



THE MARTIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING
March 17, 2026
MINUTES

The Martin County Board of Commissioners convened in a regular session on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, in the Commissioners' Room at the Courthouse located at 129 Main Street, Shoals, Indiana. Commissioners present were Retha Warner and Aaron Summers. Commissioner Paul R. George was absent. Also present were Attorney David Lett and Auditor Michelle Norris.

The meeting was called to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 5:30 p.m.

RE: APPROVAL OF MINUTES & CLAIMS

The minutes from the regular meeting of March 3, 2026, were approved with a motion made by Commissioner Summers, seconded by Commissioner Warner. All in favor, motion passed. A motion was made by Commissioner Summers to approve the claims and allowances, seconded by Commissioner Warner. All in favor, motion passed.

RE: SOUTHERN INDIANA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (SIDC) REGIONAL UPDATE

Greg Jones, Executive Director with Southern Indiana Development Commission, presented a comprehensive effectiveness report detailing SIDC activities across the five-county region, emphasizing the annually updated Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy used to support regional grant pursuits and project alignment. SIDC assists communities with small planning efforts, including wastewater and downtown revitalization planning, and highlighted Shoals' wastewater treatment funding support and a \$2.9 million Greene County EDA award providing water infrastructure to the Technology Park at Crane as Phase I development support. Public facilities projects cited included work with Vincennes and Martin County assets such as the Shoals Public Library, the Loogootee Park Pavilion, and the Loogootee Country Court project through READI initiatives.

Mr. Jones described SIDC's role as a governmental entity eligible to apply for defense-related planning funds on behalf of the base, noting completion of a Military Compatibility Handbook, legislative recommendations for military communities, and a historical and wastewater study for the Town of Crane now advancing to one hundred percent engineering design suitable for bid solicitations and grant applications. SIDC anticipates leveraging congressional directed spending of \$17 million secured by working closely with USTF for a wastewater treatment plant serving the tech park, with parallel efforts to obtain additional construction funding through the Defense Community Infrastructure Program (June submission) to optimize use of the \$17 million and expand park work. An EDA-requested \$4 million water tower project at the tech park is in development.

Mr. Jones stated SIDC worked on Loogootee's Behind the Wire recovery housing project with expectation there will be another project once the next location is determined. Active owner-occupied rehabilitation projects include nineteen homes in Bloomington, nineteen in Mitchell, and twenty-one in Lawrence County, focusing on roofs, electrical systems, water heaters, HVAC, ramps, and radon mitigation, with approximately thirty percent of inspected homes showing radon presence. Prior projects included Loogootee owner-occupied rehab (six homes) and nine Martin County homes funded through housing preservation grants, with future applications planned for Linton and Vincennes.

SIDC's EPA brownfield assessments leveraged approximately \$13 million in cleanup and redevelopment funding from about \$400,000 in assessment grants, with ongoing interest in finding a grant to help with cleanup of the Nu-Tap in Shoals, which faces grant pacing issues. Additional services include annual traffic counting for county decision support, asset management assistance for community crossings eligibility, day-to-day administrative and financial support to Westgate at Crane, and participation in ROI quality-of-place teams (housing, innovation, daycare, behavioral health), with daycare incentives identified as an emerging regional priority. SIDC leadership participates in the White River Military Coordination Alliance and the Regional Planning Council which consists of a statewide network of sixteen regional planning commissions, with Brown, Owen, and Monroe counties exploring formation

of a new regional planning commission. Future project targets include facilities support for Boggs, Shoals water projects, Loogootee recovery housing, continued work with Greene County Regional Sewer District and the Greene County Eastern Heights Water Utilities, and expanded brownfield assessments via the Indiana Uplands Regional Land Bank.

Mr. Jones reported that, excluding the \$17 million congressional directed spending, SIDC-affiliated partnerships have brought approximately \$18,711,911 in grant funding into the region over recent years, estimating a return of about \$113 in value for every \$1 contributed by counties to SIDC. Commissioners expressed appreciation for SIDC's efforts, noting significant activity at Westgate at Crane; Mr. Jones noted it is a collaborative approach among USTF, ROI, Radius, and SIDC.

RE: INDIANA UPLANDS REGIONAL LAND BANK STATUS AND FUNDING DISCUSSION

Mr. Jones provided an overview of the Indiana Uplands Regional Land Bank, established approximately two and a half years ago using READI funds to address blighted properties through legal acquisition such as donations, tax sales, or commissioners' sales. This allows them to take some of the worst properties in a community and turn those properties into additional housing which in turn puts properties back on the tax roll. As of the meeting date, the land bank reported twenty total properties: fourteen owned, three under renovation contracts, and three in tax sale/title processing. SIDC requires developers who enter into a renovation contract to provide detailed redevelopment plans, financial capacity verification, and performance timelines, with title reversion provisions to prevent renewed abandonment.

Local contracting has been emphasized, with approximately \$73,000 awarded to small local providers for lawn maintenance, cleanup, inspections, title work, surveys, demolition, and tree removal, plus \$43,000 in completed demolition and an additional \$115,000 in demolition scheduled for calendar year 2026. The land bank has paid back approximately \$35,000 in property taxes associated with acquisitions and ongoing obligations, with a goal to minimize non-profit tax exposure by promptly transferring properties to private developers. Aggregate assessed value of acquired properties is approximately \$564,000, with projected redevelopment value of about \$3,675,000, representing an estimated six-and-a-half times return in taxable value and community impact.

Mr. Jones stated the land bank has partnered with the Martin County Redevelopment Commission to try to build a home in Shoals. Bobbie Abel updated the Commissioners regarding the project in West Shoals, targeting groundbreaking soon and aiming for completion by year end, potentially within six months depending on coordination and approvals. Ms. Abel described active Martin County projects and shared before-and-after documentation, noting substantial neighborhood improvements from cleanup and rehabilitation. In response to Attorney David Lett's question, Mr. Jones clarified the land bank currently manages twenty properties region-wide, with two in Martin County as of this date. Mr. Jones stated it was the counties who donated properties to the land bank where things moved the fastest.

The READI grant ends in September, which has funded the land bank to date. Mr. Jones stated most land banks take seven years before they are fully functioning and three years before they own their first piece of property. Indiana Uplands Regional Land Bank is working on twenty properties in two and a half years because of obtaining READI funding. Commissioner Summers stated Bobbie Abel has been a very good advocate for the land bank. Mr. Jones commended Ms. Abel for her advocacy and expertise in county processes and title and lien research, which enable clean deeds and marketable titles for subsequent private investment.

Mr. Jones outlined systemic challenges, including lengthy title and tax sale timelines of nine to eighteen months for clean deeds, the critical role of code enforcement, and market distortions from LLCs and venture capital groups purchasing tax sale certificates to capture guaranteed interest returns upon redemption, thereby restricting local acquisition and prolonging blight cycles. A recent brownfield example near the Town of Crane (Hartsburg property) demonstrates the land bank's ability to unlock remediation: by acquiring the property, the Indiana Finance Authority committed roughly \$260,000 to address petroleum contamination, and SIDC is pursuing a ROI clearance grant for demolition to create a marketable corner site in the tech park area.

With READI grant resources sunseting in September, Mr. Jones previewed a forthcoming funding request of approximately \$50,000 per county to sustain operations, with parallel efforts to secure support from regional foundations, redevelopment commissions, and supplemental grants to reduce county contributions. Proceeds from dispositions are reinvested to fund staff and future projects; however, given the complexity and cost of blighted assets, the land bank will not be fully self-sustaining from sales alone. Commissioners acknowledged the progress in Martin County and thanked SIDC and the Hoosier Uplands Regional Land Bank for their work.

RE: CENTRAL DISPATCH AND COUNTYWIDE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

Loogootee City Mayor Brian Ader stated there has been discussion at the city regarding updating radios at the fire department; the police radios were updated two years ago. Mayor Ader stated there are issues with communications such as North of Loogootee in the Crane area where the city also services. Mayor Ader stated in the past there has been talk of establishing a countywide central dispatch system to address persistent communication failures among law enforcement, fire, and EMS agencies. He explained that the city currently funds a weekday dispatcher and pays the county for dispatch services after hours, causing duplication of effort and cost, citing current annual expenditures of approximately \$60,494 for one city dispatcher, which includes \$12,000 paid to the county for dispatching. He emphasized that equipment upgrades alone will not resolve interoperability gaps and noted recent progress in acquiring twenty new fire department radios through grant application assistance from Kristi Risk while the department's need remains at thirty-plus radios.

Mayor Ader recommended evaluating the EMA building for central dispatch operations, noting the facility was originally designed with dispatch capabilities. He proposed that all agencies—Sheriff's Department, Town of Shoals, Loogootee Police and Fire, and local EMT services—standardize on compatible systems to ensure seamless communication for public safety. He suggested a target start date of January 1, 2027, recognizing the need for planning, interagency coordination, and budgeting beginning mid-2026. Mayor Ader suggested that the six township trustees be approached for annual contributions. He further noted that if dispatch functions are removed from the jail, additional jail staffing may still be required for non-dispatch duties and identified grants from state partners and potential contributions from Westgate developments as funding sources.

Commissioner Summers acknowledged longstanding complaints, stating this is not the first he has heard of the issue. Chase Cummings, Loogootee City Chief of Police, described a situation today where there was a hit and run; the county dispatch contacted the city dispatcher who must then contact him to respond to the scene. There are operational delays and safety risks caused by split dispatching, explaining that 911 calls route to the county, who then must relay information to the city's dispatcher who pages out the fire department, leading to loss of timeliness and clarity. City Chief Cummings stated that unless he is standing next to the fire department on scene, they cannot communicate and it becomes a safety concern. It will be an expense upfront, but it has the potential to save lives.

Ethan Mathies, Assistant Fire Chief, underscored field safety concerns, including how responders could approach scenes without knowledge of armed or violent subjects, and even if the information were relayed to the city's dispatcher and that information to the fire department, once they are two miles out of town, signal is lost on the VHF radio. Mr. Mathias stated radios are not the issue, the mayor and city council have done a great job getting radios and helping with funding.

City Chief Cummings added that a fully operational 911 center requires at least two qualified dispatch operators at all times, implying increased personnel, wages, and benefits costs, and argued that acting proactively now will be less expensive than reacting after a major incident. City Chief Cummings stated that while the county dispatch is currently controlled by the Sheriff's Department, other counties in the State have a 911 advisory board, which in Martin County could consist of the Sheriff, Chief of Police, Town Marshal of Shoals, Mayor, a County Commissioner, representatives from the Board of Works or City Council, fire chiefs or their designees, and the EMS Director who would collaboratively set standards, staffing, and training requirements.

Commissioner Summers asked if a 911 call comes into the Sheriff's Department, if all responders are able to communicate. City Chief Cummings stated the officers have an eight hundred frequency channel which the officers from the city and county can communicate, but the fire departments only have a few of the eight hundred radios and some of the issues are also with the towers. Commissioner Summers stated he cannot speak for the other two commissioners, but he sees no reason why emergency personnel should not be on the same page and it will help the county as a whole.

City Chief Cummings stated there are grants available for equipment and startup costs. Commissioner Summers asked whether grant support could be sought from the Community Foundation, and Attorney David Lett affirmed that the foundation is open to proposals subject to evaluation. No formal motion was made. The Commissioners agreed that more information can be obtained and it is something that can be investigated.

RE: INFORMATION SHARING AND “PASS DOWNS” BETWEEN SHERIFF’S OFFICE AND MUNICIPAL AGENCIES

Mayor Ader requested that the Sheriff’s Department resume regular “pass downs” to municipal agencies, noting a one-year lapse that could expose officers to unknown risks at active scenes. He emphasized that pass downs keep officers apprised of ongoing cases, incident details, and potential hazards. Mayor Ader asked for assistance in obtaining pass down information.

RE: RENOVATION PROPOSALS

Attorney David Lett stated the Commissioners advertised for proposals for renovations at the former recycling center building; to build two offices and renovate another. The request for proposals stated that the Board of Commissioners would look at those proposals and select a proposing party to begin negotiations with for that project. Attorney Lett stated there were two proposals received, from Street’s Contracting and from Jack’s Construction, which have been provided to the Commissioners for review. Attorney Lett stated he has reviewed the proposals and compared them to specifications that were published and he has concerns that one of the proposals does not answer the specifications. As such, Attorney Lett recommended to the Board of Commissioners that they not consider the proposal from Jack’s Construction because he does not believe it is responsive. Attorney Lett stated the Commissioners are not making a final decision at this meeting, but to begin negotiations. A motion was made by Commissioner Summers to begin negotiations with Street’s Contracting for the project, seconded by Commissioner Warner. All in favor, motion passed.

RE: COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS GRANTS

Auditor Michelle Norris stated that Community Corrections Director Danielle Murphy could not attend tonight, but Director Murphy is preparing to submit the community corrections 2027 fiscal year grants and is asking for a letter of support from the Commissioners. A motion was made by Commissioner Summers to approve the Martin County community corrections grant and jail treatment grant for fiscal year 2027, seconded by Commissioner Warner. All in favor, motion passed.

RE: SHOALS PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD APPOINTMENT

Auditor Norris stated the Shoals Public Library is requesting the Commissioners appoint Mary E. Holt as their representative to the library board with a term beginning April 1st, 2026, through December 31, 2029, for a four-year term. A motion was made by Commissioner Summers to approve Mary Holt to the Shoals Public Library Board, seconded by Commissioner Warner. All in favor, motion passed.

RE: AUDITOR’S COPIER MAINTENANCE AGREEMENT

Auditor Norris stated she has received the new copier in her office and asked the Commissioners to approve a maintenance agreement with Hoosier Business Machines. Auditor Norris stated this agreement costs less than the agreement on the previous copier. A motion was made by Commissioner Summers to approve the maintenance agreement on the Auditor’s office copier with Hoosier Business Machines, seconded by Commissioner Warner. All in favor, motion passed.

RE: ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Summers and seconded by Commissioner Warner. All were in favor, and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 6:31 PM. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 31, 2026, at 5:30 PM.



Paul R. George



Retha Warner



Aaron C. Summers



ATTEST:

Michelle Norris, Martin County Auditor