

Vermillion County Commissioners

Meeting Minutes

June 15, 2026

Commissioner's Courtroom, 2nd Floor, Courthouse

- I. Call to Order
- II. Pledge of Allegiance to The Flag
- III. Roll Call – Peebles Absent
- IV. Approval of Minutes from May 4th, 2026

Approval of Minutes from Executive Session May 11th, 2026

Dunavan Motion

Hess second

All in Favor, motion carries

- V. Approval of Claims from May 8, 15, 22, 29, June 2, 5, and 12, 2026

Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

All in favor, Motion Carries

- VI. Approval of Payroll April 8, 22, and June 5, 2026

Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

All in favor, motion carries

- VII. Public Comments:

Data Centers and Solar Development

A significant portion of public comments focused on concerns about potential data center development in Vermillion County and its relationship to proposed solar projects.

Public Concerns Raised

- Several residents expressed concern that recent solar approvals may be connected to future data center development.
- Speakers cited concerns about:
 - Water consumption and potential impacts on local aquifers.
 - Increased electrical demand and strain on the power grid.
 - Environmental impacts.
 - Fire protection capabilities for facilities using large battery systems or advanced electrical infrastructure.
 - Limited job creation relative to the scale of development.
 - Loss of local control through potential state legislation.
 - Privacy and surveillance concerns related to AI and data storage operations.

Requests from Residents

- Multiple residents requested that the county enact a ban on data centers.
- Speakers urged commissioners to prioritize local control and public input before approving any future projects.
- Several residents encouraged commissioners to conduct additional research and gather more information before making decisions.

Commissioner Responses

- Commissioners stated that no data center project has been approved.
- Any future proposal would be required to go through:
 - The Area Plan Commission (APC) review process.

- Public hearings.
 - Final consideration by the Board of Commissioners.
 - Commissioners emphasized the importance of public participation and local input in any future development decisions.
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2. Petition for Road Safety Improvements

Presentation by Sherlyn Towles

- Spoke on behalf of the family of Chase Bennett, who was killed in a February 2026 traffic accident.
- Presented approximately 2,500 petition signatures.
- Requested county support for:
 - Additional guardrails.
 - Additional rumble strips.
 - Re-evaluation of roadway safety on State Road 63/163 near Lyford.

Commissioner Action

- Commissioners indicated support for the request.
 - Agreed to prepare and send a letter to INDOT requesting a second review of the roadway and consideration of the proposed safety improvements.
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3. Solar and Battery Storage Projects

Engie North America Presentation

Representative Layne Ashton discussed two proposed projects:

- A 250-megawatt solar facility.
- An associated battery storage facility.

Key points presented:

- Estimated investment of approximately \$450 million.
 - Estimated long-term tax revenue of approximately \$85.3 million.
 - Approximately \$40.3 million projected to benefit local schools.
 - Request that commissioners delay action on proposed zoning amendments affecting battery storage projects.
 - Offer to provide additional information regarding lithium-ion battery safety and economic benefits.
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4. Newport Chemical Depot Reuse Authority Property Acquisition

Public Question

A resident asked about recently acquired property south of Bono that appears to be owned by the Newport Chemical Depot Reuse Authority.

Response

- Commissioners stated they were not aware of any connection between the property and a proposed data center.
- Suggested directing questions to representatives of the Reuse Authority.

- Noted that any future development proposal would still be subject to local review processes.

5. Debate on Solar Energy

Support for Solar Development

One resident argued:

- Solar energy generates significantly more usable transportation energy per acre than corn grown for ethanol.
- Solar projects can increase local tax revenue.
- Renewable energy development could help attract economic investment to the county.

Concerns About Restrictions

Another resident requested additional review before adoption of any ordinance that would remove solar and battery storage uses from county zoning regulations, citing long-term impacts on landowners and economic development opportunities.

6. Local Control and State Legislation

Residents discussed concerns regarding proposed state legislation that could limit local authority over development decisions.

Commissioners responded that:

- Counties have historically opposed efforts to reduce local control.
- Citizens should remain engaged with state legislators and participate in elections.

7. Environmental and Infrastructure Questions

Residents raised questions regarding:

- Environmental impact studies.
- Historical contamination concerns related to the Newport Chemical Depot.
- Wastewater treatment and discharge procedures at the Vermillion Rise site.
- Emergency response capabilities.
- Fire department preparedness for potential industrial or data center incidents.

Commissioners indicated that:

- Major development projects typically requires environmental review.
- Technical questions regarding wastewater operations should be directed to Vermillion Rise management and utility personnel.

VIII. Open Issues

IX. New Business

a. Flood Hazard Prevention Ordinance (2026-07)

Penny Carpenter presented an update to the county flood hazard prevention ordinance.

The update replaces the 2013 ordinance and is required periodically through state and federal floodplain management requirements.

Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

All in Favor, Motion Carried

b. Solar Power Plant Text Amendment (2026-09)

Carpenter presented a proposed text amendment to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

The amendment would:

- Remove solar power plants as a permitted or special-exception use.
- Maintain regulations for already-approved solar projects.
- Restrict future battery energy storage facilities from primarily using lithium-ion battery technology.

The Area Plan Commission stated the amendment is intended to pause new utility-scale solar projects while the county evaluates impacts from previously approved projects.

Solar projects could still seek approval through the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process, requiring review by the Area Plan Commission and County Commissioners.

Commissioners discussed public concerns regarding solar development, property rights, and land-use planning.

Commissioner Hess requested additional time for review and the presence of the full board before taking action.

The matter was tabled until the July commissioners meeting.

c. Alley Vacation Request (2026-08)

Roy Chaney requested the vacation of two alleys adjacent to his property.

Required notices and filings had been completed.

Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

All in Favor, Motion Carried

d. Architura Corporation Presentation

Michael Conly introduced his firm and requested the opportunity to continue discussions regarding future county building projects.

Conly highlighted the firm's previous work on county facilities and experience with projects located near data centers.

Commissioners requested additional information for future discussion.

e. Inee Mahan, Veteran Officer-Not Present

f. Nolan Mihail– Data Center Concerns

Nolan Mahail presented petitions containing more than 830 signatures concerning potential data center development.

Mahill requested stronger protections in county ordinances related to:

- Water consumption
- Energy use
- Noise
- Lighting
- Air quality Environmental safeguards

He expressed concerns regarding transparency and communication from the Vermillion Rise board.

Commissioners responded that they support evaluating and implementing appropriate protections if a data center proposal is submitted.

g. Child Adult Resource Services (CARS)

Jeff Uhey appeared before the commissioners regarding the organization's annual county appropriation.

The funding supports transportation and other services for individuals with disabilities that are not covered by Medicaid waiver funding.

Commissioners noted the appropriation had already been approved and requested the presentation for informational purposes.

h. Rick Anderson with Veregy

- Reviewed results of a countywide energy assessment initiative previously authorized by the Commissioners.
- Discussed increasing utility costs, noting electric rates have risen approximately 66% over the past decade.
- Explained Indiana's Guaranteed Savings legislation (IC 36-1-12.5), which allows energy-saving projects through an alternative procurement process with guaranteed costs and no change orders.
- Highlighted federal incentives available through the Inflation Reduction Act, including potential reimbursement of 30–40% of eligible solar, geothermal, and battery investments.
- Proposed energy conservation measures for county facilities, including:
 - LED lighting upgrades
 - Window and building envelope improvements
 - HVAC replacements and controls
 - Solar photovoltaic systems at the jail
 - Geothermal systems for county facilities
- Estimated approximately 75% reduction in electric costs at the jail through solar installation.
- Presented a projected payback period of approximately 12 years.
- Shared examples of successful projects completed in other Indiana counties and institutions.
- Commissioners discussed potential solar panel locations and agreed to review the proposal further before future consideration.

i. Vermillion RISE Board Vacancy

- Announced the resignation of Eddie Thompson from the Vermillion RISE Board.
- Opened a 30-day application period to fill the vacancy.
- Interested applicants were directed to submit applications through the county website under the Newport Chemical Depot Reuse Authority appointment listing.

j. Engagement Letter

- Approved an engagement letter for legal services related to:
 - Duke Energy Economic Development agreements
 - Apex Solar agreements

Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

All in Favor, Motion Carried

k. Bridge 71 Bid Documents

Approved release of bid documents for repairs and improvements to Bridge 71 near the Eugene Covered Bridge area.

Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

All in Favor, Motion Carried

l. Baker Tilly Financial Planning Agreements

Approved agreements with Baker Tilly to assist the county with long-term financial planning and analysis related to anticipated impacts from Senate Bill 1.

Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

All in Favor, Motion Carried

m. Jerrell Consulting Agreement

- Approved consulting agreement with Kristy Jerrell to pursue an IOCRA public safety grant.
- Project aims to establish an ambulance station at Vermillion RISE to improve emergency service coverage.

Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

All in Favor, Motion Carried

Architectural Services Agreement

- Approved an agreement with Architecture Plus to provide design, bidding, and project oversight services for the proposed ambulance station project.

Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

All in Favor, Motion Carried

n. Economic Development Agreement

- Economic Development Agreement
- Road Use Agreement

- Decommissioning Agreement

These items were tabled until the next meeting to allow participation of Peebles

k. McLain's Subdivision Housing Development

- Discussed county-owned lots received through a prior economic development agreement.
- Authorized issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking local or regional builders interested in constructing homes on the lots.

X. Adjourn

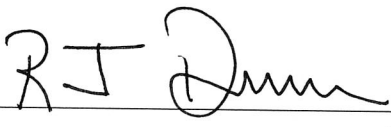
Hess Motion

Dunavan Second

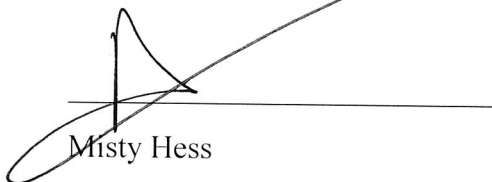
All in Favor, Motion Carried

AYE:

NYE:



RJ Dunavan



Misty Hess

ATTEST:



Ron Dunavan,

