OWEN COUNTY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
July 13, 2026 @ 6:00 P.M.
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Call To Order

- The Owen County Council met in regular session on July 13, 2026, at the Owen County Courthouse in Spencer, Indiana. Council President Polly Chesser called the meeting to order. Opening prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance were conducted. Council members in attendance:
- Members Present: Daniel Browning, Steve Carrell, Polly Chesser, Joe Frye, Verl Keith, Anton Neff, and Nick Robertson
- Auditor: Sheila Reeves Present
- Members of the public were reminded to sign in if they had not already done so.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

- Council members were given an opportunity to review the minutes from the June 8, 2026, regular meeting. No additions or corrections were offered.
- Robertson moved to approve the June 8, 2026, meeting minutes second by Carrell 7/0 approved.

Monthly Financial Report

- County Auditor Reeves presented the June 30, 2026 financial reports and reviewed the County's current financial position as preparations continued for the upcoming 2027 budget workshops.
- Reeves advised Council members that overall cash balances remained strong throughout county government and specifically noted the positive financial position of the Highway Department. She explained that her office had been closely monitoring each fund to ensure accurate information would be available during budget planning and that department balances were in a healthy position entering budget season.
- She further explained that budget binders were being finalized and would soon be distributed to Council members. By providing the information several weeks before budget hearings, Council members would have sufficient time to study department requests and communicate directly with department heads if additional clarification was needed.

Insurance Review and Cost Savings

- Auditor Reeves also reported several significant developments involving the County's employee insurance program.
- Explaining that after months of reviewing insurance invoices and working with the County's insurance representatives, the Auditor's Office determined the County had been overcharged. As a result of those efforts, the County would receive a $27,000 credit from Epic.
- In addition, while reviewing monthly insurance invoices, staff discovered that United Healthcare had been charging the County an administrative service fee of approximately $3,000 per month. Those charges were now being investigated through the County's insurance representatives, who were pursuing reimbursement of the improperly assessed fees.
- Council members commended the Auditor's Office for identifying unnecessary expenses and aggressively pursuing reimbursement on behalf of taxpayers. Members observed that

discovering these overcharges demonstrated careful financial oversight and responsible management of County resources.
- Mrs. Reeves advised that health insurance proposals and renewal options would be presented during the upcoming budget workshops. She noted that many County employees had expressed dissatisfaction with the current insurance coverage and anticipated reviewing alternative plans during the budget process.

Budget Workshop Preparation
- Council members discussed information needed before budget hearings begin.
- A request was made that updated employee benefit calculations and revised insurance cost estimates be provided so salary and benefit projections could be evaluated accurately during budget discussions.

Meeting Schedule
- Reeves reminded Council members that the August Council meeting had been moved from August 10 to August 3, 2026, and asked members to update their calendars accordingly.
- No further questions were presented regarding the monthly financial reports.

Jail Project Update
- Council members noted that the previously scheduled joint Jail Project meeting had been cancelled.
- Council President Chesser announced that the meeting had been rescheduled for Monday, July 27, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Room.
- Members acknowledged the schedule change and encouraged attendance due to the importance of the continuing jail planning process.

Old Business

Highway Department Wage Classifications and Job Description Approval
- The Council returned to unfinished business involving Highway Department staffing, job descriptions, and employee classifications.
- It was explained that the County's personnel consultant had completed a comprehensive review of the newly created Operations Coordinator position after working closely with Highway Department personnel and Commissioners to refine the responsibilities associated with the position.
- Commissioner Norm Warner confirmed that the Commissioners had already approved the revised job description.
- Council members were advised that, following the consultant's evaluation, the Operations Coordinator position warranted moving one classification level higher within the County's wage structure because of the expanded responsibilities assigned to the position.
- In addition to the Operations Coordinator position, updated job descriptions were presented for: Equipment Operator, Laborer and Highway Superintendent
- It was explained that while only technical revisions had been made to those descriptions, the Council had never formally adopted the revised versions. Staff recommended approving all updated job descriptions to ensure County personnel records remained current.
- Council members also noted that although the revised classification would ultimately affect employee compensation, no separate salary action was necessary at this meeting because those adjustments would be incorporated into existing wage appropriations during the regular payroll process.

- Browning moved to approve:
    - The revised Operations Coordinator job description;
    - The recommended classification increase;
    - Revised job descriptions for Equipment Operator, Laborer, and Highway Superintendent.
- Second by Keith 7/0 approved.

Human Resources/Administrative Assistant Position

- Discussion included job descriptions, most likely 2 positions. Commissioner Warner stated Commissioners are waiting on the Attorney Overholt and Addie @Waggoner, Irwin & Scheele to prepare the descriptions before we can move forward.
- Auditor Reeves stated the HR would take some of the workload off of our office and I was willing to give that person up for that position. But now they're asking for an administrator more than they are in HR. I'm not giving my position up because that workload still falls on Lindsay. I can't ask her to do anymore, if we can afford to pay that then I feel we can afford to pay her more and get her trained if we needed to.

Soil & Water LARE Riverfront Restoration Project

- The Council received an update on the LARE Riverfront Restoration Project. The project coordinator Tammy Bingham reported progress with utility coordination, DNR permitting, and engineering efforts to stabilize the riverbank and remove inactive utility pipes. A request was made for a $3,500 Riverboat Fund **appropriation** to provide the local match for an engineering and design grant.
- Motion by Neff to advertise an appropriation of $3,500 from the Riverboat Fund to provide the local match for the engineering and design grant second by Frye.
- Motion passed 4/3 (Chesser, Robertson, & Carrell opposed)
- The appropriation will return at the August meeting for final approval.

Municipal Unit Strategic Task Force Discussion (MUST)

- Council discussed scheduling the required task force meeting before the October 1 reporting deadline.
- Members agreed to coordinate with the Towns of Spencer and Gosport and provide proper public notice.
- Motion by Neff to schedule and advertise the task force meeting for August 31 at 6:00 p.m. second by Frye 7/0 approved.

New Business

Library Board Additional Appropriation Request

- The Library Board requested $322,000 in additional appropriations from its Rainy Day Fund and Library Improvement Reserve Fund to finance facility improvements and expanded services using interest earned on existing investments.
- Robertson moved to approve the additional appropriations and authorize the required Gateway documentation second by Browning 6/1 (Chesser Opposed) approved.

EMA Director Request – Siren Battery & Padlock Project

- EMA Director Jack White requested $9,919.14 to replace emergency siren batteries and 22 padlocks, noting the batteries are replaced on a three-year cycle. He advised EMA and County Maintenance to complete the installation, eliminating labor costs.

- Motion by Neff to advertise a $9,919.14 Riverboat Fund appropriation for the project second by Browning 7/0 approved.
  Vote: Motion carried.
- The request will return at the next meeting for final approval.

Owen Circuit Court-Additional Appropriations

- The Council next considered requests submitted on behalf of the Owen Circuit Court concerning increasing jury trial expenses and court-ordered psychological evaluations. The discussion reflected the substantial increase in complex felony cases currently pending before the Court.
- Judge VanDerMoere appearing on behalf of Judge Hanlon explained that the request consisted of two separate appropriations:
  - $10,000 for contract services to pay court-ordered psychological evaluations.
  - $20,000 for jury expenses.
- Under Indiana law, the Court is required to appoint qualified psychiatrists or psychologists to perform competency and criminal responsibility evaluations depending upon the level of felony charged. Those evaluations must be performed by individuals certified through the Indiana Supreme Court, leaving the Court little discretion regarding provider selection or costs.
- Judge VanDerMoere further advised that the Court was facing one of the busiest jury calendars in recent years. Scheduled jury trials included:
  - A 10-day murder trial beginning July 21.
  - A second murder trial scheduled for August.
  - A major shooting case scheduled for September.
  - An in-custody felony trial in October.
  - A child molestation trial scheduled for November.
- Council members reviewed the current Jury Fund balance and learned that recent claims had reduced the available balance to approximately $1,300, substantially less than previously reflected in printed reports.
- Robertson moved to advertise an additional appropriation consisting of:
  - $20,000 for jury expenses. $10,000 for contract psychological evaluation services. Both appropriations would be funded from the County General Fund.
- Second by Frye 7/0 approved.
- Council members acknowledged that additional requests might become necessary later in the year should the unusually heavy jury schedule continue.

Sheriff's Department Additional Appropriation Request

- Sheriff Ryan White appeared before the Council requesting an additional appropriation totaling $89,998.95 to cover extraordinary inmate medical expenses incurred by the Owen County Jail.
- White explained that the appropriation resulted from emergency medical treatment provided to an inmate who required extensive hospitalization following a serious medical emergency while in County custody. The inmate remained in intensive care for approximately one month and underwent four separate surgeries during that hospitalization.
- Although the invoice presented totaled nearly $90,000, Mr. White explained that the amount represented the negotiated balance after the County's inmate medical management contractor, Quality Correctional Care (QCC), had completed extensive negotiations with the treating hospital.
- White also advised that portions of the hospitalization occurred after the inmate had been transferred to the Indiana Department of Correction. Staff continued reviewing billing dates to

determine which charges remained the County's responsibility and anticipated reducing the County's obligation by approximately $10,000 once the final allocation was completed.
- Neff moved to advertise an additional appropriation of up to $89,998.95 from Fund 1170 to pay the inmate medical expenses, recognizing that the final amount may be reduced after review of Department of Correction billing responsibilities. Second by Carrell 7/0 approved.

Probation Department Transfers
- The Council next considered several transfer requests submitted by the Probation Department involving Project Income funds.
- The Auditor explained that the requested transfers consisted of three separate amounts: $5,000, $6,888, $1,712
- All transfers would be made within the Probation Department's Project Income Fund to properly align appropriations with anticipated expenditures.
- A Council member questioned why transfers required Council approval. The Auditor explained that under recent changes in State procedures, **all budget transfers must now be presented to and approved by the County Council**, regardless of the funding source.
- Council members acknowledged the procedural change and indicated they appreciated the clarification.
- Motion by Robertson second by Browning to approve the three Probation Department budget transfers in the amounts presented from the Project Income Fund. 7/0 approved.

Probation Department Additional Appropriation
- The Council next reviewed a separate additional appropriation request submitted by the Probation Department for expenses associated with probation care and services.
- Motion was made by Robertson to advertise $18,600 from project income.
- The request initially appeared to involve $18,600 entirely from Project Income. Auditor Reeves clarified that the request consisted of two funding sources:
  - $10,000 from County General
  - $8,600 from Project Income
- Following that clarification, the original motion was amended to reflect the proper funding sources. Robertson moved to advertise an additional appropriation consisting of:
  - $10,000 from County General
  - $8,600 from Project Income
- Second by Neff 7/0 approved

Conflict of Interest Forms
- The Council then discussed Conflict of Interest disclosure forms that had recently been submitted and approved by the Commissioners.
- Auditor Reeves explained that no Council action was required because the forms had already been properly submitted and would appear on the Commissioners' agenda.
- The discussion broadened into a review of best practices used throughout Indiana counties regarding annual Conflict of Interest disclosures.
- Council members questioned whether such a practice required adoption of an ordinance or formal resolution. Reeves advised that many counties routinely require:
  - County Commissioners
  - County Council members
  - Elected officials
  - Board and commission members

- The Auditor advised that no ordinance was necessary because the forms are standardized State documents and simply require filing with the County Clerk before being submitted to the State by the individual filing the disclosure.
- Council members also asked whether township trustees, planning commission members, Board of Zoning Appeals members, and other appointed officials would also be required to file disclosures when conflicts arise.
- The Auditor confirmed that any individual involved in County governmental business who has a qualifying conflict should complete the appropriate disclosure form.

Salary Ordinance Confirmation Summaries

- The Council next reviewed the monthly Salary Ordinance Confirmation Summaries prepared for employee changes occurring during the previous month.
- Motion by Neff to authorize the Council President to sign the Salary Ordinance Confirmation Summaries second by Robertson 7/0 approved.

Building Department Staffing Issue

- Auditor Reeves reported that a temporary part-time employee had worked a limited number of hours earlier in the year despite:
  - No authorized part-time position in the Salary Ordinance.
  - No budget appropriation for the position.
  - No approved job description.
- Reeves advised the situation was not compliant with State Board of Accounts requirements and recommended:
  - Retroactive authorization of the temporary part-time position for the period worked.
  - Approval of an appropriate part-time job description.
  - Establish the necessary salary ordinance and budget appropriation.
  - Maintaining a modest appropriation for future temporary staffing needs to ensure compliance.
- Commissioner Warner agreed to work with the Building Department and County staff to resolve the matter before the August meeting.
- No formal Council action was taken.

Grant Administration Discussion

- Council discussed grant administration after learning that a department had applied for a grant before formal Council review. The grant had expired, and a similar application had already been submitted, requiring no further action.
- Members supported exploring a centralized grant management process, including assigning grant responsibilities to staff, hiring a grant writer, or contracting with a grant administration firm.
- Members agreed centralized oversight could improve coordination, prevent duplicate applications, and strengthen grant compliance.
- No formal action was taken.

Election Board Equipment Update

- Council received an update on the County's aging Infinity voting panels and reviewed a MicroVote replacement proposal of approximately $115,000.00
- The matter will be considered during future budget discussions.
- No formal action was taken.

Legislative Summaries

- Auditor Reeves provided several informational updates regarding recent legislative changes, training opportunities, and State reporting requirements affecting county government.
- Mrs. Reeves advised that each Council member had received informational materials summarizing recently enacted legislation affecting county government.
- She explained that the summaries had been prepared in a simplified format to make complicated legislative changes easier to understand. Council members were encouraged to review the materials before budget hearings because many of the new laws would affect County operations and financial planning.

Public Information

- Reeves also discussed educational materials explaining Indiana's property tax assessment process
- Noting that the fact sheets presented one of the clearest explanations available regarding how assessments and property taxes are calculated. She suggested that making those materials available to the public through local media could help answer many questions routinely received by County offices.
- Council members agreed that better public understanding of the property tax system would likely reduce confusion and improve communication with taxpayers.

Public Records Request Process

- Reeves next discussed new State requirements concerning public records requests. She explained that although the County Attorney had determined neither an ordinance nor a resolution was necessary, the County still needed to establish an internal process for receiving, tracking, and responding to requests.
- The Auditor advised that her office was working with the County's Information Technology provider to develop a standardized system.
- Further explained that the County did not intend to manage requests directly through the County website because of staffing limitations. Instead, until an administrative or Human Resources position is created, the Auditor's Office would continue managing public records requests.
- Council members acknowledged that responsibility could eventually become part of the duties assigned to the proposed Administrative or Human Resources position once that position is established.

Road Funding Update

- Council was informed by Reeves that the County had unexpectedly received approximately $363,691 through the State's new lane-mile road funding program.
- Explaining that the funds were restricted to road and bridge purposes and that a new fund had been established to account for those revenues. Current guidance indicated the program would continue through at least 2029.
- Additional appropriations would be required before the funds could be spent.
- Reeves also advised that State distributions associated with gasoline tax and holiday road funding reimbursements were temporarily running behind schedule.
- Rather than receiving payments monthly as previously anticipated, the State would distribute reimbursements in larger installments over the coming months.

- Although the delayed distributions would temporarily reduce monthly highway revenues, the County anticipated receiving the deferred payments before year-end.
- All delayed distributions were expected to be completed before December 31.

Council Comments

- Council members reviewed several upcoming meetings and conferences.
- The Joint Jail Meeting would be held on July 27, 2026.
- The next regular County Council Meeting would be held on August 3, 2026, rather than the previously scheduled August 10 date.
- Council members were also reminded that the Association of Indiana Counties Annual Conference would be held in Allen County from September 21 through September 24, 2026.
- Members interested in attending were asked to notify the Auditor's Office so travel arrangements and registrations could be completed.
- No additional Council comments were offered.

Adjournment

- With no further business coming before the Council, a motion was made by Robertson and seconded by Browning to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.
- Council President Chesser declared the meeting adjourned and thanked everyone for their attendance and participation.