

FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD SPECIAL MEETING AT

6:00 PM

MINUTES OF MEETING

Apr 6, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

The Special Meeting of the County Board, was called to order at 6:14 p.m. by Chairman Neil Hargis. This meeting was held in the Franklin County Courthouse, County Board Room 133, 100 Public Square, Benton, Illinois.

ROLL CALL

Secretary, Paris Dunk, called the roll. Members in attendance were Angela Evans, John Gossett, J. Larry Miller, Ray Minor, Curtis Overton, Kevin Weston, Brad Wilson, and Neil Hargis. Dave Bartoni was absent.

Also in attendance were Kyle Bacon, County Sheriff; Matt Barnett, County Engineer; Amanda Kink, County Board Office Manager; Marty Leffler, County Coroner; Jim Muir, Circuit Clerk; Steve Vercellino, County Treasurer; as well as other interested parties.

PLEDGE

Chairman Neil Hargis leads everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Neil Hargis asked if there is anyone who wants to make a public comment?

Liam Mungovan, Superintendent of the Veterans Assistance Commission of Franklin County read from a prepared statement. The statement was read as follows.

Liam Mungovan, Veterans Assistance Superintendent:
"Members of the Board, The Veterans Assistance Commission formally determined its necessary funding for the FY2026, transmitted that Determination to the Board, and presented it during the budget process.

The Official record reflects no documented evaluation of that determination prior to final approval, and no response to subsequent follow-up.

For that reason, I am submitting the following statement for the record.

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Franklin County formally determined, By Resolution, that \$156,600 is just and necessary to meet its statutory obligations under Illinois Military Veterans Assistance Act. This determination was adopted on September 9, 2025, and transmitted to the County Board on September 30, 2025.

The Commission's requested budget was subsequently presented during the November 17, 2025 Finance Committee meeting, where the VAC levy was specifically listed as an agenda item. The County therefore had both formal notice and direct presentation of the Commissions determination prior to final action.

Despite this, the December 15, 2025 meeting minutes reflect that the VAC levy was approved at \$126,000 without discussion of the Commissions submitted determination, without analysis of need, and without reference to the statutory framework. The only substantive exchange indicates the amount was simply "left the same"

Following adoption of the levy, the Commission again contacted the County Board on February 27, 2026, formally requesting alignment of funding through a supplemental appropriation and reiterating the basis for its determination. The record does not reflect any response, analysis, or action taken in connection with that request.

Further, there appears to be no recorded minutes, findings, or recommendations from the November 17 committee meeting reflecting consideration of the VAC presentation.

The record therefore reflects that the Commissions determination was:

- Formally adopted,
- Timely transmitted
- Directly presented
- And reaffirmed following final action

Yet is not documented as having been meaningfully considered at any stage of the process.

Compounding this, the \$126,000 figure had previously been identified during budget discussions as a placeholder amount. The record does not reflect any process by which that placeholder was evaluated against the Commission's formal determination before being adopted as final.

Since that time, the Commission has reaffirmed its determination through Resolution 2026-3, again establishing that \$156,000 is necessary to meet its statutory obligations. The Commissions position has remained consistent throughout.

This is not a discretionary funding matter. The statute establishes the Commissions authority to determine the funding necessary to meet its statutory obligations. A process in which that determination is received, presented, reaffirmed, and then reduced without documented evaluation raises serious concerns as to whether the statutory framework was applied at all.

Accordingly, I am requesting clarification on the following:

- What record exists reflecting consideration of the VAC presentation at the November 17, 2025 committee meeting?
- What process was used to evaluate the Commissions September 30, 2025 submission?
- What consideration, if any, was given to the Commissions February 27, 2026 supplemental request?

- What analysis supports the conclusion that \$126,000 satisfies the Commissions necessary expenses?
- What legal authority supports adopting a placeholder figure in place of a formally determined and submitted amount without documented review?

At present, the official record reflects action taken without a corresponding record of evaluation.

Absent clarification, the Commission will be required to further evaluate its position under the Illinois Military Veterans Assistance Act, including the provisions governing its authority to determine necessary funding.

This request is made to ensure the record accurately reflects the process used and its compliance with statutory requirements.

I would welcome the opportunity to resolve this matter cooperatively."

Chairman Neil Hargis: Thank you for your comments. Do we have any other public comments?

No further comments were made at this time.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Chairman Neil Hargis informed everyone in attendance at the meeting that the purpose of this meeting is to discontinue the 1% Sales Taxes for the building of the Franklin County Courthouse that was established April 16, 2019.

ORDINANCE TO DISCONTINUE THE 1% SALES TAX

Chairman Neil Hargis stated the next item on the agenda was the Ordinance to Discontinue the 1% sales tax before making this statement.

Chairman Neil Hargis: Before I bring the Ordinance to discontinue the 1% tax, I would like to read a statement, and then I'm going to open it up for the other board members to say a few words. I would like to start off by saying; Promises Made, Promises Kept. Several years ago, people of

Franklin County were faced with a difficult but necessary decision. Our Courthouse, which was built in 1874, had reached a point where it was no longer safe, efficient or financially practical to maintain. I can remember, for some of you older board members, when David Rea took me around, and when I saw the foundation of the courthouse literally crumbling, I knew we had a problem. So, after careful consideration, the voters approved a 1% sales tax, and it was a hard sell. Jim Muir knows that, Tom went to several meeting as well. The voters approved a 1% sales tax with a clear purpose. To fund the new courthouse, and to do with a built-in end date. This was never intended to be a permanent tax. It was a promise a commitment, that once the project was paid for, the tax would go away. Construction of the new courthouse began in 2020, and in just over 600 days a modern and efficient facility was completed. At the outset, expectation was that this would take 15 years to fully pay off. But Franklin County did something different. Through Discipline, Financial Management, including the refinancing of the debt certificates when interest rates were low a few years ago. Strong local revenue performance, and a continued to commitment to conservative budgeting, we accelerated that timeline dramatically. Today I'm proud to say, that the Franklin County courthouse will be paid off this year, just 7 years after the voters approved the plan. So less than half the time. Just as importantly, we are keeping the second half of the promise. The 1% sales tax that made this project possible, will be ended early. That means thousands of dollars in interest things, it means less burden on our tax payers, and it means putting money back into the pockets of our residents, families, and small businesses sooner than anyone expected. This is what responsible government looks like. We identified a real need, we asked the public for support, with transparency and accountability, and we followed through exactly what we said we were going to do. In Franklin County, we don't believe in open ended taxes or

endless obligations. We believe in setting a goal, meeting the goal, and then stepping back. The Courthouse stands today not only as a center of justice, but as a lasting symbol of what can be accomplished when government works with discipline, integrity and respect for the people it serves. Franklin County made a promise to its citizens, and today we have kept it. Thank you. At this time, I would also like to thank the current members of the board, whom I will open up for statements in a moment, and acknowledge the former members of the board, who apart of this overall process as well. Including former chairmen Randall Crocker, and J. Larry Miller. Just to recognize a few of our former members, and I hope I don't skip anyone. Danny Melvin, Steve Leek, John Gulley, Tom Vaughn, Matt Donkin. We had several former board members that drained this 7-year process and even a few years prior. It took a couple of years to get it going. They played instrumental parts in getting this thing going and making this thing a reality. I would like to thank not only the current board, but also the past members of the board that made this new courthouse possible, and to do it in a fiscally responsible way to the public. So with that said, I would like to turn it over to any member of the board to say a few words.

Kevin Weston: I just have a few things. I've been on the board now; well, this is my eighth year. The purpose of building a new courthouse was kind of a big task given to the board. It was through innovative financing. We used local banks to go in with us and the money stayed here that were paying back to the banks on interest. We also were very lucky that the interest rates were very favorable to us. Both on the money put in the bank to make the payment, that was getting a higher interest rate, and we had a lower interest rate that we were paying on the loan. I'd like to thank our architect; we used a local architect. White and Borgognoni, out of Carbondale. Gail White and Nicholas Williams were the architects that worked

Nicholas Williams were the architects that worked with us on the project. Local Contractor Fager-McGee out of Murphysboro and Carterville. The Construction management firm, I wasn't in favor of hiring construction manager firm, but we did. They really helped keep the project on track and also within budget. That was Navigate Building Systems. It was a combined effort; it was a great thing that we were able to put it all together.

John Gossett: Were a little old fashioned here in Franklin County. I don't have a problem with it, I hope you don't. But we had a prayer here tonight, and Larry gave it and did a good job, and God was with us like Kevin just told you. We got in at the right time. We got a low interest. We did use banks; it could have gone both ways. We could have used bonding companies or banks and we did banks. That was a good decision because with a bonding company we couldn't have paid it off early, we would have had to use a schedule. So, God was with us on that. I can go on and on but I won't say much more but I will say Mr. Jim Muir, you and Mr. Crocker, and Mr. Weston and I could say more deserve a lot of credit, because I wouldn't have done it. I'm just here to tell you I wouldn't have, but I'm glad you did. Thank you.

Brad Wilson: I thought about this the other day as I was watching the news. We live in a country that is very divided. Politically. Socially. Just very Divided. I just want to say this. To me this Building is more than bricks and budgets. It's a reminder that progress happens when we focus less on division and more on purpose. When we work together, we don't just build structures, we build trust. We build accountability, and we build a stronger community. That's what this building stands for. I Hope in years to come, that this proof that collaboration and working together is not just possible, but that its powerful. We have proven that here, because when you work together, you can get things done, and I think we need a lot

more of that in this country. I'm very proud to be a small part of what we've done here, and thank you to the board members that got this started.

Curtis Overton: I'd like to thank everyone that participated in the building of this courthouse. Even though this was initiated before I was on the board, I'm proud of this building and what everybody pulled together and did. One of the most amazing facts about the building of this courthouse, ~~is that there was not one lost time accident during~~ the construction. I thought that was amazing to hear, that everything just flowed so well. It was planned out and initiated in a way there wasn't a lot of problems that you normally encounter and I'm proud to be apart of getting it paid off today. Thank you.

J. Larry Miller: One of the things I found in my barn the other day was this (Holds up yard sign.) I cleaned it up a little bit. I remember well when we began this project, and I was for it. We had failed 2 other times, hadn't we? But the chances of getting it passed a 3rd time was nil almost. I think Randall Crocker and Jim Muir had went around and sold this thing, and I remember distinctly, one night out here at the Elks building, one of the things that was being said all along was that as soon as we paid off the building that the tax would go away. I heard one guy say "there's no way you guys will do that." If you look at the language of the ordinance that we passed in 2019 and also the resolution it is very specific that it would be abated and that's what were going to do tonight. I think that, I talked to a person that has some influence, and I won't say who it was. That person felt like we needed to keep the tax on. It's not a question on whether we can or not, it's a question of integrity. He made the statement that integrity is not the law. I texted him later that day and said integrity may not be the law, but it's a good godly principle. I think that's what were doing here tonight. We are fulfilling a promise we made

to the community. I got some folks, that have said we will believe you when you do it, we have the news here tonight, and people are going to find out that were going to take it off. I'm so happy for them. There's a lot of issues about where to build it, heard a lot of that. Still hear it to be honest with you, but they're farmers, you know how we are. I think its in a great place. I think it needed to be here. Just think about what our community would be like, if there wasn't a building here. So, I thank the chairman and the finance chairman. They work hard.

Ray Minor: I guess I'll just reiterate, it's been an honor to be apart of this. I wasn't on board in the very beginning. Jim Muir and Randall Crocker came out to my shop to talk to me about running for the board a bit about what they were doing and wanted to know if I would support the 1% sales tax. I got on the board and completely supported the building of a new courthouse. I'm honored that I got to be introduced to it early and the 8 years I've been on the board and been a part of it. I'm proud of what were doing in Franklin County and I'm proud of this board.

Angela Evans: I want to add to. I was one of those skeptical that Larry was talking about. We know today that when a tax is passed, do you really believe that a tax is going to go away. It has been a privilege and honor to serve with my fellow board members. My first board meeting was in this room right here and I'm very thankful in everybody that participated in getting that bill passed and this courthouse has served its purpose. I just appreciate each and every one of you.

Jim Muir, Circuit Clerk: I want to say thank you to all these people, I invited them tonight. Sesser Mayor, Jason Ashmore, I also want to thank Fred Kondritz who was Mayor of Benton, Tom Jordan who was Mayor of West Frankfort. They all got on board with this. Bob Rea, and his wife Brenda are

here and Hilary their daughter is here with them tonight. Also, Courtney Cox, I called him and he couldn't be here. Alan Price called me today and isn't feeling well and couldn't be here. I want to thank all those folks for getting on board with this. The only regret I have tonight is, Randall Crocker was a good friend of mine. He was a classmate of mine. We started kindergarten together. Randall Passed away on July 16, 2024. The key thing I take away from this tonight is, Randall was a Democrat and I'm a Republican. When he called me and asked me to get on board with him on this, we didn't talk politics. We didn't fuss and fight with each other about what we don't agree on. We just rolled up our sleeves and got to work to get something accomplished and what the voters of Franklin County needed and what Franklin County deserved. What we accomplished here tonight would be a great lesson for the folks in Springfield, and the folks in Washington D.C. To see what could happen, when you stop arguing and fighting with each other, and try to do work for the people. Again, thank you for this ordinance you passed, I'm going to put a little pressure on you. Thank you for this unanimous vote were about to have on this. God bless you all for being here tonight.

Jason Ashmore, City of Sesser Mayor: I don't know if anyone here wants to follow Jim Muir. I just want to say thank you. This is actually putting integrity back in government. I'm hoping people realize, like Brad said this shows we can work together, and we can do what we say were going to do and keep promises, and show local governments can get things done. I Just want to say thank you very much, you all did a great job.

Lennie Shelton from Benton West City Chamber of Commerce: When the past board and Jim came to the chamber of commerce and wanted to promote this, I was 100% all in. The fact that you thought outside of the box, and decided to let everyone that shops here pay for the courthouse and not take it out of

property taxes was unbelievable. The new courthouse has lit a fire under everyone else on the square, and other businesses in town. Grants have helped people on the square upgrade their buildings. It's just, I think it lit a fire, it got something started. Not only in Benton, but Franklin County, it's something to be proud of. So, I just wanted to say thank you very much.

Tom Vaughn, Former County Board member: I just wanted to tell you, how proud I was and as a great privilege that Randall Crocker was my mentor. I was with him, near the time of his passing and he recognized how much I appreciated him and how much the county appreciated the hard work he put in on this. I went around to some of these meetings, and I was given that name that I readily embrace. Tax and spend. So I ran into a problem now and then, people who were strong in their beliefs. Their ideas and how it should be done, which is what we call a friendly opposition. But that was a good time in my life to go around and convince people. I consider this a testimony to the dedication and vigilance of Randall Crocker.

Chairman Neil Hargis asks if there is anyone else who wishes to make a statement. No further statements were made at this time.

John Gossett made a motion to discontinue the 1% sales tax. J. Larry Miller second that motion. On roll call vote, all vote yes.

Said ordinance is made a part of these minutes as Ordinance No. 2026-01.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Neil Hargis asked the Board if there were any additional questions? J. Larry Miller made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Brad Wilson second that motion. There being no further business. Chairman Neil Hargis declares the meeting adjourned.



Neil Hargis
Franklin County Board Chairman



Paris Dunk
County Clerk and Recorder