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The Elkhart Truth

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Elkhart Truth photos / Clayton Sidenbender

Sergio, a Green Demolition Contractors, Inc. worker, tears down a wall with a Bobcat Skid Steer on the second floor of the former Chase Bank building on Wednesday.

'Truly pivotal'

City moves forward with financing for public safety building

By CLAYTON SIDENBENDER
csidenbender@elkharttruth.com



Demolition work began in November at the old Chase Bank building in Elkhart. Workers from Green Demolition Contractors, Inc. entered from an opening in the building near Second Street on Wednesday afternoon.

ELKHART — The city's public safety administrators say they will be thrilled finally to have the space they need when the renovation of the former Chase Bank building is completed.

City council on Monday approved the financing for reconstruction of the building at 121 W. Franklin St., which will be repurposed into a consolidated Public Safety Center for the city's police, fire and 911 communications departments

The resolution authorizes the financing for reconstruction, not the purchase of the building or demolition, according to Megan Erwin, chief of staff for Mayor Rod Roberson's office. The city has already purchased the building and the demolition work going on now.

The resolution was passed unanimously 7-0. City Councilmen Alex Holtz and David Henke were not present for the vote. The resolution authorizes the city to borrow up to $45 million in bonds, with a maximum interest rate of 7 percent and a repayment period of up to 20 years, City Councilman Aaron Mishler wrote on his official campaign Facebook page. Mishler compared the approval of the funding by the council to buying a house.

"When you go to the bank and get

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ELECTION 2026

Midterm turnout hits 42 percent with 45 percent of votes cast absentee

After 32 years, Libertarians in Indiana just shy of votes they need to keep ballot access

By CASEY SMITH
Indiana Capital Chronicle

INDIANAPOLIS — A few hundred votes could end the Indiana Libertarian Party's 32-year run of automatic ballot access – and a new minor party has secured its place on future ballots.

Libertarian Lauri Shillings received 38,663 votes in the race for Indiana secretary of state, or 1.987 percent of the 1,945,765 votes recorded in preliminary returns from all 92 counties.

At that vote total, the 2 percent threshold is 38,916 votes, putting Shillings 253 short. Former Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard received 70,068 votes, or 3.60 percent, for the Lincoln Party.

The final vote and turnout totals could still change slightly. County certified returns were due Tuesday, but counties have until Friday to make corrections, according to the Indiana Election Division.

Stephanie Dasbach, chair of the Libertarian Party of Indiana, said the party is waiting for certified results and will help its 2028 candidates gather signatures if needed. She did not say whether the party would seek a recount or file a legal challenge if Shillings falls short however.

"We cannot know anything until the final certified results are out," Dasbach told the Indiana Capital Chronicle. "We will pursue any avenues we can to ensure that every vote is counted and that the election is secure."

The Nov. 3 election drew nearly 2 million Hoosiers, or about 42 percent of registered voters, up from about 40 percent in the 2022 midterms. The bigger change was in how people voted. Nearly 45 percent of ballots were cast absentee, up from about 37 percent four years earlier.

Absentee in Indiana includes both in-person early voting and mail-in ballots.

Laura Merrifield Wilson, a political science professor at the University of Indianapolis, said losing automatic ballot access would make it harder for Libertarians to field candidates under their party's name.

"Of course, if they're able to clinch the 2 percent, then the conversation is moot," Wilson said. "But that said, this would be I think a major loss for the party."

What 2 percent gets a party

Democrat Beau Bayh won the secretary of state race with 1,007,815 votes, or 51.8 percent, in the preliminary count. Republican Max Engling received 829,083 votes, or 42.6 percent.

For the two minor parties, the same race determined how easily they could put candidates on the ballot in future elections.

Indiana allows a minor party whose secretary of state candidate receives at least 2 percent and less than 10 percent of the vote to nominate candidates by convention. If the preliminary results hold, the Lincoln Party would gain that option and the Libertarians would lose it.

Libertarian candidates seeking a printed spot on the ballot will have to petition for it. The signature requirement is based on 2 percent of the vote in the most recent secretary of state race within the district the candidate seeks to represent.

The Libertarian Party of Indiana has held ballot access since 1994.

Dasbach said the party expected Shillings to clear 2 percent. She said Shillings was "largely locked out of the media coverage given to her three opponents" and still drew more than 38,000 votes.

"The results of this election showed that a significant

See **VOTE**, page A3

Woman who stole $230K from dealership gets 4-year sentence

By JORDAN FOUTS
jfouts@elkharttruth.com

GOSHEN — A New Paris woman who admitted to stealing over $200,000 from her employer to gamble with has received a four-year sentence.

Julie Hostetler, 65, received a four-year suspended sentence Thursday after pleading guilty to theft as a Level 5 felony. Police said she stole a total of $232,205 from Lochmandy Motors during her five-year employment.

Judge Michael Christofeno, Elkhart County Circuit Court, ordered that all four years be served on probation, at a level left to the discretion of the probation department. He also ordered her to pay $15,000 in restitution and forbade her from gambling while on probation.

"You may be tempted. All you've got to do is think about where you go if you violate the terms of your probation," the judge told Hostetler.

Hostetler apologized for the theft and expressed shame at her behavior.

"I'm sorry. I'm mortified. I embarrassed my friends and family," she said. "I just thank God I have friends who stood behind me."

Hostetler entered her plea in October, ahead of a jury trial set for Jan. 4. She was arrested in October 2025, after the vice president and account manager of Lochmandy Motors reported the thefts to Elkhart Police at the beginning of the year.

Hostetler had been the controller at Lochmandy locations in Knox and Bremen and at Advanced Equity, the dealership's private finance company.

The account manager said she noticed a suspicious entry made by Hostetler in July 2024, with money from "accounts receivable" being inaccurately documented. She said when she confronted Hostetler, the woman became flustered and didn't have an appropriate explanation for the entry.

The manager gave police emails from Hostetler, in which she said she was resigning due to health problems and acknowledged that she had "practiced poor judgment in business dealings." The manager said she looked at finances since the start of Hostetler's employment and found that $232,205 had been stolen.

She said Hostetler had stolen cash from the locations she oversaw which should have been deposited in the bank, then manipulated the company's financial management system with false entries to make up for the cash in other accounts. The manager said Hostetler had manipulated deposit slips to inaccurately reflect the amount of money that had been received at each location.

Hostetler would also pay a relative who worked for the company twice, once in cash and once with a false entry in the financial system, according to the account manager. She said she also suspected that Hostetler would falsify expense reimbursements for herself because she had no receipts.

Lawsuit challenges SNAP restrictions on sugary drinks, food in 18 states

By KEVIN HARDY
Stateline

INDIANAPOLIS — A lawsuit filed Wednesday seeks to block more states from restricting what kind of items food stamp recipients can buy.

Led by the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, the class action lawsuit seeks to strike down restrictions on products such as candy and soda in 18 states for recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

It targets Arkansas, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Wyoming.

In previous litigation, a judge already blocked state and federal efforts to use waivers to restrict SNAP purchases in Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, Tennessee and West Virginia.

"These unlawful waivers serve as a backdoor method to restrict access to SNAP," Katharine Deabler-Meadows, senior attorney at the national center, said in a Wednesday news release. "Our lawsuit seeks to hold the Trump administration accountable for violating the law and causing unprecedented chaos for SNAP recipients and retailers alike."

The Trump administration has encouraged states to seek federal waivers restricting what kinds of purchases can be made with SNAP, which has traditionally allowed recipients broad autonomy to select their own groceries.

Those waivers have targeted a variety of products but generally focus on sugary beverages and candies.

Hawaii's waiver restricts only the purchases of soft drinks, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. But Florida's waiver restricts purchases of soda, energy drinks, candy and prepared desserts.

The federal government argues those restrictions divert taxpayer dollars away from food purchases that fuel the

See **SNAP**, page A5

Indiana context

Since Jan. 1, Hoosiers have not been able to buy candy or sugary drinks with SNAP benefits. Indiana was one of the first states to receive a federal waiver for the restrictions. State officials declined comment on this story.

– Indiana Capital Chronicle

Tomorrow's weather

65° 50°

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