

THE MARTIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING
June 23, 2026
MINUTES

The Martin County Board of Commissioners convened in a regular session on Tuesday, June 23, 2026, in the Commissioners' Room at the Courthouse located at 129 Main Street, Shoals, Indiana. Commissioners present were Paul R. George and Retha Warner. Commissioner Aaron Summers was absent. Also present was 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 June 9, 2026, were approved with a motion made by Commissioner Warner, seconded by Commissioner George. All in favor, motion passed. A motion was made by Commissioner Warner to approve the claims and allowances, seconded by Commissioner George. All in favor, motion passed.

RE: HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Highway Superintendent Scott Seals addressed the Board regarding the recent severe weather. He reported that the county experienced significant rainfall and one confirmed tornado, which resulted in the loss of a bridge, damage to several culverts, and multiple ground slides on steep hills. Superintendent Seals noted his crews have been working tirelessly since Sunday evening to make roads passable and asked the public to report issues only once, as repeated calls for the same issue slow down the response process. He stated that his department has begun tracking all storm-related work for documentation purposes, as advised by Emergency Management Director Andy Ringwald, who noted the importance of thorough documentation for potential disaster declarations and damage assessments. Superintendent Seals also announced he would be meeting with the bridge inspection team on June 24, 2026, to discuss options for the Friends Creek Bridge. Superintendent Seals requested permission to begin researching and gathering pricing and loan information for a grader to replace an existing unit with high hours. A motion to grant this approval was made by Commissioner Warner and seconded by Commissioner George. All in favor, the motion passed.

Wayne Ritchey, a resident of Raglesville Road, addressed the Board regarding road conditions and storm damage. He reported pushing trees off the road himself after the storm and noted the presence of a deep, uprooted hole by the roadside that poses a safety hazard. Mr. Ritchey reiterated a previous request by Jeff Asdell from two months prior who requested ditching work on the road, which he described as being in very poor condition with increased traffic from new home construction. He mentioned water is backing up near a newly installed culvert because the water has nowhere to go. Mr. Ritchey also mentioned another culvert near Highway 231, which he believes was damaged by the State Highway Department last Summer. The resulting water overflow has created a dangerous icing situation in the Winter on the blind hill. Superintendent Seals stated he believes the culvert near Highway 231 is likely the State's responsibility but that he would investigate further.

A discussion was held regarding Mr. Ritchey's concerns about how low-hanging tree limbs on Raglesville Road are forcing large farm equipment to drive into his yard, approximately twenty feet off the road, to pass. He stated that while he understood why they were doing it, he felt he deserved the courtesy of his yard not being used as a thoroughfare. Mr. Ritchey also pointed out several dead and leaning trees that pose a safety hazard, including a "widowmaker" on St Joseph Road that was struck by lightning and is hanging over the road near where children live. He mentioned that equipment, such as sprayers, has sustained damage from the overgrown vegetation, which he likened to driving through a rainforest. Commissioner George acknowledged the concerns and confirmed the Highway Department plans to perform ditching and will look to see if the trees can be trimmed along the road.

Commissioner Warner expressed her appreciation for the work being done by Highway Superintendent Seals, his crew, and administrative assistant.

RE: FLECK ENGINEERING LLC CONTRACT

Highway Superintendent Seals introduced Brian Fleck of Fleck Engineering LLC. Mr. Fleck proposed an on-call retainer contract to provide engineering services to the Highway Department as needed. He explained this type of agreement would allow the County to utilize his services for various tasks, such as assistance with lane mile distribution bidding, asset management plan updates, or site distance analyses, on an hourly basis. The proposed contract would have a not-to-exceed amount of \$20,000 and would be separate from existing contracts for Community Crossings Matching Grant projects. Attorney David Lett stated that he had reviewed the contract and found it acceptable, with one exception. He strongly recommended that a specific term, with a start and end date, be added to the contract to avoid an indefinite agreement. Mr. Fleck and Superintendent Seals agreed to this modification. A motion was made by Commissioner Warner to approve the contract with Fleck Engineering LLC for on-call services with a not-to-exceed amount of \$20,000, with the provision that a term date be added, running from July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2027. The motion was seconded by Commissioner George. All in favor, the motion passed.

RE: GAS TAX REVENUE LOSS

A discussion was held regarding the financial impact of the State's gas tax suspension. Superintendent Seals stated the suspension has been good for the public, but it will significantly affect the Highway Department's revenue in July and August with an anticipated 50% reduction in revenue. Auditor Michelle Norris explained that the gas tax funds are split, with fifty percent deposited into a restricted fund and fifty percent into an unrestricted fund. The total revenue received in the two funds for May was \$185,382.94, while the total for June was \$167,838.86, representing a decrease of \$17,544. Commissioner George noted that state officials have mentioned potentially using surplus funds to make counties whole, but the timing of such a reimbursement remains uncertain. He also remarked that July is typically a high-revenue month due to local festivals and that a clearer picture of the impact will emerge by the end of July or August.

RE: LOCAL DISASTER EMERGENCY DECLARATION

EMA Director Andy Ringwald presented a Martin County Local Disaster Emergency Declaration for the Commissioners' approval. He stated that the National Weather Service had confirmed a tornado declaration for the area, and the county experienced significant water and flooding damage. Director Ringwald clarified that the declaration is the necessary first step to request assistance from the State, but there is no guarantee of assistance at this point. Commissioner George noted the necessity of the declaration, citing a bridge outage and numerous damaged culverts and roads throughout the county. Director Ringwald mentioned that Martin County, along with Warrick and Gibson counties, appeared to have sustained the most significant damage in the recent weather event. A motion was made by Commissioner Warner to approve the Martin County Local Disaster Emergency Declaration to activate the response and recovery aspects of the county emergency plan and authorize the furnishing of aid and assistance under the plans. Commissioner George seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed. The Commissioners thanked EMA for their work.

RE: AMBULANCE SUPPORT FOR CORONER'S DEPARTMENT

Coroner Tony Abel publicly thanked Ambulance Director Jeramey Osborn and the ambulance service for their support of the Coroner's office.

RE: HIRING PROCEDURE FOR COUNTY EMPLOYEES

Attorney Lett informed the Commissioners that the County's insurance provider will no longer perform driver's license checks for prospective ambulance service employees. He recommended that the Commissioners direct the Sheriff's Department to obtain this information to ensure new hires have a clean driving record. EMA Director Ringwald inquired if the Emergency Management Agency (EMA) could also be included in this procedure for background checks, which was affirmed. Attorney Lett stated he would speak with the Sheriff's Department after receiving Commissioner approval. Commissioner Warner made a motion to approve the Sheriff's Department to check the records of new hires for the insurance company under the ambulance service and the EMA. Commissioner George seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed. Commissioner George then asked that the

Highway Department be included in this new procedure as well to ensure a consistent process for all departments with employees who drive county vehicles. Attorney Lett agreed to investigate the current process for the Highway Department.

RE: INTERIM COUNTY SURVEYOR APPOINTMENT

Attorney Lett addressed a vacancy in the County Surveyor's office. He explained that state statute requires the office not remain vacant and that if a chief deputy exists, they would assume the role. Since the Martin County Surveyor's office does not have a chief deputy, he recommended the Commissioners appoint an interim surveyor until the party caucus is held to officially fill the position on July 11, 2026. Attorney Lett suggested that the person assuming the responsibilities of the office should also receive the surveyor's salary. The Commissioners discussed appointing the current Deputy Surveyor, Kyle Turpin, to the interim position. It was clarified that this appointment would be temporary until the caucus formally selects a permanent replacement. A motion was made by Commissioner Warner to approve Kyle Turpin as the interim County Surveyor until the caucus on July 11, and for him to receive the salary of the previous surveyor during this period. The motion was seconded by Commissioner George. All in favor, the motion passed.

RE: ORDINANCES FOR COMMERCIAL ENERGY AND DATA SYSTEMS

Attorney Lett presented a recommendation to address concerns about the installation of data centers and other forms of commercial energy in the unincorporated areas of Martin County. He proposed a two-step approach. The first step involves the Board of Commissioners adopting an ordinance that requires a special permit to be issued by the Board of Commissioners for the commercial installation of data centers, battery energy storage systems, utility-scale solar energy systems, radio and telephone towers, and commercial wind energy systems. The second step would be to establish a moratorium on the installation of any such facilities until standards can be developed and further study can be conducted on their safety, placement, and service of those types of installations within Martin County. Attorney Lett clarified that the Commissioners' authority is limited to the unincorporated areas outside the limits of Loogootee, Shoals, and Crane.

Following this discussion, Commissioner Warner made a motion requiring special permitting by the Martin County Board of Commissioners for commercial installations of data centers, battery energy storage systems, utility-scale solar energy systems, radio and telephone towers, and commercial wind energy systems in Martin County. Commissioner George seconded the motion. All in favor, motion passed.

Commissioner Warner made a motion to establish a temporary moratorium on the location of data centers, battery energy storage systems, utility-scale solar energy systems, and commercial wind energy systems in Martin County. Commissioner George seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed.

RE: COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS BOARD – CERTIFICATE OF DEPOSIT AUTHORIZATION

Auditor Norris reported that the Community Corrections Advisory Board had approved investing money in the Project Income Fund exceeding budgeted amounts into a certificate of deposit (CD). She stated the Advisory Board voted in favor to place up to \$175,000 into a CD. Following outreach to three banking institutions, the best quote secured was from Crane Credit Union for a seven-month CD at an interest rate of 3.97 percent. Auditor Norris requested the Commissioners' approval to authorize payment and placement of the funds into the CD since the transaction had not been included in the current claims. A motion was made by Commissioner Warner to approve the Community Corrections investment of \$175,000 into a seven-month CD at Crane Credit Union at the rate of 3.97 percent. The motion was seconded by Commissioner George. All in favor, the motion passed.

RE: COURTHOUSE DEPUTY POSITION – ESTABLISHMENT

Auditor Norris informed the Board that Judge Isha Wright-Ryan has formally requested the establishment of a full-time courthouse deputy position to provide front-entrance security. Auditor Norris explained that the creation of the position by the Commissioners is needed so the Council can be approached for funding during the budgeting process. Commissioner Warner moved to approve and establish the full-time courthouse deputy position. The motion was seconded by Commissioner George. All in favor, the motion passed.

RE: HIGHWAY AND COMMUNITY CROSSINGS

Mary Smith inquired about the statute of limitations on claims related to Bridge 44. Attorney Lett stated the statute of limitations is six years. Ms. Smith inquired regarding the planned projects using wheel tax and Community Crossings funding. Commissioner George reported that, at the prior meeting, the Highway Superintendent was asked to prepare a project list; he will be asked to have it at their next meeting in two weeks. Commissioner George noted a mile-long segment was recently chip-and-sealed on Tedrow Lane which was paid for using wheel tax funds. Commissioner George stated they intend to use wheel tax funds primarily for chip-and-seal projects; there are multiple hills which experience gravel loss after a significant amount of rain. Commissioner George stated Brickyard Road will be paved in July using CCMG funds. Ms. Smith asked how it was determined which roads would be repaired using CCMG funds. Commissioner George outlined a strategy for Community Crossings selections based on traffic counts and establishing improvements along main arterial roads. Fleck Engineering works with the Highway Department and Commissioners to then determine what other shorter roads can be paved to use every dollar of available funding.

RE: PUBLIC COMMENT – OPEN BURNING AND TRASH BURN ORDINANCE

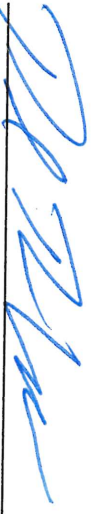
Tony Abel asked the Commissioners if they would be open to establishing an ordinance for burning of trash and debris. Mr. Abel stated within the last year there were farmers burning corn stalks near town which had health impacts on residents, including those on oxygen. Mr. Abel requested consideration of an ordinance or at minimum a communication protocol, such as notifying the Sheriff's Office in advance of controlled burns to facilitate public advisories. Commissioner George and Attorney Lett discussed the possibility that the County may already have an ordinance on burning, noting the Town of Shoals does have one. The Board directed Attorney Lett to review the ordinance book and report findings to provide clarity and determine next steps.

RE: GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS – LIBRARY EVENTS AND COURTHOUSE HOLIDAY CLOSURE

Mary Smith thanked the Commissioners for attending the library ribbon cutting held on June 5th. Ms. Smith informed the Commissioners there were approximately one hundred and fifty who attended the open house on June 6th. Commissioner George announced that the Courthouse will be closed on Friday, July 3, in observance of Independence Day.

RE: ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Warner and seconded by Commissioner George. All were in favor, and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 6:32 PM. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 7, 2026, at 5:30 PM.


Paul R. George


Retha Warner

Aaron C. Summers

ATTEST: 
Michelle Norris, Martin County Auditor