OWEN COUNTY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 12, 2026 @ 6:00 P.M.
COURTHOUSE 2ND FLOOR

YouTube Live Streamed-Owen County Government

Meeting was called to order by Auditor Sheila Reeves

- Opening Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance were given
- Roll call and public sign in
- Council members present: Daniel Browning, Steve Carrell, Polly Chesser, Joe Frye, Verl Keith, Anton Neff, and Nick Robertson
- Auditor Sheila Reeves

Election of Officers

- Auditor Reeves opened the meeting taking nominations from the floor for President, Neff nominated Chesser seconded by Carrell, Robertson motioned to close the nominations seconded by Neff, 7/0 approved.
- Chesser took nominations for Vice President, Carrell nominated Neff seconded by Chesser, Browning motioned to close the nominations 7/0 approved.
- President Chesser thanked the Council and stated her commitment to serving diligently.

Approval of Minutes

- Motion was made by Browning to approve the December 8th 2025 meeting minutes, seconded by Carrell 7/0 approved.
- Minutes for the December 19th 2025 budget meeting were not available.

2026 Budget Review – DLGF 1782 Notice

- Auditor Reeves presented the final 1782 Notice issued by the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF). The notice reflected State-required reductions to the county's 2026 budgets, including Election & Registration, Cumulative Capital Development, and the Highway Fund.
- The Auditor explained that until Council action was taken to reduce the budgets to the State-approved amounts, the County could not upload final budgets into Gateway or release departmental budget information. She emphasized the importance of taking action that evening to avoid administrative delays.

Election & Registration Fund – Detailed Discussion

- The Council discussed the State-mandated reduction of $33,536 to the Election & Registration Fund. Auditor Reeves explained that although sufficient cash balance exists to operate elections, State law requires the adopted budget to first match the approved 1782 amount before any additional appropriations may be considered. Council members discussed the impact of election-year expenses, including

unexpected costs and statutory requirements. Funding options discussed included use of the Election & Registration cash balance or the Riverboat Fund. The Auditor explained that using Riverboat funds would reduce the risk of the State denying a later additional appropriation based on cash-balance calculations.

- Robertson moved to reduce the Election & Registration Fund by $33,536, with the Auditor and Clerk authorized to determine the specific line items to be reduced. Carrell seconded the motion 7/0 approved
- Robertson then moved to appropriate $33,536 from the Riverboat Fund to the Election & Registration Fund to support election operations Keith seconded the motion 7/0 approved. The Auditor advised that the appropriation would require statutory advertisement and would return to the Council for final approval at a subsequent meeting.
- At the end of the meeting, Clerk Stutsman advised of the exact cuts to make, Line 12500 reduce by $13,038 / Line 13600 reduce by $3,898 / Line 32600 reduce by $16,600 motion made by Neff seconded by Browning 7/0 approved.

Cumulative Capital Development Fund – Detailed Discussion

- The Council next addressed the Cum-CAP Fund reduction of $120,920. Auditor Reeves explained that the Cum-CAP Fund has a limited number of line items, making the maintenance line item the most practical source for the required reduction.
  Council members discussed the distinction between routine maintenance expenses and larger capital improvement projects, including a potential courthouse window replacement project estimated at approximately $549,000. Council consensus was that major capital projects should be planned and funded as complete projects through a dedicated appropriation rather than through incremental budget adjustments.
- Robertson moved to reduce $120,920 from the Cum-CAP maintenance line item. A second by Carrell, 7/0 approved.

Highway Fund – Detailed Discussion

- The Council reviewed the required Highway Fund reduction of $599,753 per the 1782 Notice. Discussion included prior-year appropriations, existing encumbrances for equipment payments and contracts, current cash balances, and anticipated monthly revenue distributions.
- Council members discussed the uncertainty surrounding State revenue distributions and the importance of verifying those figures. Despite these concerns, the Council agreed that the required reduction must occur immediately to comply with State requirements, with the possibility of future appropriations once revenues are confirmed.
- Robertson moved to authorize the Board of Commissioners and the Auditor to determine which Highway Fund line items would be reduced to achieve the required $599,753 reduction. Second by Neff 7/0 approved.

- Replacement road work Stone Aggregate and Bridge 15 out of Edit Fund motion by Frye second by Browning for additional appropriation out of Edit Fund 7/0 approved.

Additional Highway & Funding Discussion

- Additional discussion addressed Community Crossings Matching Grant (CCMG) reductions enacted by the General Assembly, which significantly reduced available statewide funding. It was reported that INDOT representatives are expected to meet with County officials to address road mapping alignment issues that have impacted grant eligibility and to improve future funding outcomes.

Auditor's Report

- Auditor Reeves provided a detailed update on year-end financial activity, including the completion of numerous fund transfers and the processing of encumbrances. She explained that encumbrances represent committed but unpaid obligations and allow departments to proceed with planned expenditures without requiring additional appropriations later in the year. Updated financial reports will be presented at a future meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

JAIL PROJECT

- The Council received an update on the jail project. It was noted that a Jail Committee meeting is scheduled and that no land transfer or land swap will occur until site feasibility is fully confirmed. No formal action was taken.

NEW BUSINESS

Additional Appropriation

- A request by Probation was withdrawn, no action needed.

PTABOA Board Appointment

- Commissioners can change number of members on the Board from 5 to 3 Council will move to the February meeting.

Health Department

- Full time CCMA position, change from 1,820 to 1,560 annual hours
- Part time Environmentalist position, change from 728 to 800 annual hours
- Motion by Robertson seconded by Carrell 7/0 approved.

Sheriff's Department

- Evidence Room Manager position revised job description and pay level.
- Motion by Robertson to approve second by Browning 7/0 approved.

E-911 Communications Center – Detailed Discussion

- The Council discussed a proposed restructuring of E-911 Communications operations. The proposal includes no net increase in staffing but reorganizes positions to improve supervision, training, and experience retention. Proposed changes include the creation of dedicated day and night shift supervisors, designation of a training coordinator, clarification of IDACS coordinator responsibilities, and establishment of senior and probationary communications officer classifications with corresponding pay differentials. Council members discussed the operational benefits of the proposal, including improved training, clearer advancement pathways, and enhanced service delivery.
- It was noted that the restructuring is financially workable within the existing budget and provides improved operational flexibility and recruitment opportunities.
- Motion by Robertson to approve the restructuring and adoption of updated job descriptions of the Owen County E-911 Communications Center as presented second by Browning 7/0 approved.

CIVILIAN POLE JOB CATEGORY RESTRUCTURE & NEW CIVILIAN EMS POLE CATEGORY

- Following approval of the E-911 updates, additional discussion addressed the overall changes to the Civilian POLE job category and the creation of a new EMS POLE job category. This included the Civilian POLE Job Category restructure impacting E-911 positions, Evidence Room Manager position, and two Jail Sergeant positions necessitated by restructuring changes, and the new EMS POLE Job Category impacting EMT and Paramedic positions. Motion to approve the changes and adoption of associated job description updates made by Robertson, seconded by Browning, 7/0 approved.
- Neff moved to approve all remaining changes not explicitly covered by the prior motions concerning the information presented to ensure all related adjustments and job description updates were addressed and completed properly, second by Browning 7/0 approved.

COMPENSATION SYSTEM ORDINANCE UPDATE

- An updated compensation system ordinance is needed to reflect all changes/action taken.
- Robertson moved to adopt Owen Council Ordinance 2026-001, seconded by Browning 7/0 approved.

COMMUNICATION & COORDINATION REQUEST

- Commissioner Sam Hobbs requested that the Council keep the Board of Commissioners informed of future restructuring and compensation discussions,

particularly as they relate to appointed personnel. Council members acknowledged the request and agreed to maintain open communication.

COMPENSATION CONFIRMATION SUMMARIES – DISCUSSION & ACTION

- Auditor Reeves explained that two separate actions required for employee compensation confirmation summaries:
- 2025 compensation confirmations for employee changes occurring after early December 2025 and before year-end and a complete 2026 compensation confirmation summaries inventory, reflecting budgeted positions and compensation levels, excluding changes approved during the current meeting, which would be addressed in February.
- It was noted that approximately 200 confirmation forms would require signature.
- Councilman Neff explained an efficiency measure added to the compensation confirmation summaries' language, stating that they are subject to Owen County Council Ordinance 2024-0022 or the latest subsequent ordinance, allowing future ordinance updates without reissuing all confirmation documents. This language was noted to prevent unnecessary reprinting following adoption of Ordinance 2026-001.
- Motion by Robertson to authorize Council President to sign 2025 compensation confirmation summaries, seconded by Carrell, 7/0 approved.
- Motion by Neff moved to authorize Council President to sign the complete inventory of 2026 compensation confirmation summaries, seconded by Robertson, 7/0 approved.

Hamilton Center

- Cindy Rotman, representing Hamilton Center, reported on services provided in fiscal year 2025, including 308 consumers served, 4,528 services delivered, approximately $800,000 in operating expenses, and $38,024 in charity care. Discussion followed regarding outcome measurement challenges.

Building Department

- The Council discussed Building Department operations, permit fees, and financial sustainability, noting that permit fees remain comparatively low and coordination with the Board of Commissioners is necessary.

Meeting Procedures

- The Council discussed packet deadlines and an August meeting date.
- Motion by Neff to authorize the Auditor to draft an updated meeting resolution reflecting a packet deadline of close of business Monday prior to meetings and changing the August meeting date to August 3 second by Robertson 7/0 approved

Liaison Appointments

- Council members were provided with liaison assignment forms for distribution to departments.

Closing Prayer

- A closing prayer was offered, asking for guidance, healing, and strength for County officials and staff, including prayers for those facing health challenges.

Dated this _____ Day of _____

Owen County Council

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Polly Chesser

_____
Anton Neff

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Daniel Browning

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Steve Carrell

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Joe Frye

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Verl Keith

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Nick Robertson

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Attest: Sheila Reeves