WHEREAS, in the opinion of the Lake County Auditor, the public interests required that the Lake County Council, should be called to meet in special session at this time, for the purpose of considering First Reading for the 2027 Budgets. A written notice was sent to each member of the Council, and proper advertisement made, and all other acts performed in accordance with the laws governing such matters.

And now in obedience to such call, come Christine Cid, President, Ronald Brewer, David Hamm, Pete Lindemulder, Ted Bilski and Randy Niemeyer, County Councilpersons, together with Tom O'Donnell and Ray Szarmach, County Council Attorneys. Councilman Charlie Brown was absent.

In the Matter of Ordinance Authorizing Tax Levies (OR-1)

Brewer made the motion, seconded by Hamm, to approve on First Reading only. Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to approve on First Reading only carried 6-yes, 1-absent.

In the Matter of Ordinance for Appropriations, Forms 4A and 4B (OR-2)

Hamm made the motion, seconded by Bilski, to approve on First Reading only. Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to approve on First Reading only carried 6-yes, 1-absent.

In the Matter of Salary Ordinance for 2027 (OR-3)

Bilski made the motion, seconded by Hamm, to approve on First Reading only. Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to approve on First Reading only carried 6-yes, 1-absent.

In the Matter of Longevity Ordinance for 2027 (OR-4)

Lindemulder made the motion, seconded by Hamm, to approve on First Reading only. Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to approve on First Reading only carried 6-yes, 1-absent.

In the Matter of Sheriff Clothing Allowance Ordinance (OR-5)

Niemeyer made the motion, seconded by Lindemulder, to approve on First Reading only. Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to approve on First Reading only carried 6-yes, 1-absent.

In the Matter of Per Diem Expense Ordinance for 2027 (OR-6)

Brewer made the motion, seconded by Hamm, to approve on First Reading only.

Councilwoman Cid recommended increasing per diem meal allowance by $5 per meal (Breakfast to $15, Lunch to $20 and Dinner to $30) due to inflation, noting the estimated impact to the budget would be approximately $5,000.00.

Hamm made the motion, seconded by Bilski, to amend the main motion to increase the per diem meal allowance by $5 per meal (raising Breakfast to $15, Lunch to $20 and Dinner to $30). Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to amend carried 6-yes,1-absent.

Motion to approve the per diem expense, as amended, carried on First Reading only with 6-yes,1-absent (Brown).

In the Matter of Binding Recommendations/Ordinances – Lake Ridge Fire (OR-7)

Hamm made the motion, seconded by Brewer, to approve on First Reading only.

Councilman Bilski asked for an update on ambulance coverage and volunteer fire department funding. Trista Hudson (Cender Dalton) went over the district's budget, stating expected 2027 net tax revenues of $525,000 after circuit breaker reductions, with $250,000 for the volunteer fire contract and $112,000 for annual payments on a Centier Bank building loan. Hudson detailed an $840,000 ambulance budget for full-time staffing, with $350,000 expected from billing, and stated the fire department's request for a $350,000 contract could not be met due to current revenues. Financial Director Scott Schmal stated the remaining loan balance was $469,000 as of December 2025 with a variable interest rate, and Councilman Bilski asked about getting help from the county commissioners to pay off the loan to get rid of the interest and free up operating money. Lake Ridge Fire Chief Marvin Pyle stated the $250,000 contract was not enough after setting aside $68,000 for volunteer call pay, and stated that ambulance calls into Gary leave the township uncovered. Chief Pyle agreed to provide call numbers before the second reading.

Councilman Bilski asked staff to check with the commissioners about paying off the loan.

Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to approve on First Reading only carried 6-yes, 1-absent.

In the Matter of Binding Recommendations/Ordinances – Lake County Solid Waste (OR-8)

Bilski made the motion, seconded by Hamm, to approve on First Reading only.

Councilman Niemeyer questioned the district's service delivery relative to its $6.5 million budget. Executive Director Kiera Hagerman stated that $2.5 million is distributed directly to cities and towns for local recycling, with the remainder funding countywide hazardous waste, electronics, and tire collection programs at a cost of just over $14 per household. Councilman Niemeyer stated he would not oppose the budget, but requested future review of the taxing district's overall efficacy.

Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to approve on First Reading only carried 6-yes,1-absent.

In the Matter of Binding Recommendations/Ordinances – Crown Point Library (OR-9)

Lindemulder made the motion, seconded by Niemeyer, to approve on First Reading only.

Crown Point Community Library, Director Julie Wendorf, presented the 2025 annual review and explained that state law requires binding approval for library budgets exceeding growth limits. Wendorf requested a 4.5% budget increase to keep up with rising costs and growing community demand, including increases in visitors, circulation, and program attendance across Crown Point, Winfield, Winfield Township, and Center Township. Municipal Advisor Trista Hudson clarified that the library is not asking for county funding, as the proposed budget is fully supported by the library's existing cash balance and dedicated capital funds.

Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to approve on First Reading only carried 6-yes,1-absent.

Additional Comments:

Councilwoman Cid stated that the council is still reviewing budget requests from attending departments.

Public Comments:

Jason Gootee, Lake County Veteran Service Officer, asked about taking funds from a position that has been open for two years and using it to raise pay for his current staff. He explained that salaries in his office are lower than nearby counties like Porter and Elkhart, even though Lake County serves 24,000 veterans. Cid recommended Jason to talk with his budget chair, and Councilman Niemeyer asked for a written request. Niemeyer mentioned a concern about county departments keeping open positions on the books just to use that money later for pay raises instead of filling the job. Jason stated that his five-person office has had a hard time finding qualified people for the niche role over the last two years, but his current staff can handle the workload. Councilwoman Cid and Councilman Niemeyer noted the small size of the department and questioned eliminating a position that has stayed open that long.

Additional motions:

Lindemulder made the motion, seconded by Bilski, to cancel the October 8 11:30 A.M. Budget Workshop meeting. Majority voted yes. Brown was absent. Motion to cancel October 8th Budget Workshop meeting carried 6-yes,1-absent.

There being no further business to come before the Council, it was moved and seconded that this Council does now adjourn, to meet again as required by law.

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President, Lake County Council

ATTEST:

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Peggy Holinga-Katona,
Lake County Auditor