



ST. JOSEPH COUNTY BULLETIN AUGUST 2025

<https://www.sjcindiana.gov/agendacenter>

Hello MAD members, this Bulletin gives thumbnail sketches of some of the major (and a few minor) actions of our county government in August. Our County Council is the legislative branch of county government, and the Board of Commissioners is the executive. The MAD Oversight Committee tries to monitor the public hearings of both of those branches, but we also have observers attending Board of Health, SJC Public Library Board, and the South Bend Community School Corp. We had members observe the Area Plan Commission meeting this month because of the Solar Energy/Property Value ordinance. We hope to add this commission and other boards and commissions to our oversight practice, and would gratefully welcome assistance with these. An observation that has come up repeatedly this month is the role oversight might play in exposing and remedying the current lack of accountability we witness in the actions of county government offices. You will see three specific examples in the Board of Commissioners section.

County Council

Public hearings are the 2nd Tuesday of the month in the County City Building, 4th Floor Council Chambers and via zoom:

View the video:[August video](#)

ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

While stopping short of replacing affirmative action and minority language, Dan Schaetzle joined the 4 Democratic Councilors in proposing a revised tax abatement ordinance which includes Civil Rights language. This new abatement would mean that our County would require any business requesting a tax abatement to abide by national laws. This is a minimum expectation. See item #5 below:

(5) The petitioner, as well as their contractors and subcontractors, has submitted as part of their application an equal employment opportunity policy which complies with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and as amended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972.

The full ordinance change can be found here: [Community First Ordinance](#)

A public hearing will be held on this ordinance at the September County Council meeting **September 9 beginning at 6:00 pm**. As a reminder, members of the public are allowed up to three minutes to speak on any bill on the agenda. They may also speak for up to three minutes at the end of a meeting during Privilege of the Floor. These remarks cannot be on agenda items.

Area Planning Commission

ON SOLAR:

On August 19, the Area Plan Commission met to vote on the amended solar ordinance. Accountability was glaringly absent as they did NOT ALLOW a public hearing, claiming it was not required. Statements made by APC members were not factual and were misleading.

Highlights of remarks:

- Eugene Matzat stated there are 72 counties in Indiana with this ordinance; this is patently false. There are 4 or 6 counties who have implemented property value guarantees for large scale solar installations. There are no installations in those counties as a result.
- Derek Dieter expressed concern about the logistics regarding getting property assessments; what happens if your property value increases? Do you pay the solar company?
- Eugene Matzat stated incorrectly that we don't know enough about solar farms since it's a new technology. (It's been with us since the 1950s.
- DJ Tavernier argued that he spoke to pro-solar advocates and anti-solar advocates who disagreed; so how could you know what's true?
- Molly Hannon said solar farms should not be placed on agricultural land
- Adam DeVon was the only no vote citing concerns that this is a slippery slope and the Council already has the power with their "special use" permits.

Of note: much was made of the number of emails sent; 44 in favor and 39 opposed and mention was made about townships and locations. Not one rationale was mentioned, simply numbers. Obviously there was no consideration of the tiny detail that the majority of the arguments in favor were based on misinformation.

Also of note: All members of this commission are appointed, and show no sense of obligation to the public welfare.

Results: The APC vote was 7 in favor and 1 against; the room applauded; two solar farms will be exempt because they were granted special use permits prior to this

ordinance. However, any further solar development on agricultural land will stop. We are at the mercy of fossil fuels for electricity.

Board of Commissioners:

The Commissioners meet weekly on Tuesdays

View the videos:

[Tuesday, August 5, 2025](#)

[Tuesday, August 12, 2025](#)

[Tuesday, August 19, 2025](#)

Tuesday, August 26, 2025: This video has not been posted as of August 30. When it is released, you'll be able to find it under BoC, [here](#).

Review of the agenda and appended documents brought home to me the total lack of ACCOUNTABILITY that seems pervasive throughout our county government offices. Here are three examples.

1. No one on oversight was able to be present at the meeting on Tuesday, August 26, because they changed the time of their meeting from 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. without prior announcement. We would like to suggest that ALL county public hearings should be locked in to their announced dates and times 48 hours before the scheduled meeting.
2. The county Auditor's Office requested funds from the BoC to replace "chairs ... starting to decline in wear and tear." They were requesting 18 new, bonded leather, high back, luxury executive chairs at an average price of \$320 each. Is it good stewardship of county taxpayers' money to provide everyone in the auditor's office bonded leather, high-backed executive chairs? Are there 18 staff members in the Auditor's Office? The staff directory shows only four. It may seem a minor point, but —is it?
3. In the public comments section of a BoC meeting, a citizen asked about the board's reappointment of a member of a committee, noting that the opening had not been published. Mr. Baxmeyer explained that the Board routinely automatically reappoints members to Boards and Commissions if they wish to continue. We view this as preposterous overreach and disregard to public participation in government. All appointed seats on county boards, commissions, and councils should be published when an appointment nears its conclusion, and a good faith effort to consider interested applicants should be implemented.

One additional concern from the 8/26 meeting was an impossibly vague Memorandum of Understanding with Mishawaka pertaining to provision of utilities for Microsoft's planned data center as well as a section of Granger with disintegrating septic systems. With the MOU signed, the Board will be able to agree to whatever

specifications arise with the umbrella statement that this is just an update to an already approved MOU.

SJC Public Library Board: Monthly, 4th Monday

Next meeting: 9/29/25, 4:15 pm in the Beutter Kernan Hall, 305 S. Michigan St, SB 46601

The main event of the 8/25/2025 meeting was unanimously passing a resolution crafted by outside counsel Richard A Nussbaum II in consultation with Sylvia Watson, General Counsel for the Indiana State Library. This resolution cited facts, prior case law, and a timeline. It states that Ruth Warren WAS validly appointed to the Library Board, pursuant to State Law, and therefore the appointment of Sniadecki by Jeanette McCullough is void and of no legal effect.

Mr. Sniadecki, during public comments, asked to be seated on the Board anyway. He went over his 3 minutes and had to be escorted back to his seat by a security guard.

Four other people commented, all supported Warren. This contentious dispute with the South Bend School Board to try to replace Ruth Warren with William Sniadecki on the Library Board was clarified but perhaps not resolved, as Mr. Sniadecki has threatened a lawsuit.

Of note is that the SBCPL's Purchasing Policy update was passed by the Board at this meeting. It includes using contractors of companies who are owned or employ the disadvantaged, minorities, women, and veterans. What a contrast to the changed tax abatement contracting language of the County Council!!

SJC Board of Health: Monthly, 3rd Wednesday at 4:30

Next meeting: 9/17/25, 4:30, 4th Floor Council Chambers

Money for public health was slashed by our Indiana General Assembly by 73%, from \$150M to \$40M yearly for the next 2 years. We continue to see the effects of decreased funding for public health. Examples: There is only one person currently credentialed to handle mental health emergencies. The fees for nearly everything in the department have been increased, now in line with a comparison with 4 other counties. The Department has had to reduce staff by 10.5 positions.

Food inspections have been reduced by the current budget. There are only 6 inspectors, an assistant director, and the department director to do all inspections. There is no feasible way to inspect unlicensed businesses, for example. BTW, Port-a-Pit Chicken IS licensed, so kids doing fundraisers at gas stations likely are serving safe food. There will be inspections of some vendors at only 3 Notre Dame football games, though.

An ongoing issue is that there are only 7 Board of Health members. For a county our size, 9 members are mandated by state law. Why is our board short two members? Mayor Wood and Mayor Mueller each must submit a list of 3 candidates to the Board of Commissioners, from which the BOC must choose one from each list. Is the holdup with the mayors or the BoC?

Who Else? (Other local grassroots organizations with complementary interests and objectives)

We Make Indiana:

Organization of “faith communities” with the goal of “making Indiana more safe, healthy, and whole.”

Promoting a presentation by Luke Bretherton, University of Oxford, on Democracy. Sponsored by UND’s Institute for Social Concerns, Thursday, September 4, 5:30 p.m. Geddes Hall, Andrews Auditorium.

Concerned Voices of SJC

Next gathering on Thursday, September 4th from 5:30 to 7:30pm at the Teamsters Union Hall #364, 2405 Edison Road, South Bend. The speaker is former U.S. Senator and Ambassador to the Vatican, Joe Donnelly. The conversation will focus on “How to Stand Up for our County, State and Country.

Receive MAD emails

Write to Cynthia Heckman-Davis if you would be willing to attend a county board, commission or committee hearing. Let her know if you have a particular interest in a particular group: checkmandavis@gmail.com