



LA PORTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Sheila Matias
President

Dr. Vidya Kora
Vice President

Richard Mrozinski
Member

Special Commissioners' Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 22, 2020 La Porte County Complex Room 3 at 3:00 p.m.

President Sheila Matias called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.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 extending the county's Covid-19 operations policy to May 1, 2020 which is consistent with the Governor's latest executive order. Commissioner Kora motioned to extend the policy. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

Considered resolution in support of Covid-19 3.5 aid package to counties requested by the National Association of Counties and Indiana Association of Counties. Attorney Shaw Friedman gave a bit of background on the resolution. Stated the Covid-19 3.5 aid package would have provided immediate direct cash relief to Indiana counties and it was being considered over the weekend. It was supported with a resolution by the County Council on Monday. As many county governments around the country went on record, there were some issues since that time and this resolution deals with that, putting the Commissioners on record that if any future Covid-19 relief or supplemental bill were to happen, that relief be provided to Indiana counties. Prior to reading the resolution Commissioner Kora thanked the Council for their support but unfortunately this was not added to the bill that was just passed by the Senate. Hoping that by passing this and forwarding it to the Indiana Congressional delegation and lobbying them to support this resolution would help our county. Commissioner Kora read the resolution into the minutes. Commissioner Kora motioned to accept the resolution. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried. *****Resolution 2020-11**

Commissioner Vidya Kora stated he would like to allow Clerk Kathy Chroback to speak on Absentee Voting and mail-in applications. **President Sheila Matias** inserted Department Head Reports to this section of the agenda. Commissioner Kora said he urged Kathy to consider sending out applications requesting *ballots by mail* to voters because he sees the risk to voters and poll workers all coming together on Election Day. An example would be in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where after their primary election at least 17 individuals came down with Covid-19 after voting in person.

Department Head Reports/Comments

Clerk of the Circuit Court Kathy Chroback reported on the cost for mailing out an application to vote by mail to every registered voter in our county. La Porte County has approximately 71,000 registered voters. An estimate of 2,000 ballots have been returned to Absentee Voting. Kathy stated about \$40,000 would be needed to just mail out the applications. Other costs include all supplies from envelopes, ballot cards, secrecy envelopes, stamps for returning the ballots to address labels. Not only will supplies be needed but additional labor as well. An estimated total of \$261,288.73 was given to the Commissioners. An application to vote by mail is available online. May 21st is the deadline for submitting an application. Commissioner Kora motioned to support Clerk Kathy Chroback in this effort; mail out an application to vote by mail to voters that have not requested one yet and consider a joint workshop soon with the Council to fund this effort. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried.

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William "Bill" Wilson, Executive Director of Adult Facilities for Indiana Department of Corrections, was present via Zoom to give a status report on the Indiana State Prison and Westville Correctional Facility which resides in our county. Currently Westville has 129 offenders that tested positive for COVID-19. Twenty six offenders are symptomatic and isolated. All 3 major complexes are on restriction. Offenders are quarantined to their housing units and are basically on lockdown. Commissioner Kora asked how many are currently in the hospital. Mr. Wilson replied he believes it is 8 offenders at the hospital in Michigan City. What are the numbers at ISP? Mr. Wilson said he did not have the information. He reported his obligation is to follow the guidelines by Dr. Box, Indiana State Health Commissioner, to report all positive cases to the state level of the department of health when Commissioner Kora asked if the reports can be submitted to our county health department at the same time. President Sheila Matias stated the problem is communication. The two facilities reside in La Porte County and are our biggest employers. A lot of community members work at the facilities then return home to their families. They may stop to get gas or groceries on the way home. The concern is to report to the local level. Bill Wilson said he will reach out to ISP to find out why phone calls are not being returned to our county health department. President Matias asked how many staff members are at each facility and how many tested positive? Bill reported 18 staff members at Westville are positive. Commissioner Kora stated again how important communication is between the correctional facilities and the county. President Matias asked again for the numbers of positive staff members at the Indiana State Prison which Mr. Wilson declined to answer, stating his information may not be accurate. Commissioner Kora said Testing, Tracing and Isolation is the key to getting over the pandemic. President Matias questioned a contractual ambulance company to assist with transportation so the county's service will not get overwhelmed. Mr. Wilson replied he is waiting for a response from a contract medical provider. President Matias stated it is important for DOC to share the information once they get it in order for our 911 center to alternate transport calls. **Coroner Bob Cutler** said a few concerns have been worked out, one of them being a refrigerator truck if needed, is available. Bill Wilson said he would not comment on that because he does not know enough information on the truck but he has spoken with Mr. Reynolds at the Ott/Haverstock funeral home in Michigan City. DOC is embedded with the Homeland Security in Indianapolis. Attorney Shaw Friedman said Randy Novak is present, via Zoom, and has information regarding the truck. Council President Randy Novak said he had a conversation with the head of Homeland Security, Steve Cox, and that DOC is handling the truck situation. President Sheila Matias asked Dr. Sandra Deausy and Jenny Smith from the Health Department to give an update. Dr. Deausy stated the numbers of positive cases are still going up in the county, still going up in the state. Deaths are increasing with the peak not being reached yet. Illinois is expecting their peak to be in mid-May or June. Dr. Deausy said she does not know what metrics are being used to determine the peaks. Governor Eric Holcomb will lay out phases to begin the re-opening of our state on May 1st. Test, Trace and Isolate is important. Cannot trace if you do not test. Social distance is important as well. Follow the rules and listen to the Governor. Reporter Stan Maddux asked the number of positive cases in our county. Jenny Smith, Health Department, replied 52 positive cases in La Porte County **not** including Westville Correctional Facility. At this time there is not enough testing being done. Swabs are available just not enough reagents. Those tested first are health care workers, patients being admitted to hospitals for further testing. Commissioner Kora stated people with **severe** symptoms are being tested and those with mild cases are instructed to isolate themselves at home. He explained the steps taken once a person tests positive. The nursing staff at our health department will reach out to those that have had contact with the positive case person and check on those individuals as well. In an ideal world all contacts should all be tested in case they are showing no symptoms. Ted Yoakum, Herald Argus, stated employees at Westville Correctional have been saying they do not have enough PPE. Tony Mancuso, Director of the health department, replied that the PPE for the employees would come from the state department of health and not county level. President Matias stated offers were made to both Westville and Indiana State Prison for PPE supplies if needed but both were turned down, saying they had enough for their employees. Ted had a follow up question on the golf courses when they are allowed to open. What guidelines will be followed? Tony Mancuso, Director Health Department, replied letters were sent to the Golf Courses and all are aware of the guidelines and/or restrictions. Attorney Shaw Friedman stated golf courses are abiding by the guidelines. One person per golf cart, practicing social distancing, golf courses are allowed to be open for outdoor recreational activity as long as the rules are followed. All four golf courses in our county have submitted a plan.

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Justin Kiel, Westville Indicator, asked when did the county stop receiving information from the prison? Commissioner Kora replied they did not actually stop reporting however instead there were no cases reported until Franciscan Health had several positive cases admitted to the hospital then Westville was questioned by county officials. A conference call took place and the county was informed there was an outbreak in one building which led to our county numbers spiking. Eighty six cases were added to our numbers in one day. Westville reported new cases only to the state department and not the county and that was the cause for discrepancy in the numbers.

Commissioners Comments

Commissioner Rich Mrozinski encouraged everyone to check on the elderly people they know, see if they need anything.

Commissioner Vidya Kora thanked Dr. Deausy and Jenny Smith for attending the meeting and answering questions. Contract tracing is very important. Tony Mancuso's health department will be doing follow-ups on positive cases. Voting by mail is ideal to keep everyone safe.

Commissioner Sheila Matias thanked Commissioner Kora for voicing his opinion on voting by mail versus going to the polling locations on Election Day. She also thanked Commissioner Mrozinski for reminding us to check on people. President Matias announced Solid Waste would be opening their facility for compost and yard waste drop off on Monday, April 27th. Thanked Dr. Deausy, Jenny Smith and First Responders for doing their job especially during this pandemic.

Meeting adjourned at 4:16 p.m.

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

DATE 5-6-2020

Sheila Matias
Vidya Kora
Rich Mrozinski

ATTEST: _____

Auditor

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

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