

Minutes
Penn Township Advisory Board Meeting
St. Joseph County Indiana
Penn Township Trustee's Office
210 E Russ Ave, Mishawaka, IN 46545

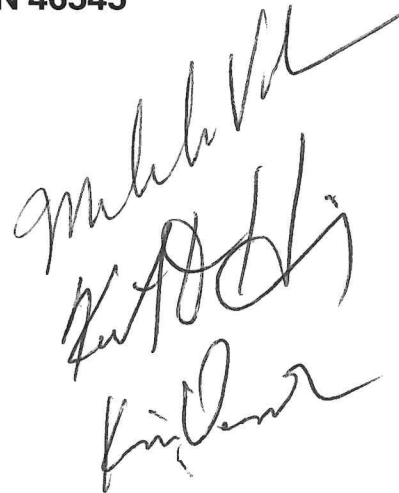
January 6, 2026

In attendance:

Kent Hizer – Board President
Mark Voelker-Board Member
Kris Verash – Board Member
Doris Portolese- Trustee
Chief Gerndt – Fire Chief

Members of the public in attendance:

Nancy Duncan
Greg Deardruff



5:30 pm- Pledge of Allegiance

Call to Order: Doris Portolese

New Business for Penn Township Board:

- Due to State Law – the first meeting of the year must be held on 1st Tuesday in January. This is why the normal Monday meeting is today on Tuesday.
- Election of officers for 2026: Kris Verash nominated Kent Hizer for Board President, Mark Voelker second, Unanimous vote to approve Kent.
- Kris Verash nominated Mark Voelker for secretary, Kent Hizer second, unanimous vote to approve Mark.
- Meeting turned over to Kent -

Annual Board of Finance Investment Report: Presented by Aaron Finley (Cender & Dalton)

- This is an annual report which is required by Indiana. There will be a final report available once the December figures are reconciled.
- Penn Township finished 2025 with over \$790K more money than January 1, 2025. This is a favorable position as there could be potential income changes for 2026 due to state SB1 law. Page 1 shows interest earned by year for last 10 years. There was a slight increase in interest earned 2026 but in line with last 3 years. According to Dorris, there was significant increase in earned interest occurred when Township changed from PNC to Interra Credit Union. Mark asked how this money is invested – Doris responded that money is in 2 money market account and 1 operating account. Money is invested at least at prime interest rates.
- The last 2 pages shows 2026 expectations for property taxes levied and schedule of tax rates by various townships. Aaron states that for 2026 – Penn township should continue to see increase in revenue since the assessed value of property in Penn Township is still increasing. Not every township will see increases for 2026.
- Kent praised Doris on her money management, being very frugal, and always looking for ways to move money into savings. Aaron also praised Doris in balancing township services with making sure township has money and the funds for the future. Mark asked for explanation the tax schedule – Top part is Penn Township specific and what we control. There are also 5 different zones in Penn Township which has additional tax rates that apply. Mark also asked for explanation for the Historical Net Assessed Valuations – this is the total value of Penn township property, broken into Real Estate, Utilities, and personal property for a total of over \$2.6 billion.
- With SB1 tax law, the personal property Assessed Valuation could change the most as depreciation rules have become more favorable. Aaron also expects more guidance from the state as this new law is implemented and he expect future changes as things are modified or tweaked.
- Nancy Duncan asked what Utilities property is: Arron explained any utilities on the property for waste, water, electric all has value which is identified. It's not included in real estate value, but overall township value. Doris quickly totaled the number of parcels in unincorporated Penn Township to be 4,792 parcels. Aaron left meeting to head back to Indy.

- Approval of December 1, 2025 Board Meeting minutes – Kent Hizer motioned for approval of minutes – Mark Voelker seconded / All approved.
- Doris presented resolution 2026-01 Annual Nepotism in Employment Certification that by state law is required to be signed by all board members. This confirm that Board Members meet the employment agreement.
- Doris presented resolution 2026-02 Annual Nepotism in Contracting Certification related to suppliers which is also required by state law and each Board member needs to sign. These resolutions will be place on Penn Township website for review.
- Kent provided an overview of these Nepotism certifications for the public by reading the highlights of these resolutions. Kent made motion to approve Resolution 2026-01 and 2026-02 Kris Verash second this. All voted to approve and signed forms.

Old Business: Kent Hizer provided an update on the status of the Fire Territory.

- February of 2025 Clay Township came to Penn Township to see what interest there would be in joining forces forming a single Fire Territory. This was in response to the salary pressures both townships were having in paying and retaining firefighters. The Indiana law places caps on township budget. This hinders our ability to increase pay without increasing tax levies to meet this salary pressure.
- With the possibility of making this new fire territory, last year Penn township raised our compensation to our firefighters. This change in pay has stopped the turnover within the fire department. However, by doing this the Township is spending money that is not covered by tax levies. Tax levies can be changed or re-set if you expand a fire territory which would cover the changes in salaries.
- In 2025, Penn Township entered into agreements, and signed letters of understanding with 7 entities. Osceola, Roseland, Indian Village, Clay, Harris, German, and Penn townships. To make this territory happen, each entity needs to have 3 public hearings by the end of March and be approve by township boards. The goal is to have the territory operational January 2027.
- Doris and Kent have been involved with many meetings since February 2025, with positive indications and progress being made.
- There are 3 things that are important to get this launched. 1) name of the territory, 2) determine the providing unit, 3) determine the makeup and voting structure of the executive territory board. Finding consensus for item 2 and 3, is challenging.
- The meeting on January 5, 2026 revealed problems on item 2 & 3. To keep things moving forward, a follow up meeting is scheduled for January 12th. Hopefully progress can be made on item 2 & 3 and satisfy various Indiana Codes. However, any delay could hinder the ability to have public meetings in time by for the end of March approval.
- The goal for Penn Township is to ensure that we continue to provide excellent fire service at the same tax rate as we currently do. Penn is one of the bottom three taxing entities within St. Joseph County, even with building a new fire station, and developing a fully funded full time fire department. Keeping this lower level of tax levy is important for the residents of Penn township.
- Kent & Dorris feels that for us to continue to provide proper fire coverage while still keep tax levies low and stable, Penn Township needs to ensure proper controls are in place. Since each of the 7 entities are required to have board membership. How to divide the controls and board membership is difficult since the 7 entities all are different in size, assessed value, and current services being offered.
- At this time, it looks like meeting the time schedule to implement a new fire territory by 2027 could be in jeopardy. Hopefully something can be finalized within the next 2 weeks to give us a chance to meet the goals.
- Good news is that Penn Township can financially support another year as an independent fire department.
- Nancy Duncan asked why 7 entities – Kent informed that Penn Township consists of Penn and Osceola, while Clay Township consist of the remaining 5 entities.
- Kent is most concerned about who will be developing the budget for the new territory. Again, the concern is for spending controls. Both Clay and Penn are capable to “operate” the new territory. The concern is proper executive controls and then finding efficiencies within the new territory to lower costs.
- Chief Gerndt sees no negative in joining forces with Clay Fire Department as long as there are proper controls in place. Make sure we are doing this right. If it takes another year – that’s fine.

Chief Gerndt Report:

- Chief Gerndt submitted call volume report: 210 incidents, 1 fire, 139 rescue & Emergency medical services, 38 good intent calls. Well within a normal month. The 1 fire happened during Chief Snyder funeral. Other territories handled the call.
- The Department had 3 people finished their probationary year. Phil Keys Battalion Chief passed National Registry of Paramedics. Hanna Estes -parttime firefighter / paramedic completed her bachelor degree in fire science.
- The overall support by the firefighters' memorial team did a fantastic job of making Chief Snyder's a very memorable event.
- Chief Gerndt will be sending a special thankyou note to key participants for Chief Snyder's funeral. The Department made a special memorial challenge coins which will be given to everyone that helped with the funeral and family members. The remaining coins (about 100) will sell at \$20/each which will cover the cost of making the coins, plus a donation of \$1000 to the Snyder family for funeral costs.
- Chief Gerndt will be implementing an annual John Snyder Leadership and Service award to an outstanding firefighter. The first award will be given at this weekend Christmas party event.
- Chief Gerndt thanked Dorris and the Board for continued support of the Penn Township Fire Department.

Trustee's Report:

- Accounts will be balanced by end of week.

Good of the Township:

- No comments

Call for adjournment: 6:10 PM

Hizer made a motion to adjourn.

Voelker second.

Unanimous vote to adjourn.

Next Meeting: January meeting is Monday February 2nd – 5:30 PM at Trustee's office.