



# LA PORTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

555 Michigan Avenue, Suite 202  
La Porte, IN 46350-3400  
Phone: (219) 326-6808 ext. 2229

Sheila Matias  
President

Dr. Vidya Kora  
Vice President

Richard Mrozinski  
Member

## LA PORTE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES Wednesday, May 6, 2020 La Porte County Complex Meeting Room #3 at 10:00 a.m. via ALCO and Zoom

**President** Sheila Matias called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioner Rich Mrozinski requested a moment of silence for Gene Jonas, a member of the Plan Commission and Regional Sewer and Water District Commission, who passed away.

**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 add a resolution for Nurses week. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried. Commissioner Kora then motioned to accept the amended agenda. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** approval of April 8 & 22, 2020 minutes for special meetings and April 15, 2020 regular meeting minutes. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Executive Assistant Diane Gonzales** read the claims with Payroll ending 4/24/2020 - \$1,179,634.75 and Miscellaneous claims - \$1,751,065.78. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Presentation by Commissioner Rich Mrozinski** and VFW honoring Detective Pat Cicero. Commissioner Mrozinski stated Captain Pat Cicero was honored by the Rolling Prairie VFW as Policeman of the Year for Post 9423. Recommendation went to the district then state level. Commissioner Mrozinski then presented two awards to Detective Cicero. Law Enforcement Officer of the Year and VFW National Law Enforcement Award. Detective Captain Pat Cicero thanked everyone, God, his wife and his family. Stated he accepts the award on behalf of his department, sheriffs he has worked under and all the detectives he has worked with over the past 18 years. President Sheila Matias congratulated Captain Cicero. Commissioner Kora said he worked with Pat in the past while serving as County Coroner.

**Dr. Kristen Dauss, Chief Medical Officer and Jon Ferguson, Chief Legal Officer** for Indiana Department of Corrections via Zoom. Globally screening all individuals (staff members) that enter facilities. No visitations or volunteer activities at this time. PPE is provided at both Westville Correctional and Indiana State Prison in La Porte County. All staff and offenders have access to masks. Promoting hand hygiene. All have access to water, soap and hand sanitizer with greater than 60% alcohol base, which is typically not allowed in a correctional setting due to safety and security reasons. On-going education is provided to all staff and offenders in regards to Covid-19. Signs are posted outside and inside the facilities. All sick offenders are isolated. Quarantine those that have been exposed to the virus. All being monitored by the medical staff on a frequent basis. Case numbers are reported everyday with the state. An IDOC technical response team is ready and available. Roll call has been limited with social distancing in place. Staff is dedicated within the units. Contract tracing is being conducted. There are marked boundaries within the facilities to show offenders the 6

ORIGINAL

foot distance. Movement has been limited for offenders. Staff is questioned before entering the workplace on symptoms such as cough, shortness of breath and temperatures are taken. Hazard pay has been provided. Indiana State Prison in Michigan City has a body scanner. Limited the 'hands-on' shake down. Masks are now part of the uniform for the staff. Gowns, face shields and N-95 masks are available for certain areas within the prisons. PPE is being produced in the prisons and being utilized statewide. All staff have access to hot water, soap and hand sanitizer. Communication is promoted by an anonymous email box, Infocast – similar to Zoom; Covid-19 email, phone box and website for information. Mental Health resources are being researched for staff and their families. Attorney Jon Ferguson stated the DOC is taking the care of the offenders and staff very seriously, it is a new environment right now for everyone. Thinking differently and taking steps that never before have been thought about such as providing alcohol base hand sanitizer inside the facilities. Numbers were provided for current status of cases in the facilities. Westville has 23 offenders quarantined meaning they've been exposed but not showing symptoms. Isolation means having symptoms and are in single areas of the facilities away from everyone else. Currently 8 offenders are isolated and 149 offenders that have resolved symptoms; 168 released from all medical precautions; 198 offenders have been tested and 142 have recovered. Commissioner Kora asked out of the 198 tested how many were positive – 166. President Matias asked the number of population for Westville. Attorney Ferguson replied 3100 offenders. Will all staff and offenders be tested asked President Matias. Dr. Dauss replied they are following CDC guidelines and IDOC recommendations by testing only those that are symptomatic or have been exposed. If an offender states they have symptoms then they are screened and if signs are present then they are tested. At the Indiana State Prison there are 0 in quarantine; 3 inmates that are isolated; 4 that have resolved Covid-like symptoms; and 6 have been tested. Dr. Dauss explained the layout of the two correctional facilities. Westville is more 'dorm' based whereas ISP are individual cells. Covid-19 was brought into Westville facility somehow and then spread among the offenders and staff. Covid-19 at ISP can be contained and slow down the spread unlike Westville. Commissioner Kora stated staff members at Westville are concerned that they are exposed and not being tested. Attorney Ferguson replied every staff member who is concerned that they have been exposed to the virus can get tested. Dr. Dauss added the staff simply needs to email the Covid-19 DOC mailbox. Councilman Randy Novak questioned the rapid test machines that are available. Why not use them to test? Dr. Dauss replied they do not have thousands or even hundreds of test kits. Councilman Novak asked if inmates were being transferred from facility to facility and Dr. Dauss stated overall that is on hold however if there is an urgent medical need or safety/security issue then movement is done.

### **Public Comment**

**Joe Coar** – 3768 N. 525 W. La Porte – On behalf of Betty and Joe Coar he thanked the Commissioners for staying on top of economic side of the pandemic.

**Joe Haney** – 2695 W. Joliet Road La Porte – Voiced his concerns on a few items: Postcards mailed out to voters and the cost. Joe questioned whose idea was it to send the postcards out. Amicus brief filing is not a good idea to speak for all of the populous of the county. OCRA grants would be better time spent for the Commissioners. Commissioner Kora replied every family in La Porte County will be affected if the ACA is struck down by the Supreme Court of the United States. Regarding the postcards, Commissioner Kora stated when a person is admitted to the hospital due to the COVID-19 virus and if they go to ICU the cost is approximately \$100,000 per patient.

President Sheila Matias read into the record a letter submitted by Michelle Burkhart regarding Coronavirus-related restrictions. \*\*\*Letter attached to these minutes

### **Department Reports/Department Head Comments**

**Darlene Hale – IT Director** – Updated the Commissioners on the postcards.

**Randy Novak – Council President** – Supports item '10 c' on moving forward with the renovation of the Michigan City Courthouse.

**Tony Mancuso – Health Department Director** – Reported on the COVID-19 testing site located at the Armory in La Porte on State Road 2. Also stated as of May 18<sup>th</sup> the Indiana State Department of Health will be

ORIGINAL

doing contact tracing for any COVID-19 cases moving forward allowing the county health departments to get back to their normal business of immunization and other work. Governor Holcomb gave approval for restaurants to start opening again with requirements or recommendations such as PPE and social distancing. Inspections will still be done by the health department. Commissioner Kora questioned if contact tracing will be taken away from our county health department nurses to which Tony answered he is not 100% sure yet but will keep the Commissioners informed. Food trucks with permission or re-instating their license will be allowed to open up to sell their products to the public. Motion made by Commissioner Kora to allow the food trucks to receive permits or have their licenses re-instated by county health department. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Lynne Spevak – County Treasurer** – Reported on current tax collections. In 2019 at the date of May 5th 40 million dollars had been paid and this year we are at 35 million dollars collected which includes an 8 million dollar lender file which was not included in last year's collections. That would put us at 27 million dollars collected to date compared to 40 million last year. Normally 200-300 hundred walk-ins would occur which due to the virus that has not happened this year. Mail is heavier this year and several drop boxes have been set up outside LP and MC Treasurer's offices. Online payments are being made as well as phone calls saying they will wait until the buildings are open back up for business to come in and pay in person. Governor granted a 60 day waiver for taxes due until July 10<sup>th</sup> with no penalty. Commissioner Kora asked if tax payers are waiting until the building opens for business to which Lynne replied yes, some tax payers would rather pay in person. Lynne stated an extra hire could help control the line of tax payers whether in their car or in line outside the buildings using social distancing to keep everyone safe.

**Steve Alt – E-911 Director** – Advised everyone that the COVID-19 Optum testing site at the armory is not set up yet. Registering online was simple but the site is not ready. Very efficient though.

President Sheila Matias changed the order of requests before the proclamations.

#### **Requests**

**Request** from the county's judges for workshop to discuss plans for phased re-opening of the Courthouses and of the Courts. Judge Rich Stalbrink was in attendance via Zoom. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve a workshop for next Wednesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>. Time was suggested at 10:00 a.m. but not confirmed at this meeting. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** Proclaiming Corrections Officer week May 3-9, 2020. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** Proclaiming EMS week May 17-23, 2020. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** Proclaiming Nurses week May 6-12, 2020. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

#### **Old Business**

**Considered** proposed amended La Pore County Covid-19 Employee and Operations Policy to comply with Governor's May 1, 2020 Executive Order providing for phased re-opening. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Update** on Commissioners' request to county election board for mailing providing options for voters on mail in and early voting. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve advisement to the Clerk of the Circuit Court to hire extra staff to process Absentee ballot applications in a timely manner. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried. Commissioner Kora motioned a request for the County Election Board to meet once a week prior to the June 2, 2020 Primary Election. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** updated funds report/anticipated revenue estimates provided by Financial Advisor Karl Cender and Auditor Joie Winski as a pre-requisite to possible re-start of MC Courthouse project financing. Commissioner

ORIGINAL

Kora motioned to remove the pause put on the Michigan City Courthouse renovation project with a down payment of 3.5 million dollars, 2 million out of the reserve account and 1.5 million coming from Major Moves. If possible tap into any available funds through NIRPC for any bond debt. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**New Business**

**Considered** MOU with City of La Porte for local matching funds for economic development corridor project – Mitch Bishop. Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Kora seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** property and liability insurance renewal for 2020-2021 policy period – John Jones, Agent of Record. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Considered** signing on to *amicus* or ‘friend of the court’ brief to be filed in the U.S. Supreme Court by cities and counties defending the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski did not second the motion. President Sheila Matias stepped down and seconded. Motion carried with 2-1 votes. Commissioner Matias – Yes; Commissioner Kora – Yes; Commissioner Mrozinski – No.

**Considered** resolution of support in favor of establishing twenty five (25) small business Covid-19 Lifeline grants of \$10k each funded by just-announced state OCRA grant of \$250,000.00 and select public sector and private sector appointees to committee to conduct grant application review/awards – Office of Community & Economic Development – Tony Rodriguez, Matt Reardon. Commissioner Kora motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

**Commissioner Comments**

**Commissioner Rich Mrozinski** said Zoom meetings have been utilized a lot lately. Commissioners’ meetings, weekly meetings with the Commissioner and Council Presidents, and he would like to see a resolution drawn up allowing future meetings to take place this way even after this pandemic. Senator Mike Bohacek is on a committee that he would be willing to help push this through in Indianapolis. On another note Commissioner Mrozinski said good news came in on the USS Grayback, a WWII submarine ship, which went missing in 1944 with 80 American sailors on board, has been located and will bring our soldiers back home.

**Commissioner Vidya Kora** reported on telemedicine which has been very effective during this pandemic.

**President Sheila Matias** agreed that Zoom and Telemedicine has changed our lives due to COVID-19. Wearing masks and social distancing is still needed to flatten the curve of this virus.

**Adjournment**

**President Matias adjourned at 1:06 p.m.**

EXAMINED AND APPROVED BY THE  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE  
COUNTY OF LA PORTE, INDIANA

5-20-2020  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sheila Matias  
Vidya Kora  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

ORIGINAL

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to ask that you consider placing more restrictions locally than the directives issued by the State of Indiana, due to the following factors:

- We are directly bordering the state with the 7th highest number of cases and 3rd highest number of deaths
- We are connected via transit, commerce, tourism, and social ties to the state with the 4th highest number of cases and 6th highest number of deaths, the bulk of which are in the Chicago area
- We have a current outbreak at Westville Correctional, which may continue to spread into the community in larger numbers via unintentional transmission from staff members
- Our case counts/deaths in the county have not leveled off or decreased--they continue to rise, even as these restrictions are in effect. They will rise at a more rapid pace if we open up to the extent envisioned by the state.
- PPE, hand sanitizer, wipes, disinfectant, etc. are in short supply for non-medical businesses and private citizens, and we should not be putting people in a position where they feel pressured by economic forces to resume business before they can obtain the supplies they need to be safe.

It is a fool's game to look at these circumstances and hope that our outcomes will be better than they have been in any other place in the world. With no cure and no treatment, our greatest protection against coronavirus is to slow the spread of transmission. The most reliable way to slow the spread is to limit the number of contacts between people of different households, and to make those contacts safer.

In addition, to protect the safety of all citizens, I beg you to put into place a requirement that people wear masks in public (if they are medically able to do so). Making masks optional puts employees in the position of having to choose between their safety and their ability to feed themselves and their families. If customers are not wearing masks, people in customer-facing jobs will be exposed to potentially hundreds of risky interactions a day, placing them and their families in great harm. Please provide the legal and political cover to allow employees this modicum of safety.

As the incidence of infection is likely to increase, please do whatever is in your power to help long-term care facilities to obtain medical-grade PPE with strong protection levels. My grandmother is in an assisted living, and I am very concerned that the CNAs and other staff members will be at risk of greater exposure in their personal lives as a result of the state's directives. Without stronger protection against transmission, an asymptomatic staff member may unwittingly cause a devastating outbreak among our most vulnerable citizens and vital members of our healthcare team.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I'm sure this is a difficult time for you, and I appreciate your service.

Best regards,

Michelle Burkhart

109 E. Warren Street

Michigan City, IN 46360

**COPY**