OWEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES July 16, 2026 @ 6:00 P.M.
2nd Floor of the Courthouse Commissioner's Room

Live Streamed on YouTube-Owen County Government

Call To Order and Opening Prayer

- Opening Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer were given.
- Meeting called to order by Commissioner Hobbs.
- Present: Commissioner Sam Hobbs, Commissioner David Risk and Commissioner Norman Warner.
- Auditor: Sheila Reeves and Attorney: Tony Overholt

Financial – Monthly Fund Reports

- Auditor Sheila Reeves presented the monthly financial reports.
- Monthly fund reports had been prepared through the end of July for Commissioner review.
- Budget information has been entered into the County's financial system as part of the ongoing transition process.
- Department budget documents will be distributed by the following Friday for review before the August 3 Council meeting.
- Health insurance projections currently included a 19% estimated increase to ensure adequate funding while final figures continued to be refined with Parmley and Proactive representatives.
- Final budget entries must be submitted to the State by October 1, with all approvals completed before the statutory November 1 deadline.

Approval Of Minutes

- Risk moved to approve the minutes of the July 2, 2026 regular meeting, second by Warner 3/0 approved.

Approval Of Payroll and Claims

Payroll	$345,634.02
Regular Claims	$315,716.28
Out-of-Cycle Claims	$90,507.51
Totaling	**$751,857.81**

- Warner moved to approve the payroll and claims as presented second by Risk 3/0 approved.

OLD BUSINESS

Jail Project Review

- Commissioners briefly discussed the upcoming July 27, 2026 Joint Meeting with the Owen County Council regarding the proposed jail project.
- President Hobbs clarified that the July 27 meeting would be a formal joint meeting of both governing bodies rather than a work session and indicated that substantive discussion and decisions regarding the jail project would occur at that meeting.
- No additional jail business was considered during this meeting.

Human Resources / Administrative Assistant Position

- Commissioners continued discussion regarding creation of an Administrative Assistant position to support the Board of Commissioners.
- President Hobbs stated the position had been discussed over several meetings and emphasized that increasing administrative responsibilities—including email correspondence, scheduling, records management, and coordination of meetings—had grown beyond what could reasonably be absorbed by existing Auditor's Office staff.
- Commissioners expressed appreciation to Auditor Sheila Reeves and her staff for their continued assistance while recognizing the need for dedicated administrative support for the Commissioners.

Auditor Reeves reported that:

- The proposed job description had been forwarded to County Attorney Tony Overholt for legal review.
- The position would be presented to the County Council during the August 3 budget meeting.
- Discussion continued regarding whether Human Resources and Administrative Assistant duties should remain combined or eventually become separate full-time positions.
- Current workload analysis suggested Human Resources responsibilities could ultimately require a dedicated full-time employee.
    - Commissioners and the Auditor also discussed ongoing work with the County's Human Resources consultant to revise county personnel policies. Auditor Reeves explained that:
- The policy review remained in progress. Consultants had been authorized to continue drafting the remaining policy manual to accelerate completion. Updated personnel policies were expected to reduce recurring personnel issues and improve consistency across departments.

- Additional discussion included employee leave policies and compensatory time requirements. Auditor Reeves advised Commissioners that:
  - Federal regulations limit compensatory time balances to 240 hours for eligible employees.
  - One County employee currently exceeded that threshold and would require action by the County Council.
  - Several departments continued to accumulate substantial vacation and personal leave balances due to staffing shortages and heavy workloads, particularly within the court system.
- Commissioners also reviewed pending Human Resources policy updates affecting Emergency Medical Services (EMS), agreeing those revisions should receive priority consideration at an upcoming meeting.
- Following discussion, Commissioners agreed the Administrative Assistant position should continue moving forward for Council consideration.
- Risk moved to authorize County Attorney Tony Overholt to finalize the job description for the proposed Commissioners' Administrative Assistant position for presentation to the County Council, Warner seconded the motion 3/0 approved.

NEW BUSINESS

Architectural Services Presentation

- President Hobbs recognized Mike Conley, Architect, who appeared before the Board to reintroduce his firm and discuss architectural services available to Owen County.
- Mr. Conley advised that his Indianapolis-based firm specializes in public-sector projects and has extensive experience working with county government facilities throughout Indiana. His firm had previously partnered with Owen County on ADA improvement projects.
- He stated that his firm would be available to assist Owen County with future courthouse improvements, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance projects, facility planning, or other capital improvements, and offered to meet with Commissioners at no cost to discuss future needs.

Peters Franklin LLC – Jail Consultant and Bond Engagement Letter

- Commissioners considered an engagement agreement with Peters Franklin LLC for continued financial advisory services associated with the proposed Owen County Jail Project.
- President Hobbs stated that financial advisor Jeff Peters had served the County for several years and had been instrumental in developing the financial strategy, debt planning, and bond financing options for the proposed jail project. He noted

that Mr. Peters had attended numerous public meetings to explain financing alternatives and would continue assisting the County as the project progressed.
- Commissioners reviewed the scope of services contained within the engagement agreement, which included:
  - Financial planning and debt analysis.
  - Evaluation of financing alternatives.
  - Consultation regarding bond issuance.
  - Attendance at public meetings.
  - Coordination with County officials and other project professionals throughout the financing process.
- Commissioners indicated they had received the proposed agreement prior to the meeting and had sufficient opportunity to review its provisions.
- Motion by Warner second by Risk to approve the Peters Franklin LLC engagement agreement and authorize Board President Sam Hobbs to execute the agreement on behalf of the Board 3/0 approved.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statements

- President Hobbs presented two Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statements requiring approval by the Board.
- The disclosures involved:
  - Daniel Joseph Frye, Owen County Council Member.
  - Verl Keith, Owen County Council Member.
- Commissioners noted that County Attorney Tony Overholt had reviewed the disclosures. Discussion included the relationship between Council Member Verl Keith and Tilden Keith, who is assisting the County with the proposed jail property acquisition, as well as the distant familial relationship disclosed by Council Member Joseph Frye.
- After determining that both disclosures had been properly completed and reviewed, Commissioners proceeded with formal action.
- Risk moved to approve the Conflict-of-Interest Disclosure Statements submitted by Daniel Joseph Frye and Verl Keith, second by Warner 3/0 approved.

DEPARTMENT HEADS / ELECTED OFFICIALS

Auditor's Office

- Auditor Sheila Reeves provided several administrative updates for the Board.

Public Records Request System

- Auditor Reeves reported that County staff, AME, and County website administrator David Martin had continued working to implement the County's new public records request process.

- Reeves advised that once technical issues are resolved the updated system would:
  - Route requests directly to the appropriate department.
  - Automatically notify responsible personnel by email.
  - Track response deadlines.
  - Assist with preparation of the County's newly required annual public records reporting.

County Website Improvements

- Mrs. Reeves further reported that all 2026 Commissioner meeting minutes had been uploaded to the County website, with 2025 minutes expected to be posted shortly.
- Although posting older minutes online is not required by law, Commissioners agreed that making the records readily available would improve transparency and reduce repetitive public records requests.
- Discussion also addressed long-term preservation of the County's YouTube meeting recordings. Commissioners noted that while state requirements mandate maintaining recordings for only ninety days, preserving archived recordings beyond the minimum retention period would protect important historical records and provide a safeguard in the event of data loss or website failure.
- Commissioners directed staff to work with the County's information technology provider to ensure appropriate backup procedures are established for both the County website and archived meeting recordings.

Highway Department Review / Updates

- Highway Superintendent Chad Walker presented the monthly Highway Department report:
  - Walker advised that AME’s estimate for a network firewall for the Highway Department for $1,060.00 had been approved, Warner stated he had signed off on that last week, acknowledged he was not aware the Highway Department did not have a firewall, it has been installed.
- Reported that CountryMark would temporarily close Dutch Bethel Road beginning July 20 for a gas line repair, with detours and traffic control provided by the company.
- Reviewed ongoing Highway Department activities, including roadway patching, culvert replacements, ditching projects, equipment maintenance, and completion of the Tower Road paving project through the 2026 Community Crossings Matching Grant (CCMG) program. Commissioners commended the Highway Department and contractor on the completed work.

- Commissioners discussed planning for the 2027 Community Crossings Matching Grant (CCMG) program, upcoming INDOT construction and detours on State Road 67/U.S. 231.
- Replacement of the Highway Department bucket truck. Commissioners authorized continued investigation and encouraged Mr. Walker to also contact:
  - Hoosier Energy, Duke Energy, REMC. Utility contractors and power companies that periodically retire fleet equipment
- Superintendent Walker was directed to inspect each proposed project, determine necessary drainage improvements, and identify locations requiring contractor assistance for ditching and culvert installation before paving work proceeds.

Specific roads discussed included, among others:

- Sherfield Road
- Macville Road
- Howard Road
- White Road
- Bus Road
- Baker School Road
- Franklin Road
- Hubble Station Road
- Mill Grove Road
- Keeler Road
- Oak Grove Church Road
- Cherokee Road
- Clark Road
- Graham Road
- Six Mile Road
- Buckalew Road
- Mount Zion Road
- Hickory Road
- Hudson Hill Road
- Front Street
- Rocky Hill Road
- Fertig Road
- West Dam Road
- Commissioner Hobbs moved to authorize Highway Superintendent Chad Walker to solicit bids for ditching and culvert installation work on Sherfield Road, Macville Road, and Howard Road as the initial phase of future road improvements, second by Warner 3/0 approved.
- Walker reported that work would continue on Freedom Arney Road, Mitten Road, and other scheduled projects as the Highway Department continued planning future roadway improvements. Commissioners expressed appreciation for the department's continued efforts despite staffing and equipment challenges.

Walker further reported that Highway Department crews continued extensive roadway maintenance activities throughout the County, including:

- Completing patching operations on Byerly Road.
- Preparing to begin repairs within Jordan Village and Owl Hollow.
- Continuing culvert replacement work on Freedom Arney Road despite encountering unexpected concrete drainage structures beneath the existing roadway, which required additional demolition before installation could proceed.
- Beginning ditching and culvert replacement work on Hyden Road with contractor assistance.
- Receiving delivery of drainage pipe materials in preparation for additional work.
- Completing paving of Tower Road as part of the County's 2026 Community Crossings Matching Grant (CCMG) program.
- Additional discussion included updating County road mileage records with INDOT to ensure County inventories accurately reflected eligible roadway mileage for future funding purposes. Staff advised they would continue coordinating with INDOT to reconcile any discrepancies.
- Commissioners complimented the Highway Department and paving contractor on the quality of the completed Tower Road project and expressed appreciation for the continued progress despite staffing limitations and unexpected field conditions.

Additional Highway Discussion

- Walker also reported:
- Additional culvert replacement projects remained scheduled after completion of current CCMG work.
- Freedom Arney Road and Mitten Road projects remained on schedule.
- Acquiring a bucket truck would significantly improve the Highway Department's ability to trim roadside trees before paving operations.
- Local contractors interested in participating in County projects were encouraged to contact the Highway Department so they could be included in future bid opportunities.
- Commissioners reiterated their appreciation for the Highway Department's continued progress despite staffing shortages, aging equipment, and increasing infrastructure needs throughout the County.

AUDITOR COMMENTS

Auditor Sheila Reeves presented several additional administrative updates and requests for the Board's consideration.

- Reeves informed Commissioners that implementation of the County's revised public records request system was progressing and that technical issues identified during testing had largely been resolved. The updated system would automatically route requests to the appropriate department, provide email notifications to responsible personnel, track statutory response deadlines, and assist with preparation of the County's required annual public records reporting. Commissioners expressed support for moving forward with implementation while continuing to monitor the system to ensure it functioned as intended.

- Reeves also reported that all 2026 Board of Commissioners meeting minutes had been uploaded to the County website and that staff expected to have the 2025 and 2024 minutes posted in the near future. Although not legally required, Commissioners agreed that posting prior meeting minutes online would improve transparency and make County records more accessible to the public.
- Additional discussion addressed preservation of the County's YouTube meeting recordings. Commissioners agreed that archived recordings should be backed up whenever possible to protect the County's historical records in the event of website failure, cyberattack, or data loss. Staff was directed to coordinate with the County's information technology provider to ensure appropriate backup procedures were in place.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Executive Session

- Commissioners discussed scheduling an Executive Session for Thursday, July 30, 2026, to address matters permitted under Indiana's Open Door Law.
- Following discussion of individual schedules, Commissioners agreed to begin the Executive Session at 4:00 p.m.

Subjects anticipated for discussion included:

- Pending litigation.
- Highway Department matters.
- County building maintenance.
- Custodial operations.
- Additional personnel and administrative matters authorized by statute.

Commissioners acknowledged that the Executive Session could extend beyond two hours depending upon the amount of business requiring discussion.

Administrative Work Session

- Following the Executive Session discussion, Commissioners also agreed to schedule an Administrative Work Session on July 30, 2026, immediately following completion of the Executive Session. The Executive Session length could not be predicted, staff was directed to advertise the Administrative Work Session for approximately 6:00 p.m., with the understanding that the actual start time could be later if necessary.
- Commissioners indicated the Administrative Work Session would primarily focus on reviewing proposed 2027 Community Crossings Matching Grant (CCMG) roadway priorities and other pending administrative matters.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- No members of the public requested to address the Board during the designated Public Comment period.

Public Safety Communications

- Commissioners received an update from Cris Lunsford EMS Director regarding communications improvements in the Patricksburg area.

It was reported that:

- The aging communications tower had been removed.
- Emergency communications would temporarily operate through the Freedom water tower.
- Local personnel had established backup communication procedures utilizing cellular phones and Active911 notifications until the permanent communications system became operational.
- A contractor had indicated that a temporary portable communications tower could be installed if operational issues developed before the permanent system was completed.
- Commissioners directed Lunsford contact vendor to install the temporary tower to maintain reliable emergency communications.

County Surplus Property

Commissioners discussed surplus disposal of County property, including:

- An approximately 80- to 90-foot communications tower that had recently been removed from service.
- An unusable chainsaw previously retained as evidence.
- Commissioners agreed staff should prepare the necessary surplus documentation for review by the County Attorney. If practical, the communications tower would first be offered for sale as surplus property. If it could not be economically salvaged or sold, it would be dismantled and sold for scrap value.

Adjournment

- Hobbs made motion to adjourn second by Warner 3/0 approved.