

your views

Brown County must demand better

Editor,

I am certain many in Brown County are tired of hearing about Pumpkin Ridge Road.

This issue is an important demonstration of governance in our county. Decisions at the federal level don't always trickle down to local impact. Local decisions always do and their benefits or detriments are felt quickly. This is why informed local voting is so, so important.

Brown County is the most beautiful county in Indiana. For this reason, Brown County brings new residents in or back who do not have or have lost touch with values, culture, and issues important to Brown County. And some of these carpetbaggers become elected officials.

Wednesday, February 18, 2026, the Brown County Commissioners finally voted on the fate of the Pumpkin Ridge Road expansion project. A project whose original plan looked more like a 4,000-foot runway was reduced to a 4,000-foot highway. Frustratingly, we only needed an improved driveway.

Those most impacted by this issue agreed that it would be nice to improve the road. What we were opposed to was using INDOT to provide the service. The standards that INDOT must follow are excessive for such a small project.

Commissioners Tim Clark and Kevin Patrick provided muted justification in favor of this project and in complete opposition to the voters and taxpayers. This is what we learned:

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- Tim Clark and Kevin Patrick favored the state over local citizens.
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- Tim Clark and Kevin Patrick signed a "boiler plate" (basic) agreement from INDOT.
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- Tim Clark and Kevin Patrick did not hold DNR accountable for their public access point at Salt Creek. This makes the Pumpkin Ridge project unnecessary.
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- Tim Clark and Kevin Patrick voted in favor of private land seizure (eminent domain).
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- Tim Clark and Kevin Patrick voted in favor of unnecessary abuse of taxpayer funds - \$6,400,000 for an unnecessary driveway to a state forest few Hoosiers go to.

One highlight that was a shock to those who have watched this process for the last year was signing the boilerplate agreement after a year of debate. During this lengthy period, there was no negotiation to protect or favor Brown County in the agreement. There are no boundaries written in, no protective controls, no county advantage to keep revenue and taxes kicked off from this bloated project. Nothing. Additionally, when you read

the agreement, it has a feeling of collaboration between INDOT and Brown County Commissioners, but section 14 states INDOT has the final say. How do you agree to this? Then again, how do you vote against your constituents?

What is so frustrating is that this has happened again and again. Just take a drive to Yellowwood State Forest from Lanam Ridge Road. What you will observe is the scalping of the forest to the entrance of the state forest. It is 200 feet wide to a state forest entrance and then the park road system is 30 feet wide (total width – tree to tree). Nothing about this makes sense. And now we do it again at Pumpkin Ridge. And we spend \$6,400,000 on another mistake.

When will this stop? When more of us speak up and get involved. Don't wait for it to happen to you. Brown County is worth your time.

Call to Action: Please go to YouTube and watch the Brown County Commissioners' meeting from February 18, 2026. Please attend or watch these meetings each month. Keep track of your local agendas and weigh in. Be more informed, and vote. We all depend on this. It is how we impact positive changes. It is how we protect the beauty of Brown County.

John Mueller Pumpkin Ridge Road Nashville

Pumpkin Road decision doesn't make sense

Editor,

I watched in horror as Tim Clark and Kevin Patrick threw the good people of Pumpkin Ridge Road under the bus at the County Commissioners' meeting February 18.

They casually voted to steal their land. While the people of Brown County showed up to the commissioners' meeting with alternate plans that were feasible and cost-effective, Clark and Patrick looked bored and didn't even pretend they were listening or even interested. And so, ignoring Ron Sanders' motion to table the decision until the other options could be explored, Clark and Patrick nonchalantly destroyed lives.

Here's the back story.

INDOT and the DNR approached our "commissioners" about improving the road that leads to Mt Tea State Forest.

It is a primitive forest.

Not a park. There are no trails and only two parking spots. That road is Pumpkin Ridge. A road that does need improvement and has been ignored. A road that those families along the road have taken care of themselves. These families have been there for generations. This area is what Brown County looked like more than a hundred years ago.

These families are good, hardworking, independent people who are the backbone of this county. You want these people behind you.

The plan that INDOT came up with is a road that will be wider than 135. This ¾ of a mile road will become the widest road in Brown County. It's not even a mile long. To a forest. Not a park. In order to make this happen, INDOT needs to steal land from these families. Eminent domain is stealing.

And, no one ever gets just compensation. It was clear Patrick was going to say yes. It was clear that Ron Sanders was going to vote no. Ron Sanders is the one who let the families know what was going on. He went door to door, making sure they knew what was brewing. They didn't know. They weren't notified.

That put Clark as the tie breaker.

The purpose of eminent domain is to steal land.

Land that has been in the family for generations.

Land that has meaning.

Land that is loved. This land that does not meet the requirements for eminent domain. Unlike Clark, who's using public monies to fight for his right to be a Republican, these people will have to hire and pay for their own lawyer.

Nobody in any of the meetings, DNR, INDOT, or our commissioners has been able to explain the why for this highway, except access to Mt Tea Forest. Not a park. But there's a much better alternative. Mt Tea butts up to Salt Creek. Easy.

Better parking. Other options were to get our own highway department involved. The people of Brown County could come up with better plans. We respect the area more than INDOT. The lastditch effort was for the people themselves to buy the gravel and grade it themselves. Remember, they've been taking care of the road for years. They've been the ones grading and snowplowing. Instead, the plan proposed

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is a highway that is beyond overkill. Every rational person knows this.

It gets better. INDOT insists on a blind agreement. Once the contract is signed, Brown County has no control. And, once INDOT has its so-called due diligence studies done, INDOT can do what it wants. If they want to change the way the road goes, they can. If they want to take more land, they can. If they want to tear down more trees, they can. If they want to poison the little lake that runs along the road, they can.

This is back asswards.

Studies should come first to see if it's even feasible.

I know of no lawyer who would say sign a blind contract. Sign away all control.

This could have all been stopped in its tracks if Clark had just said no early last year. When I called last year after finding out about this horrific use of eminent domain, I spoke with Patrick. He laughed at my concern and insinuated it was a done deal, and why would I complain? The people of Pumpkin Ridge have lost sleep and lived in a state of worry, and I'm sure affected their health.

Stress does that. They've attended every meeting.

They were willing to compromise. They were told their input was important.

Here's the thing. Due diligence, something Clark boasted about, was never done. He never looked at alternatives. Never talked to our highway department. Never talked to the DNR about using Salt Creek. Never thought how can we do this without causing harm.

Clark also bragged that he would be transparent.

He's been as transparent as mud. Everything will be plowed down.

Trees, bushes, yards for a highway for reasons no one has been able to explain. Except a road to a primitive forest. Not a park.

Nothing makes sense.

INDOT has had to cancel 300 projects due to funding. So, why is this so important? A very small stretch of road to a forest.

Not a park. The DNR states it will remain a primitive forest. Okay, but are they thinking of selling it off to a developer once the road goes in? When I reached out to Clark, I was met with silence. He's come out against eminent domain in the past. Why the silence? Did Clark make a deal with INDOT that if they say yes to open his precious Indian Hill Trail, which was closed by the previous commissioners, then Clark will vote yes to give INDOT carte blanche on Pumpkin Ridge? Or is money involved? See what happens when there isn't transparency? Lots of questions with no answers. And, it's his fault.

The heartbreak I witnessed at that meeting was gut-wrenching. The betrayal was complete.

Clark had promised to be different. A man of the people. Brown County first. A man you could trust. "I'll listen", he said.

I fell for it.

Barbara Nix Nashville

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