

Message from the Clerk

Citizens of Starke County,

Since the Vote Center concept became a reality in Indiana elections through Pilot Vote Centers in 2007 and subsequent legislation in 2011 allowing any county to become a Vote Center County, leaders in Starke County have been carefully observing its effects on voter, county budgets and on the election process.

The following pages lay out our plan to make Vote Centers a reality in Starke County. This concept gives all registered voters in the county the opportunity to cast their ballot at any vote Center within the county rather than being restricted to one precinct-based location. In addition to making it easier for voters on Election Day, Vote Centers also call for increased early voting opportunities at "satellite vote centers," which will be open prior to Election Day.

Leading up to each election the most common questions we hear address the concern of where an individual's polling place is and what are the options if the voter can't make it to their polling place by the 6p.m., end of voting on election Day. Vote Centers address the common voter concerns by broadening the voter's ability to cast their ballot.

Another important part of the concept is the financial impact it will have on Starke County. Having to staff fewer locations and reduce the amount of support needed on Election Day will help the county to realize a cost savings, as well as, hopefully shortening wait times at the polls for voters.

By moving to Vote Centers, voter convenience is improved; election administration is streamlined and made simpler and improves the county's long-term fiscal stance for elections. Vote Centers also represent a major step forward into the ever-changing landscape of technology by bringing elections into the 21st Century.

I want to thank all the wonderful people who have provided feedback at our meetings to this point and worked so hard, and in a bipartisan manner, to move the county toward Vote Centers. A thank you also goes out to all the locations that have been willing to allow us to utilize their facilities as Vote Centers in the upcoming elections as we are forever grateful.

Very Truly Yours,

Bernadette M. Manuel
Starke County Clerk
Election Board Secretary

INTRODUCTION

Upon recommendations from several elected officials Starke County began researching Vote Centers. The convenience to the Starke County voters is the number one reason to make this change. A Major motivation for the change is to encourage the streamlined abilities of the poll workers at the Vote Centers on Election Day. In precinct-based voting, each polling place had one paper poll list that included only the registered voters for that specific precinct. So when a voter came in to check in to vote, the Poll clerk had to flip through the poll list to find the correct name, and if that voter's name was not on the list, a call had to be made to the Starke County Clerk's Office. Due to the amount of calls coming in from the 21 precincts asking where a specific voter was to cast their ballot, wait times were created in the attempt to allow a single person to vote. Through the utilization of Vote Centers and Electronic Pollbooks, two teams of Poll Clerks will have the entire list of registered voters in an easy-to-handle tablet, which will have the capability of immediately bringing up a voter's profile through the scanning of their state-issued ID. Along with having additional voting machines at each location, wait times should be drastically reduced by allowing more voters to check-in swiftly and efficiently.

In addition, the board sought to enhance the accessibility of voting locations in our fast-paced society in which busy schedules may hamper the ability of some voters to make it to their precinct polling location. Through Vote Centers, any registered voter may cast a ballot at any of the available facilities, rather than being locked into just their one precinct location. This allows on-the-go voters to make casting a ballot part of their daily schedule, rather than have to work things around to try and find time to vote, which will lead to increased turnout percentages for each election.

WHAT IS A VOTE CENTER

Vote Centers are a replacement of traditional Election Day polling precincts. Any registered voter can choose to vote at a vote center located anywhere in the county and receive their correct precinct ballot on Election Day. Vote Centers will eliminate a common issue in Starke County regarding voter confusion. Each election numerous voters become frustrated when they realize they are not at the correct precinct in order to vote. In many cases, these voters are not able to make it to the correct precinct before the polls close. Under the vote center method, there is no wrong place to vote.

According to Indiana Code (I.C. 3-11-18.1-6), a county is required to have 1 (one) vote center for every 10,000 active voters. For every fraction of 10,000 active voters, a county is required to have an additional vote center. Starke County currently has 11,997 active voters, so our county would need at least 2 centers.

After Careful examination of voter turnout in the last several elections cycles, it was determined that 7 strategically placed vote center locations would be needed to successfully implement the vote center method in the Starke County mid-term and presidential elections. In municipal elections there will be 3 Election Day vote centers in the Starke County Hamlet (if needed), Knox (if needed), and North Judson (if needed). Parking, internet, handicap accessibility, and access to main roadways were all factors in the selection of vote center locations.

Unlike having 2-3 voting machines at each precinct location, each vote center would have between 4-11 voting machines that securely hold all 21 precinct ballots in the county. Each vote center would also have two electronic poll books (ePoll books) that would eliminate the paper poll books.

The electronic poll books are securely linked by internet connectivity to other vote center locations that would prevent a voter from being able to vote twice. In addition, the Starke County Election Board and Voter Registration / Election staff will have the ability to monitor electronic poll books at each location by means of a securely linked connection. The voting machines will function, as they have in the past, as stand-alone units. There will be no internet connection to the voting machines. A positive feature of the electronic poll book is that human error is dramatically reduced as the driver's license, identification card or passport can be scanned in order to quickly access the correct voter information.

HOW WILL VOTE CENTERS AFFECT EARLY VOTING

Mid-Term and Presidential

A crucial component to the success of vote centers is the satellite absentee voting process. The Starke County Courthouse will still accommodate early voting 28 days prior to the election. In Addition, voters will have the opportunity to cast their ballots on the two (2) Thursdays 12 noon to 6 p.m., two (2) Fridays 12 noon to 5 p.m., and two (2) Saturdays 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. prior to the election at the following locations North Judson Wayne Township Public Library, and in Koontz Lake Property Owners Building. These requirements meet Indiana Code I.C. 3-11-10-26.3 and I.C 3-11-18.1-4 (16)

Municipal Elections:

In the municipal election, there could be up to three vote center satellite locations in addition to the Starke County Courthouse to accommodate early voters. Per Indiana Code, voting will take place at the courthouse 28 days prior to the election.

THE PROCESS

Starting Out:

The Starke County Commissioners on the request of the Starke County Council signed a resolution to have the Starke County Election Board to begin the process of making the change to Vote Centers. Three (3) informational meetings were conducted in September and October 2019 in an attempt to gauge public interest into the matter. The feedback received from these meetings, Starke County Council and Commissioner at the joint meeting, and informal discussions with citizens of the community.

Here and Now

A draft of this plan must be presented at one public meeting before a 30-day public comment period opens, at the end of which the Starke County Election Board may amend the plan prior to final approval, which must be unanimous. The board has conducted 3 meetings, one in Knox, Washington Township, and North Judson, in an attempt to inform as many people as possible about the plan before public comment begins.

The Future:

If and when the Vote Center Plan is unanimously approved, it must be submitted to the Indiana Election Division for its approval prior to the implementation process beginning. Once that has been completed, the election Board may proceed in the process of setting up the vote Centers and purchasing needed equipment.

One major factor in the process is that it can be amended at any time, but all amendments must also gain unanimous approval. This is yet another beneficial aspect of Vote Centers as can be modified as many times as needed in order to best fit the needs of the voters of Starke County, even down to adjusting how many voting machines are to be used at a specific location to accommodate a Vote Center that is attracting the most voters.

Also, if at any point the Board deems the Vote Center model is not successful for Starke County, they may vote to revert to precinct-based voting. Again, this vote must be unanimous.

Starke County Vote Center Plan

November 18, 2019

VOTER STATISTICS AND PRECINCTS

According to the 2010 Census, Starke County has a total population of 23,363 and is divided into 21 precincts. As of November 13, 2019, the number of registered voters in Starke County is 14,286 with 2,289 of those voters with a current status of "Inactive", with 0 "Pending" and 0 "Incomplete" making the number of active voters at 11,997. The upcoming elections will take place May 5, 2020 and November 3, 2020. No voter should feel disenfranchised because of this change as voting by absentee, mail, or travel board are still available options. Moving to Vote Centers will expand the voter's capabilities by not limiting them to a single polling location on a certain day. This plan will make voting more convenient and should increase our turnout percentages.

VOTE CENTER AND SATELLITE VOTE LOCATIONS

Starke County will have seven (7) Vote Centers open for the upcoming elections. Indiana requires one Vote Center per 10,000 active voters, but the Starke County Election Board plans to provide one Vote Center per roughly 1,714 voters. Absentee voting will begin as required by state statute, approximately four (4) weeks prior to the election at the Starke County Clerk's Office, located on the second floor of the Starke County Courthouse. In addition, Two (2) satellite absentee voting offices will be open on two (2) Thursdays, two (2) Fridays, and two (2) Saturdays before Election Day. The location of the satellite absentee offices will be tentatively at the Knootz Lake Property Owners building and North Judson Wayne Township Public Library on the other Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

Absentee application will also be accepted for mail ballots until April 27, 2020, and noon May 4th 2020, for travel board for the 2020 Primary Election. Should a voter miss the deadline for these voting options, they will still have the opportunity to vote in person at one of the seven (7) Vote Centers on Election Day. The centers will be open on Election Day from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., as required by law. This will give every voter the opportunity to exercise their right to vote as all ballot styles and variations will be available on every voting machine at every Vote Center. It is the hopes of the Starke County Election Board that voters will become accustomed to the idea of the Vote Centers and will utilize them in an efficient and timely manner.

VOTE CENTER FLOW CHART, POLL WORKERS, AND PROCEDURES

Each vote center and satellite office will be connected to all other vote centers or satellite vote centers, as well as the Starke County Clerk's office in the Courthouse via electronic poll books connected via secured internet lines. At least two electronic poll book terminals will be available at each location.

Each Vote Center will be staffed with a precinct election board consisting of:

Supervisor / Inspector: Political party that won the highest number of votes for the last election of the Secretary of State will fill this position.

Facilitators / Judges- Sheriffs: equal split from each major political party

Poll Clerks: equal split from each major political party.

The number of precinct election board workers will be set by the amount of voters anticipated and the number of voting machines placed in that particular Vote Center

Each satellite voting location will be staffed by an absentee board in the following manner:

The absentee board will consist of three (3) to five (5) election workers from each major political party. There will be two voting machines and two ePollbooks at each location.

The Inspector will also serve as a greeter and verify that each voter has his/her government issued ID. Voters will proceed to a team of Poll Clerks who will access the individual's voter profile via an Electronic Pollbook (ePollbook) equipped with a scanner to read the voter's ID card. The Poll Clerks will also have the ability to type in the voter's name to access the correct profile. Once the voter's address has been verified/updated through the ePollbooks, as required by state statute, a label will then be printed and given to the Judge. The Judge will receive the printed label from the clerk and will proceed to the MicroVote Infinity Voting Machine with the voter. The printed label will indicate which ballot the voter is to receive. The Judge will then activate the Microvote Infinity voting machine and select the appropriate precinct ballot in order to verify it with the voter. The voter will then proceed with voting on the MicroVote Infinity Voting machine in the same manner as always. The Judge will keep the printed label in a small envelope which will serve as a hard copy documentation (the poll list) that the voter has voted in addition to the electronic information.

DATES, LOCATIONS, AND HOURS OF OPERATION

The dates, locations, and hours for Election Day voting will be posted in the local newspapers two (2) consecutive weeks prior to voting. Also, a mass mailing of new Voter Registration acknowledgements will be sent out to all registered voters in Starke County to notify them of the various Vote Centers open on Election Day. In addition, all previous polling locations not being utilized as Vote Centers will be posted with signs indicating where the Vote Centers are available.

The available Vote Center locations are as follows:

Open Election Day (6 a.m. – 6 p.m.)

- Koontz Lake Property Owners Building
- Hamlet Fire James R Hardesty Community Building
- Washington Township Community Building
- Knox Community Center - *Nancy*
- North Judson Wayne Township Fire Department
- San Pierre Fire Department
- Bass Lake California Township Fire Department

Open Starting 28 days prior to Election Day

- Starke County Clerk's Office
 - 8:30 a.m. to noon, and 1 – 4 p.m. Monday through Friday
 - 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. Saturday April 25, and May 2, 2020
 - 8:30 a.m. to noon Monday May 4, 2020 (day prior to Election Day)

Satellite Absentee Voting Offices

- Koontz Lake Property Owners building
 - Thursday 12 (noon) to 6 p.m.,
 - Friday 12 (noon) to 5 p.m.,
 - Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- North Judson Wayne Township Library
 - Thursday 12 (noon) to 6 p.m.,
 - Friday 12 (noon) to 5 p.m.,
 - Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Note: One satellite office will be open Thursday April 23, Friday April 24, and Saturday, April 25, 2020, while the other will be open Thursday April 30th, Friday May 1st, Saturday, May 2, 2020, depending on availability of the location, which will be determined in early 2020.

EQUIPMENT / TECHNOLOGY

Voting Machine: Starke County will continue to use the MicroVote Infinity Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) for Absentee In-Person and Election Day voting. Each of the Infinity panels will be programmed and publicly tested by the Starke County Election Board and will include all precinct ballots. Sample paper ballots will also be provided to the Inspector of each Vote Center in a three-ring binder to allow voters to view their ballot prior to casting their vote. In addition, those voting by mail and travel board will continue to use Optical Scan Ballots, which are completed and placed in secured sealed envelopes, which are kept in locked ballot boxes until tabulation of results begins on Election Day. As always, properly secured Optical Scan Ballots and provisional ballots will be delivered to each Vote Center as part of the kit provided to the inspectors at each location.

ePollbooks: Starke County Election Board has chosen Knowink LLC as the ePollbooks vendor. The Apple iPad with wireless PollPad, Model iPad 16gb WI-FI, for the hardware and with software 2.0 version. Also included in the package is the charger, basic stand, stylus, and Star Micronics Bluetooth receipt printer and receipt paper. The annual software license and maintenance will begin with the current year with Knowink. Knowink yearly maintenance is comparable to the other vendors without any additional fees for each election. Starke County IT Department will set up all ePollbooks prior to Satellite and Election Day voting to make sure the Starke County Clerk's office is connected to each Vote Center site.

SECURITY PLAN

Voting machines and the ePollbooks are to be locked in the room that is being used at each Vote Center. A numbered zip-tie seal will be placed each night on the MicroVote Infinity voting machines. The vote seal will be cut the next morning by the Judges of opposite parties. All ePollbooks will only be accessible when a member of each party, enters their undisclosed password. The number of voters on the machines and the number of voters in the ePollbook will be checked and balanced each day.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

In the event of a power failure at each or one Vote Center, the voting machines and ePollbooks will be switched to battery backup. For obvious reasons, if the safety of voters and or poll-workers is ever at risk, the Starke County Security Plan will go into effect with instructions from the Starke County Clerk, Starke County Election Board, Starke County Emergency Management Agency, Starke County Sheriff, and the area Starke County Fire Departments.

The following narrative describes what would happen in case of an emergency during an election. The first responders to any emergency, either man-made or natural event, are local citizens. Poll-workers, volunteers, and police and fire personnel will be the first to

identify the problem. The next level of response will come from the Starke County Commissioners and the Starke County Clerk's office in cooperation with the local emergency management agency. If deemed necessary by the County Commissioners, the Office of the Secretary of State's Elections Division will be contacted for emergency assistance. In addition, any action taken either by the Office of the Governor or the Office of the Secretary of State may be taken in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General to ensure that interpretations of the laws are correct.

Five general situations exist in which decision-making may occur regarding the election process and activities in Starke County:

- Situation Normal: the status quo exists and the process moves forward according to normal laws and procedures.
- Isolated Emergencies: individual precincts or parts of the county experience disruption to the election process and local agencies respond accordingly.
- Regional Emergencies: an emergency involving Starke County and neighboring counties exists and a state-level response is required.
- Catastrophic Emergencies: inside Indiana a large disaster exists that diverts the resources and attention of the citizenry and a state level response in cooperation with the federal government is required.
- Catastrophic Emergencies: outside Indiana a large disaster exists in the United States that diverts the resources and attention to the citizens and federal-level response is required.

The Starke County Commissioners have worked closely with the local emergency management director, the county sheriff, and local police and fire stations to ensure Starke County is prepared for emergencies. In addition, the Starke County Commissioners will be in close communication with the County Clerk's office cell phone or land lines should any emergency occur surrounding the election process.

In this endeavor to be prepared for an emergency that could occur on or surrounding Election Day, Starke County takes the following steps prior to each Election Day:

- Review IC 3-11-8-3.2 which outline procedures for changing polling locations.
- Review the state's Quantity Purchasing Agreements (QPA) whereby Starke County may buy or lease emergency generators and other supplies.
- Contact is made with power companies to ensure all vote centers have power on Election Day.
- Electric company will have support staff in the field or by phone in the event of a disruption.
- In the event of a power failure at a Vote Center, the voting machine and ePollbooks will be switched automatically to battery backup.
- In the event that the internet is inaccessible at a Vote Center location, the eligibility of a voter will be ascertained from records maintained by the Starke County Voter Registration office via telephone/cell phone.

STARKE COUNTY PRECINCTS DATA

Starke County has 21 precincts: (California 1, California 2, Center 1, Center 2, Center 3, Center 4, Center 5, Center 6, Davis, Jackson, North Bend, Oregon 1, Oregon 2, Oregon 3, Railroad, Washington 1, Washington 2, Wayne 1, Wayne 2, Wayne 3, Wayne 4.

NOTE: Voters from every precinct may vote at any Vote Center location or satellite office location. Every ballot style for each precinct in Starke County will be available at each Vote Center and each satellite office location. Depending on the election, the number of ballot styles varies greatly. Therefore, this plan does not attempt to provide a specific number of ballot styles. The ballots for each precinct will be programmed into all voting machines.

ELECTION RESULTS

Starke County is a central count county and the election results will be tabulated in the Starke County Courthouse in the Election Room on Election Day. Absentee voting by mail and traveling board will use the Optical Scan Ballots, followed by DRE of satellite voting at the Vote Center and Courthouse. As Vote Centers close on Election Day and arrive back to the Courthouse, Votes will be tabulated on a first come first serve basis. Election results will be tabulated by precinct totals and released to the public in a timely matter.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Resolution of the County Election Board adopting the Vote Center Plan
- B. Resolution of the County Commissioner
- C. Resolution of the County Council
- D. Current Precincts, Total Voters, Total Active Voters, Total Inactive Voters
- E. Overview of Voting Locations
- F. Poll Workers
- G. Certification of ADA Compliance
- H. Resolution adopting Starke County as a Central County

Dated this _____ day of _____, 20_____

STARKE COUNTY ELECTION BOARD

By: _____
Marcia Bedrock, Republican Member Chair

By: _____
Harrison Fields, Democrat Member

By: _____
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