported to the Council that she reviewed a procedural audit of the Economic Development Foundation. Member Todd Leinbach expressed significant transparency concerns, noting the Foundation provided only a CPA summary letter rather than the requested financial disclosure or physical financial report.
The Council also discussed the "SCILL" contract, which was not renewed in December. While a final $20,000 payment was made in March 2026, the Council debated the status of approximately $50,000 in remaining funds. Members argued that unused funds should return to the county rather than being retained by the Foundation.

Regarding tax abatements, the Council addressed the failure of several companies to file CF-1 forms by the May 15th deadline.

Official Action:

- **MOTION:** To place all companies who failed to file CF-1 forms by the May 15th deadline on "official notice" of non-compliance.
    - **RESULT:** Moved by Todd Leinbach; Seconded by Bruce Bennett. Passed unanimously.

XI. CANCELLATION OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Todd Leinbach discussed the cancellation of the 5-22-26 meeting and that there were 4 members present today that would have been at that meeting had it not been canceled. Bill Crase apologized for the cancellation. He called Justin to see if he could cancel. Bill had a family emergency and he intended to call everyone and didn't have time due to the emergency.

XII. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Council reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on April 20, 2026.
Official Action:

- **MOTION:** To approve the April 20, 2026, meeting minutes as presented.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Kay Gudeman; Seconded by Cassandra Hine. Passed unanimously.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Council moved to adjourn.
Official Action:

- **MOTION:** To adjourn the meeting.
  - **RESULT:** Moved by Todd Leinbach; Seconded by Cassandra Hine. Passed unanimously.

Bill Crase

Bill Crase, President, Starke County Council

Dave Pearman, Vice-President, Starke County Council

Kay Gudeman

Kay Gudeman, Member, Starke County Council

Cassandra Hine, Member, Starke County Council

(6-15-26 County Council Minutes Continued)

Bruce Bennett

Bruce Bennett, Member, Starke County Council

Todd Leinbach, Member, Starke County Council

Member, Starke County Council

Michaelene Houston

Attest: Michaelene J. Houston, Auditor and Secretary to the County Council