PERRY COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
June 16, 2026

The Perry County Board of Commissioners met at 6:00 p.m., as was duly advertised. Commissioners: President Randy Cole (RC) and Rebecca Thorn (RT) were in attendance. Auditor Kristinia Hammack was also present. There was no *Sheriff*, *Attorney* or *News Representative* in attendance.

The meeting opened with all present reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA

RT made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

a) Susan Miller

Miller appeared regarding questions on House Bill 1003. RC stated that he would address all the questions once everyone who signed up to speak at the meeting regarding this topic was heard. Miller asked the following questions:

1. Are the Commissioners currently in active discussion, negotiations, or under any preliminary agreement to sell the Perry County Memorial Hospital to Deaconess Health Systems or any other outside entity?

2. If the hospital is sold, what legally binding guarantees can the Commissioners secure to protect non-patient-facing jobs locally (Billing, HR, Medical Records, Compliance, etc.), preventing them from being consolidated to a larger system's headquarters or offshore?

3. How will the Commissioners ensure that the hospital maintains its current level of local, community-focused leadership and care rather than having decisions dictated by a distant corporation board?

4. Since the Commissioners will now effectively control the hospital board under HB 1003, what are the specific criteria you will use to select the two appointed members, and will those individuals be Perry County residents? Will any of the current board members be reappointed in July?

5. Did the Commissioners, or any person or group they control or direct, request or lobby Representative Steve Bartel to include the hospital board governance language (page 133 of HB 1003) in the bill? Miller stated that she did request Representative Bartel to attend this meeting, and he stated he was going to be out of town; she did invite him to come to Perry County by asking him to hold a public meeting in Perry County to sit down and talk with the community and hospital employees, stating what the Perry County community could expect from HB 1003.

6. Do you deny or confirm that the County population numbers that were used on page 133 were targeted at Perry County, taking into consideration that there were only 3 counties in the State whose population was in the ranges. One county does not have a hospital; IU Health already owns one county's hospital, and that only leaves Perry County, which is impacted among the 92 counties in the state. That is not a coincidence. Miller asked what type of communication happened between Mr. Bartel, the author of the bill, that brought it to the floor for a vote, and his yes vote?

7. Did anyone at any time talk to the current board about HB 1003?

8. Can the Commissioners commit to holding open, publicly noticed community forums before any final decisions are made to sell or significantly alter the hospital's operational structure?

9. What specific financial risk did the hospital pose to Perry County taxpayers that necessitated the dissolution of a high functioning 70-year-old hospital board?

10. Where can we find the current hospital financials?

11. Can you share your expertise, background, and education that qualify you to be on a Hospital Board?

12. What is your personal plan or the plan of the Commissioner to obtain the knowledge required to get up to and maintain the level of expertise in Hospital Administration, Customer/Patient Care, Compliance, etc?

Miller stated that she has a background in healthcare as she is the Director of Human Resources for a self-funded health plan that used Jasper Memorial Hospital as the primary source. She has experienced the sale of Jasper Memorial Hospital to Deaconess.

b) Brian Herwig
Herwig appeared regarding House Bill 1003. He asked the following questions:
1. Did each of you support language changes to hospital composition to have County Commissioners and County Council members replace appointed board members?
2. Did each of you have conversations with current local hospital board members indicating your preference and explaining your reasons for supporting this change?
3. There is a rumor circulating that the County Commissioners and County Council members have an interest in selling Perry County Memorial Hospital (PCMH). Is this rumor true? If so, is the plan to proceed with a sale within 12 months? 24 months? Or some other timeline?
4. If you are moving to sell PCMH, what reasons do you have to justify this sale?
5. Are there issues with the PCMH Board or current operations? Have those concerns been shared with the Board or Administration?
6. When will public meetings be held to hear concerns and issues raised by constituents and employees?
7. Did County Commissioners or County Council member conversations with Representative Stephen Bartels occur in accordance with Indiana's Open Door Law? Please provide me with a copy of the posted meeting notice, agenda, and minutes from those meetings.
8. What is the experience of each County Commissioner and County Council member with healthcare finance, quality, patient safety, recruitment, accreditation, outcomes or regulatory standards?
9. When will he receive the above requested information?

RC stated the there are two separate issues. With the Bill, these questions that were asked at this meeting is exactly what prompted the Commissioners to look for some way to create transparency.
RC stated he asked other Commissioners in other counties regarding serving on the hospital board; many do serve on the hospital board. RC asked how do they do that, and the response was that State Legislature allows them to do that. With research, RC found a piece of State Legislature that has between 16,700 population and 19,000 population, Commissioners were allowed to serve on a hospital board. The only change that occurred in this law was from 19,000 to 20,000 population, because Perry County's census population in 2020 was 19,170 population, probably due to the prison having additional inmates.
RC spoke with Steve Bartel and stated, "what we want to do is Commissioners have involvement, there will be more transparency with occurrences that happen at the hospital." RC added that one thing to remember, looking up on the audited financial statement of Perry County Memorial Hospital, the auditors state "Perry County Memorial Hospital, a component unit of Perry County, Indiana." The hospital is a County hospital. As taxpayers, the hospital is the single highest debt that the County owes. The County has cosigned, guaranteeing payment of that debt through tax dollars. If anything occurs at that hospital, it will be the responsibility of the taxpayers of Perry County to pay the debt.
RC stated that as Commissioners, they are voted into the office to provide oversight and management to County assets. The Commissioners feel it is the responsible thing to do to be fully informed with everything that occurs with every unit of County government.
RC stated that only one hospital board member had reached out to him. RC explained that all the County did was follow an exiting statute, just changing the population by a

notch. It is a seven-member board, made up of three Commissioners, four appointees which is two from the Council and two from the Commissioners. The current arrangement at the hospital board is six people are on the board, which it should be an odd number so there is not a tie. RC pointed out that all six are appointed by the Commissioners. The only thing that has changed is now the Commissioners will be actively sitting through board meetings with no compensation, so that they stay informed as to what is happening at the local hospital. That is all changing. When this was discussed, the Commissioners took it upon themselves to say can they transition into this? There are no board members that is going to be removed July 1st. As terms expire, the Commissioners are going to get themselves in compliance with the new state statute. This will be done over a period of time. Anyone serving currently will be eligible to be reappointed by the Commissioners or the Council. Those that are currently on the board, some terms extend into 2029. They will continue to serve if they choose through this period of time. No one is being kicked off the board. RC added it all comes down to transparency with what is happening there.

RC reiterated that the Perry County Memorial Hospital, or the debt out there, is the single highest debt that the County has. He provided information of other county-owned hospitals, the number of Commissioners that sit on the board, and their debt per bed. Perry County Memorial Hospital is a 25-bed hospital, with a debt of $33 million, which puts the debt per bed at $1.3 million per bed. Perry County is above the other hospitals. RC stated he feels it is important that the Commissioners are aware of these things to make sure that something does not happen that cannot be addressed prior to it happening. The latest financial statement that can be found online is 2024, which is a year and one-half ago. RC added that during that period of time, a lot can happen. The Commissioners feel that they need to be informed, and when informed, share with the public. Also, they feel that the oversight will allow the Commissioners to feel comfortable with how it operates, what is happening, and to address anything potentially would be a catastrophe or a strain to the local population in the community. This is the Commissioner's main goal with this. RC added this will allow the Commissioners to gain operational and financial knowledge related to the hospital, and it will provide transparency.

RC stated that the second issue is the hospital sale. A lot of questions dealt with this issue. RC stated that the Commissioners have not received or discussed any offers for purchase of the hospital. He does believe the Council has either. In conjunction with discussions with Deaconess, RC had discussions with Deaconess concerning ambulance service. He was provided an opportunity to view a presentation that was to be presented to the Board of Directors of Perry County Memorial Hospital later that afternoon. RC's presumption was it was presented to the board. He is not aware whether the board took any action, considered it, or has done anything related to that. RC added that there have been no other discussions whatsoever with anyone interested, or making an offer, for the hospital, unless it was made to the board and the Commissioners are unaware of it.

RC feels the questions regarding employment, viability of the hospital continuing to serve the community, is relevant. He added that there is no way that any Commissioner who is currently serving would even consider anything but keeping the hospital operational, as it serves a very important need in the community.

At the same time, RC wonders if there is an opportunity for expansion of services for local residents? Is the potential there? Is there potential of utilization of the current existing facility, getting more people in the door? Is there an opportunity for additional employment? Is it a growth opportunity so that it can actually expand the hospital? Would it be beneficial to the employees working for a larger firm and having more security? Larger employers have more access to benefit programs and flexibility. Would removing $33 million worth of debt from the County be a positive for county residents/taxpayers?

RC asked how does the County determine if this might be something to consider? There is only one way, and that is to engage in a discussion with the public and any suitor that would have interest. It may be a wonderful offer or it might be something that the County would not even consider at any moment. Until the Commissioners engage in a conversation, it is speculation. As far as the County is concerned, the hospital sale has not even been discussed.

Herwig stated that it sounded like RC asked Steve Bartels to change the law. He added that the law be changed so that the Commissioners can be on the board, but they are not going to replace anybody on the board until their term expires. That is contradictory. The law states beginning July 1, 2026, three Commissioners are on that board. Therefore, the County would be violating the law in two weeks. RC responded that this is a legal matter, and may be in violation, but the County Attorney drafted the whole ordinance and the replacement schedule. If somebody provides litigation against the County stating that the County Attorney is incorrect, then the issue will be visited. RC added that currently under the board system, where there are seven board members, there are only five, which will allow the new board member, the seventh that was never in existence, to be a Commissioner. There is also a vacancy, so a Commissioner will go on. Thus, there will only be two Commissioners on the board until terms expire. RC added that if that is a violation, they the County will have to bring that up. He encouraged Herwig to get with the County Attorney, as the attorney stated the County is well within its rights to do this on a transitional basis to put the County in compliance.

Herwig stated that there be nothing to preclude a Commissioner from being appointed to the board now. RC responded yes, there is right now. Herwig asked what is that? RC responded that in Indiana law, right now under the hospital, the hospital pays board members a fee, and the Commissioners cannot double-dip by taking a payment as a Commissioner and take a payment as a board member. With this change, the Commissioners will not be eligible for any kind of payment from the hospital.

To answer Herwig's question regarding Steve Bartels, RC stated that he had a discussion with him. Herwig asked if it was just him, and RC responded yes, he thought so.

Auditor Kristinia Hammack stated that RC kept stating "we the Commissioners", as their Administrator, she is hearing concern from the public that there were not any public meetings where the Commissioners discussed this matter. People found out about it after the bill was passed. When Steve Bartels was asked about it, his response was "this is what you guys wanted". Hammack added that the Commissioners have to follow Open Door Law, and they do not many times. In regard to this matter, it is either the Commissioners discussed this and a quorum was present outside of a public meeting and then it was taken to Steve Bartels, or one person themselves had this discussion with Steve Bartels.

RC asked Herwig, of the administrators at the hospital, was he aware how many actually work for Perry County Memorial Hospital, or do they work for a different third party? Herwig responded that the CEO and the CFO are Deaconess employees. The rest of the administrative team are Perry County Memorial Hospital. Herwig assumes that the Deaconess employees might be getting Deaconess benefits.

RC stated that if the County can do something that saves the hospital, the Commissioners will go out of their way to carry out that. They live here, they are taxpayers, they are part of this community, and they want that hospital be here for years and years to come. RC added it is a fantastic facility, and want to continue to have a top-notch facility.

Miller stated that the original question was never answered. She asked RC if he, personally, had a meeting with Steve Bartels without a quorum or anybody else, and asked for House Bill 1003 to raise the population by what RC said, so that Perry County was indicated, so the Commissioners could then go on to the board? RC responded that he did not have a personal meeting with Bartels, but he had a phone conversation. RC told Bartels that currently multiple other counties allow the Commissioners to serve on the Hospital Board. The Commissioners would like the opportunity, and asked Bartels if there was a way to do that so that the County can bring transparency to some of these actions back to the people of the County, given the fact that the hospital is the single highest debt the County has. RC went on the internet and searched Indiana Code, and he found the section regarding population. It simply needed nothing more than to raise the population. RC discussed with Bartels, and stated this would give the County the opportunity to provide seats or availability for Commissioners, bringing transparency to the hospital.

Miller asked if there was no other way to get information/reports from the hospital board than to sit on their board? RC responded that during the ambulance negotiation, the County requested that the Council and Commissioners sit down with the hospital board to have a discussion. The hospital provides ambulance service for the County, and the County wanted to have a discussion with the board. The board has signed all of the County contracts from the 1980's through the early ones when the hospital was built. The County wanted to sit down with the board and have an active discussion with them. RC received an email from the hospital board president, and was told that was not possible. RC was told that dealing with the County is no different than dealing with Morrison's Cafeteria service, signing a contract with them. RC was told the only person he needed to deal with was the CEO, and there was no reason to meet with the board.

Miller asked the question regarding what expertise and education do the Commissioners have in hospital administration that they feel would make them as competent as the current board members? If the Commissioners do not have that, what is the County's plan or their personal plan to get up to speed on healthcare? RC responded that every time someone is appointed to that board, there is a learning curve.

c) Chris Thorton, District Ranger, US Forestry Service
Thorton had three updates to provide to the Commissioners.
Thorton stated they have contributed $210,000 and change through the Secure Rural Schools Act and payment in lieu of taxes in 2025, to the County's coffer.
Thorton wanted to thank the Sheriff's department for their recent help at Rainbow Lake with the enforcement of all the problems they have had out there.
Thorton stated that they have an agreement with the County for Mano Point. The agreement was that the Forestry would reopen the bathroom, do the mowing, clean the parking lot, and empty the trash, and the County would every now and then clean the boat ramp off.
Thorton stated that the Forestry leadership team met a few weeks prior and discussed Mano Point. There was concern regarding the bathroom. With the Forestry being an environmentally conscious organization, when the river floods resulting in the bathroom flooding, waste is dumped in the river. This resulted in the concern from the National Forestry regarding the bathroom remaining open. Thorton wanted to get the Commissioners thoughts on if the bathroom would be closed, and how the County would feel regarding the agreement with the Forestry Service. They would continue to mow the area, and would love for individuals to be able to launch their boats. However, having a bathroom that is in the flood zone that is contaminating the river every time it floods is not something the Forestry Service wants to keep doing.
RC asked if the Forest Service would consider transferring that to the County parks system? Thorton responded that they would always talk about it. There are some things with Mano Point that are special to the Forest Service. There is a big archaeological site as well. In addition, it is difficult for the Federal government to sell land. They can trade land, do permits to have other people manage land, and would definitely be willing to talk in the future. RC responded that maybe rather than selling it, maybe some type of a longer type lease could be worked out. RC added that Derby has an active community group that may be interested in participating.
RC stated that Mano Point is a nice facility, and the Commissioners are open to discussions.

<u>MINUTES</u>

a) 05.29.2026

RT made a motion to approve, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

b) 06.01.2026

RT made a motion to approve, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

<u>STEVE HOWELL, HIGHWAY</u>

a) Application to cross Spring Road with aerial line
Howell stated that he needed to get approval on a Comcast line that is approximately 400 feet. It will be overhead. RT asked if that would affect any of the mowing equipment? Howell responded no.
RC stated that he believed that Comcast was upgrading their service, and Howell confirmed that.

RT made a motion to approve the aerial crossing of Spring Road, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

<u>KRISTINIA HAMMACK, AUDITOR</u>

a) 06.19.2026 Payroll: $181,092.41

RT made a motion to approve, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

b) 06.19.2026 Payroll W/H: $38,008.15

RT made a motion to approve, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

c) Health Insurance Claims: $13,203.29

RT made a motion to approve, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

d) 06.16.2026 Solid Waste Claim Docket: $12,983.39

RT made a motion to approve, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

e) 06.16.2026 Accounts Payable Claim Docket: $77,008.79

RT made a motion to approve, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

<u>COMMISSIONERS</u>

a) Coroner Fund Ordinance
Coroner Warren Taylor stated that he had a couple of questions regarding the Ordinance. Taylor stated that County Attorney Andew Foster sent him a copy of

the Ordinance, and put in everything that Taylor had asked for. However, the Ordinance stated something regarding the County Council's appropriation unless otherwise provided by law. Taylor did not understand what the Council has to do with these funds. The Council does not provide the funds to this Ordinance. Taylor added this is money that has been donated. There are three different funds that do not fall under County Council's control. Thus, Tayor did not understand why Foster put anything in the Ordinance about the County Council having control over it. Taylor stated that to him, the approval of the claims should be the Commissioners, not having to run through the County Council, as they provide no money in these funds. RC responded that Taylor would need to take this up with Foster because of State Statute in a lot of cases, depending where the money is collected, if it comes into County government, it has specific requirements on how it is dispersed. He added that he is completely unfamiliar about the donation funds as to whether this is the case. RC suggested to table at this time to ascertain why Foster wrote the Ordinance as he did.

RT asked Taylor if he had read the Veteran's Donation Ordinance, and Taylor responded no. RT stated that it might be good to look at that. Auditor Hammack stated that the Veteran's Donation fund still has to be appropriated with the Council as well. RC added that when the County has a fund, it is subject to State Audits.

RT made a motion to table the Coroner fund Ordinance, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

b) Hospital Ordinance

RC stated this Ordinance is to be in compliance with the new Indiana Code 16-22-2, where the Commissioners will now be eligible to serve on the board of the hospital.

RT made a motion to approve, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

c) Jackson Kelly Invoice

RC stated that is related to an ongoing lawsuit with Solid Waste Midwest, which goes back to Veolia in 2010. They filed a lawsuit against the County concerning its discontinuance of their service.

RT made a motion to pay this invoice out of the CEDIT fund, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

d) Pulse Point Invoice

RC stated that this is the reoccurring first responder program. There is money set aside for that service. The amount is $8,000 annually, and it is integrated with the CAD service at dispatch. It notifies first responders in the event of a need.

RT made a motion to approve the Pulse Point invoice, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

There will be a Joint Executive Session with Commissioner and County Council regarding employment issues on Wednesday, June 24, 2026 at 11:00 a.m.
The Commissioner next Regular Meeting will be Monday, July 6, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:06 p.m. CST.
RT made a motion to adjourn, seconded by RC. Motion carried 2-0.

Randy Cole	Pam Jamniczky	Rebecca Thorn
President	Vice-President	

Minutes reviewed by:
Kristinia L. Hammack, Auditor
Minutes prepared by:
Leisa M. Ecker, Deputy Auditor