



**LA PORTE COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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**Sheila Matias  
President**

**Dr. Vidya Kora  
Vice President**

**Richard Mrozinski  
Member**

**LA PORTE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES  
Wednesday, March 4, 2020 La Porte County Complex Meeting Room #3 at 10:00 a.m.**

**President** Sheila Matias called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Executive Assistant** Diane Gonzales called the roll: Commissioner Kora - Present; Commissioner Matias - Present; Commissioner Mrozinski - Present. Quorum present therefore meeting commenced.

**Considered** the agenda. Commissioner Kora motioned to move item "9 - Coronavirus update with Dr. Dafer Al-Haddadin" before Public Comment on the agenda. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried. Commissioner Kora motioned to accept the amended agenda. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** approval of February 19, 2020 minutes. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Executive Assistant** Diane Gonzales read the claims of Payroll ending 2/28/2020 - \$1,192,417.02 and Miscellaneous claims - \$557,045.42. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried. President Matias stated all claims are reviewed prior to the meeting.

**Commissioner Vidya Kora** said over the past 2-3 weeks there has been much concern with the Coronavirus in the community and he felt it was best to hear from our local infectious disease expert, two local hospitals and county health department on their preparedness if a case shows up in La Pore County.

**Dr. Dafer Al-Haddadin, M.D.**, Infectious Disease specialist, gave a slide show presentation on the Coronavirus which is now named COVID-19. Born in Jordan, Dr. Haddadin has lived in the US for 30 years and works at Franciscan Hospital in Michigan City. A common virus similar to Sars (civet cat in China) or Mrsa (camel in Saudi Arabia) which originated in animals, mutates then spreads to humans. This particular strain came from a bat that spread to a seafood market in China. Chain of Infection is the start to end of a virus. How contagious is the COVID-19? Average number of people infected by an individual is 1.4-2.5. Currently there is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 but there is about 20 vaccines in trial. Best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces. Wash your hands. The challenges are the unknown: What is the host as it relates to the Chain of Infection? How the outbreak is going to sort out? Natural Epidemiological behavior. Ability to mutate? Effect on the fetus? So far limited data suggesting no harm. Dr. Haddadin stated one challenge is the population. He suggested the President appoint a Secretary of Hygiene. He quoted Nikola Tesla, "The Secretary of Hygiene or Physical Culture will be far more important in the cabinet of the President of the United States who holds office in the year 2035 than the Secretary of War." Commissioner Kora asked if there are any medications to treat this virus at this time. Dr. Haddadin replied not yet but there are a few that look promising. Commissioner Kora asked who are the most "at risk" with this virus. Dr. Haddadin replied about 15% of people get sick and end up in the hospital with severe pneumonia. Weak immune systems, diabetes is common, copd and cancer patients along

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with older people. President Matias asked what the most practical things to do are. Wash your hands and stay home if you are sick. Generally 1-2 days is when an individual knows if they have COVID-19.

**Dr. Anil Chawla** spoke on behalf of Franciscan Health in Michigan City showing support for the community. Franciscan Health receives constant updates on the virus, they hold staff meetings sharing the information and are prepared and ready for any emergency. A plan is in place with inventory of supplies, i.e. masks, isolation rooms and recently a triage for respiratory patients has been set up so they do not mingle with the other patients in the waiting room. Covering your mouth when coughing, hand washing and staying at home when you are sick are the best preventions. Anxiety levels are high in the community but Dr. Chawla assured everyone Franciscan Health in Michigan City is prepared and ready to serve the community.

**Ashley Dickinson**, CEO of La Porte Hospital, echoed Dr. Chawla's support for the community by having a protocol or plan in place for patients with infectious diseases. La Porte Hospital is ready and has supplies. Ashley gave handouts with information on COVID-19 from the CDC (Center for Disease Control). Common sense too should be followed during this outbreak. Hand washing and personal hygiene.

**Tony Mancuso**, Health Department Director and Jenny Smith, Health Dept Staff, reported on the county level. Commissioner Kora did say testing is not done here in the county but cultures are sent to the CDC. This week Indiana will start testing instead of sending the culture off to the CDC. Tony said daily calls come in. Jenny reported over 90,000 cases worldwide and greater than 3,100 deaths have occurred. No one in Indiana has been reported yet. La Porte County has not had to "monitor" any travelers. Sixty domestic cases in 12 states. Three people from Wuhan, China and 45 people from the Diamond Princess Cruise ship were infected and are among the 60 cases in the United States. Six deaths occurred in Washington State. State of Indiana has 900 RT-PCR test kits available. Three tiers of travel warnings have been announced: Level 1 – avoid non-essential travel to China, Iran, Italy and South Korea; Level 2 – enhanced precautions to Japan and Level 3 – standard precautions to Hong Kong. Students studying abroad are being brought back home to the US. Commissioner Kora thanked all of the participants for the presentation. President Matias expressed her gratitude as well.

President Sheila Matias stated item "g" under New Business will be brought forward now on the agenda. **Considered** agreement regarding donation of \$25,000 from La Porte Hospital toward the new Rolling Prairie EMS base construction cost – Ashley Dickinson, CEO, La Porte Hospital. Commissioner Kora motioned to accept the agreement. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**President Matias** asked Attorney Shaw Friedman to give a report on the sale of the county home. Due to questions that the county has received on the sale of the county home and inferences that maybe the county "should a, could a" gotten more money. Attorney Friedman said he went back and looked at the timing to get key dates to answer any questions and provide a report to the tax payers and the Commission today. **Attorney Friedman stated, "It's been known publicly for over a year that the Commissioners intended to sell the county home as they first passed a resolution to start the sale process Resolution 2019-4 on February 20, 2019. At my recommendation the Commissioners agreed to hire Attorney Alex Bruggenschmidt as special counsel because there was a complicated, multiple step process for the county to properly sell off real estate it owns and we wanted every bit of this to be transparent, open and compliant with the law. That was the direction that you (Commissioners) gave us and we believe we succeeded in that. The sale should not have been a surprise to anyone who has been following the news and any interested bidders have been given a tour simply upon request. In fact the Commissioners on November 6, 2019 announced at their meeting that there would be a public hearing held on whether to authorize sale of the county home. Notices were published in both newspapers, twice advertising the November 20<sup>th</sup> public hearing. On November 20, 2019 after a public hearing, the Commission approved a public auction to be held and specifically mentioned at that meeting that the minimum bid required would be \$50,000. This was no secret, this was no hidden number. It was available to all who were watching. No one objected at that public hearing and the Commissioners formally approved setting the public auction. Five days later the County Council held its public hearing and it was clear again at that meeting what the minimum bid**

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would be. The County Council approved on a 6-1 vote the resolution approving this sale fully aware that the minimum bid would be set at \$50,000. Because of the publicity with the various public hearings there were 6 prospective bidders, count them, six, who asked the facilities director for tours of the county home. Public notice of the formal auction was published twice, once on February 12<sup>th</sup> and once on February 19<sup>th</sup>, setting the auction and making clear in the public notice the minimum bid amount. Any one of the six prospective bidders who toured the county home or anyone in the public could have appeared at the February 24<sup>th</sup> public auction and bid. Only one bidder, J&B Construction, a reportable local developer, submitted a bid. We followed the letter of the law in multiple hearings and multiple notices to alert any interested bidders. We set the minimum bid at the recommendation of Alex Bruggenschmidt who works at the law firm of experts conveying property at sale. He has conducted hundreds of tax sales throughout the state. As Alex told me and I quote, 'We got close to market value without incurring any closing costs, realtor fees or inspections.' As he said, quote, 'We held a public auction. This is as transparent as local government can be, no other bidders attended the auction.' Attorney Friedman stated it will be his recommendation to auction off any furnishings, appliances that are left in the home to potentially add to the net received and that candidly we are lucky to have enticed a reportable local developer to invest the \$50,000 to buy the place considering the huge amount of the investment it will take to bring the building back up to code. The building will be privately held and on the tax rolls, no longer a liability or expense for La Porte County taxpayers. We believe that is a win." President Matias thanked Attorney Shaw Friedman for his report on the sale of the county home.

### Public Comment

**James Donnelly** – 4622 N. 525 W. La Porte – Stated a new neighbor had started a backyard junkyard. No covenants for the county currently on the books. Suggested a referendum be placed on the ballot for the voters to decide for code enforcement for the county. James said the new Mayor for La Porte, Tom Dermody, in six weeks has issued over 600 violations, calling it "setting high standards." Commissioner Kora asked Attorney Friedman what is the process to get a referendum on the ballot. Attorney Shaw Friedman replied there is no process. Legislature has to authorize any item to go on the ballot as a referendum. Existing tools or ordinances in place now need to be used when complaints are filed. President Sheila Matias suggested a tool be placed on the county's new website to file a complaint by a citizen or resident. This will help in holding the departments accountable for handling the complaints.

**Phyllis Marks** – 118 Sagamore Pkwy – La Porte – Commented on the sale of the county home. She has admired the building for many years. It would have been nice for a senior living facility. Commissioner Kora replied tax credits were applied for 3 times to the Indiana Housing Development without approval from the state. Private developers from both Indiana and Illinois joined in the application process but each one failed. It requires a lot of money to maintain a building as big as the county home. Commissioner Rich Mrozinski said he has been the liaison to the county home for 8 years while on the Council and the past 3 years as Commissioner. There was a state program called ARCH, Assistance to Residents in County Homes, which helped low indigent people to live in the county home, was discontinued by the state and that was the beginning of the end for the county home. That meant private pay, approximately \$34-\$35 per day, for individuals if they wanted to live in the home. The number of people living there decreased.

**Sandy Tonsoni** – niece to Phyllis Marks, stated she has been a preservationist her entire life. The last 7-8 months Sandy has been working with developers to buy the county home. She worked on the Rumely Building. Sandy said her aunt Phyllis was never allowed in to tour the county home. Commissioner Mrozinski said in the past 3 years several individuals have reached out to him to tour the county home and he was never contacted by Phyllis Marks.

**Ron Sullivan** – 5288 W. 150 E. La Porte - Questioned the advertising of the sale for the county home. No sign was on the lawn. What address was used? How was it advertised? Who was the auctioneer who sold it? His license number? 303 acres?

**Ralph Gee** – 1585 S. 400 W. La Porte – Disappointed in the sale. Historical building. Ralph said he worked there as a kid. He lives one road down from the location of the county home.

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## Requests

**Considered** travel permission for Deputy Prosecutor Barb Stooksbury to Anaheim, California May 26-30. This is an annual National Conference for Drug Court. President Matias said the travel is being questioned due to the CORVID-19 virus. Requested Barb to keep an eye on the restrictions for travel prior to the departure date. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

## Department Head Reports

**Larry Levendowski** – Director of Facilities – Larry stated yes, he received phone calls from Phyllis Marks for a tour of the county home however they took into consideration who wanted to tour it. Safety was a concern during the tours, flashlights were used due to no power on in the building. Were they a true potential buyer?

**Jerry Sullivan** – County Engineer – Reported on the Rolling Praire LUST project. A conference call took place with IDEM in regards to the ERC with no restrictions or NFA letter that was requested by the County. IDEM is looking for more information, an unconditional closure which would not have the ERC or Environmental Restrictive Covenant as part of it. A line of evidence will be requested from IDEM as well. IDEM claims there are contaminants found between the 12 and 15 foot water level which is a minimal amount and should be gone with the next testing.

**Mike Schultz** – County Assessor – Approved on ratio study which was submitted 3 days earlier but took the State 2 extra days to approve it. Form 11, Notice of Assessment, will be worked on next in order to send out before May 1<sup>st</sup>. Everything is in order and on time. Mike reported due to the CORVID-19 virus the conference he was planning to attend in Phoenix with two staff members had been postponed.

**Considered** travel permission for Ann Rissman, Health Dept and Christine Moss, JSC, to Minneapolis, Minnesota March 4-6 to attend the Midwest Syringe Services Program Institute, Tony Mancuso and Erika Stallworth. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** LPCCVB Community Events Promotion Fund for \$1500 to American Legion Post 451 for Goldstars Tribute Wall. **Matt Hampton, Commander of Post 451**, distributed photos of the traveling Memorial Wall for Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan Wars which will be displayed in our county June 27 & 28, 2020 at Ames Field in Michigan City for Patriotic Day. The wall will be ‘escorted’ into our county. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

## Old Business

**Considered** proposed Pawn Shops/Scrap Metal Ordinance on second reading – Detectives James Lear and Aaron Banic – La Porte County Sheriff’s Department. Detective Lear stated Captain Pat Cicero was not in attendance today because he is teaching at the National Forensics Academy which is a great honor and privilege to have an individual from our County’s Sheriff’s Department teaching on the National level. Detective Aaron Banic gave the Commissioners handouts. Detective Lear summarized the need for this ordinance in our county. The purpose of this ordinance from day one has been to stop “victimizing our victims twice.” In the past in La Porte County if you were a victim of property crime and later your property showed up in a pawn shop or scrap yard it would be up the victim’s responsibility to buy back their own property. In 2016-2017 the Detectives decided to try a different approach and started obtaining search warrants to get items back. They were successful in getting items returned at no cost for the victims however now the “buyer” was out the money paid for the goods. Holding the businesses accountable was also a reason for initiating this ordinance. Proper record keeping was important to solve cases. Leads OnLine is a nationwide data base which reminds us that criminals do travel. A question was brought up at the last meeting on security issues with Leads OnLine. Detective Lear said it is used by law enforcement officers only. Leads does not sell their data. Employees that work for Leads OnLine sign non-disclosure agreements in order to maintain their employment. Data storage is kept on servers here in the United States. A few changes were made since the first reading. In section 4.2 any person who owns a scrap yard, and/or operates solely as a scrap metal dealer, shall not be subject to the required 15 day hold. Clarification was made to the towing/recovering agencies by adding section 9 under exemptions. Written warning was added. Detective Lear read into the record a statement which he located on ISRI’s (Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries) website on recyclable materials theft. “In cooperation with the

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appropriate authorities and affected parties, each member of the recycling industry, along with law enforcement and affected community, should take positive steps to reduce the risk of unintentional purchases of stolen materials. Recyclers should communicate and work cooperatively with community leaders, law enforcement officials and their agencies and members of the community most affected by these thefts to inform them about scrap metal industry, its operations, its departments, to develop programs designed to reduce the theft of recyclable materials. Only through active cooperation through the entire community that the problems presented of theft of recyclable materials can be addressed successfully.”

Public Comment was heard before voting on this ordinance. Michael Mervis, ISRI representative, stated again his concern is with Leads OnLine and not the ordinance itself.

Commissioner Kora motioned to accept the ordinance on second and final reading. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried. \*\*\***Ordinance 2020-1**

### **Presentation for new county website**

Tony Rodriguez – Power Point presentation with the county’s new website. [www.laporteco.in.gov](http://www.laporteco.in.gov)

### **New Business**

**Considered** requesting driveway permit from INDOT into county barn parcel off SR 2. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** first reading on ordinance establishing Cougar Road (CR 700 East) as a one-way street between SR 2 and New Prairie High School – Mike Yacullo, INDOT. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** grant agreement approval with INDOT for sign replacement – Mitch Bishop, County Planner. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** resolution authorizing temporary move of La Porte Superior Court 2 to former La Porte Superior Courtroom 3 in the basement of the County Complex during renovation of the Michigan City courthouse. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

### **\*\*\*Resolution 2020-2**

**Considered** transfer of tax sale certificate requested by City of Michigan City for property located on Peru Street in Michigan City. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried. \*\*\***Resolution 2020-3**

**Considered** resolution to designate secure office space in county assembly room in County Complex in La Porte and secure office space at 8<sup>th</sup> Street county offices in Michigan City for Clerk’s use to conduct Early Voting in 2020 elections. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried. \*\*\***Resolution 2020-4**

### **Commissioner Comments**

**Commissioner Rich Mrozinski** met with Detective Cicero on the Ordinance for the scrap yards/pawn shops. A county resident questioned Rich about not having internet for the reporting online with Leads.

**Commissioner Vidya Kora** thanked everyone involved with the new website. Also the Broadband Task Force. Commissioner Kora attended a meeting with Vibrant Communities on affordable housing, how to attract new residents to our county.

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**Commissioner Sheila Matias** said housing, the need for technology and affordable housing will help keep residents here in our county. The Broadband Task Force has been key to shining a light on the need for broadband services throughout the county.

**Adjournment**

**President Matias adjourned at 12:13 p.m.**

EXAMINED AND APPROVED BY THE  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE  
COUNTY OF LA PORTE, INDIANA  
DATE 3-18-2020

Sheila Matias  
Paul D. Matias

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
Auditor

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

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