



LA PORTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

555 Michigan Avenue, Suite 202

La Porte, IN 46350-3400

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Joseph Haney
President

Connie Gramarossa
Vice President

Richard Mrozinski
Member

La Porte County Commission Reorganizational Meeting Minutes Wednesday, January 4th, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. County Complex Room 3 & via Zoom

Call to Order: Fulfilling a customary role until the selection of the Commission President was completed, Auditor Tim Stabosz called the meeting to order.

Pledge of Allegiance: Commissioner Mrozinski led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: Chief Deputy Auditor Vaughn Galloway called the roll: Commissioner Rich Mrozinski – Present; Commissioner Joe Haney – Present; Commissioner Connie Gramarossa – Present.

Election of Officers: Auditor Tim Stabosz opened the floor for the Election of Officers, beginning with nominations for the President.

Appointment of the President of the Board of Commissioners

Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to nominate Commissioner Gramarossa for the position of 2023 President of the La Porte County Commission. **The motion died for lack of a second.**

Commissioner Connie Gramarossa motioned to nominate Commissioner Joe Haney for the position of 2023 President of the La Porte County Commission. Commissioner Joe Haney seconded. Nominations were closed, and there was a motion by Commissioner Gramarossa to appoint Commissioner Haney as Commission President. Commissioner Haney seconded. **Motion carried 3-0. Mr. Stabosz relinquished the Chair to the newly appointed Commission President, Joe Haney.**

Appointment of the Vice President of the Board of Commissioners

Commissioner Joe Haney stepped down and motioned to nominate Commissioner Connie Gramarossa for the position of 2023 Vice President of the La Porte County Commission. Commissioner Gramarossa seconded. Nominations were closed, and Commissioner Gramarossa moved to appoint Commissioner Gramarossa as Vice President of the Commission. Commissioner Haney seconded. **Motion carried 2-0 (Commissioner Rich Mrozinski did not audibly vote on the motion).**

Consider the Agenda: Commissioner Gramarossa motioned to add multiple items to the agenda:

1. Under item 8a: Consider reinstating of County Planner, Facilities Director and Commissioners' Confidential Executive Assistant to policy making annual appointments.
2. Under Old Business – SEH Contract for the Office of the Auditor.
3. Under New Business:
 - a. Consider formal recommendation by Insured of La Porte County of Property Management Inc. as County Complex Restoration Project Lead Contractor to submit insurance to Chubb Insurance.
 - b. Consider Repealing Resolution 2021-07: Electronic Meeting Policy, and Consider Resolution Establishing New Electronic Meeting Policy.
 - c. Consider Repealing Resolution 2013-01: Office of Economic Development.
 - d. Consider Resolution Establishing Economic Development, Planning & Governmental Affairs Office.
 - e. Removal of item #18: Commissioner Comments.

Commissioner Haney seconded. **Motion carried 2-0 (Commissioner Rich Mrozinski did not audibly vote on the motion).**

Consider Approval of the December 21, 2022 Minutes: Motion to approve made by Commissioner Mrozinski. Commissioner Gramarossa seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Consideration of Claims: Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Claims with Payroll ending 12/30/2022 - \$1,329,738.59 and Operating Expense Claims - \$2,592,488.64. Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Gramarossa seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Consider Appointment of Department Heads and Professional Advisors: With the addition of line-item no. 8a, Commissioner Haney motioned to add the consideration of the reinstatement of the County Planner, Facilities Director, and Commissioners' Confidential Executive Assistant to the annual appointment list. Commissioner Gramarossa seconded. **Motion carried 2-0 (Commissioner Rich Mrozinski did not audibly vote on the motion).**

Commissioner Haney read aloud a list of recommended appointees:

Insurance Agencies of Record – Michiana Insurance, General Insurance Services
County Financial Advisors – Cender & Company, Baker Tilly
County Attorney – Jones Law Firm

Commissioners' Confidential Executive Assistant – Debra Fly-Nelson
Animal Shelter Director – Eric Hayes
Community Corrections Director – Mericka Beaty
County Engineer – Jerry Jay Sullivan
County Highway Superintendent – Allen Stevens
Planning & Regulatory Affairs – Mitch Bishop
EMA Director – Robert Sabie
EMS Director – Andrew McGuire
E-911 Director – Barb Huston
IT Director – Darlene Hale
Museum Curator – Danielle Adams
Parks & Recreation Superintendent – Jeremy Sobecki
Right-To-Know & Hazmat – Jeff Hamilton
Director of Facilities – Sean Fitzpatrick
Veterans Service Office – Joseph Golec
Weights & Measures Interim Inspector – Michael Quinn
Weights & Measures Deputy Inspector – Dakota Euler
Building Commissioner – Michael Polan
Acting MS4 Director – Michael Polan
Health Department Administrator – Amanda Lahners

Commissioner Mrozinski asked what had happened to the previously appointed MS4 Director, to which Commissioner Haney and Commissioner Gramarossa reiterated that Michael Polan had been their designated appointee for the position in 2023. Commissioner Mrozinski also commented that the newly appointed County Attorney, Andrew Jones, had previously been Auditor Tim Stabosz's private attorney for a defamation case, and added that he thought this was a conflict of interest to hire him as the County Attorney. Commissioner Haney clarified that neither Mr. Jones nor his law firm represented the Auditor in any capacity at this time. Mr. Jones added that he had previously withdrawn as a representative of Mr. Stabosz, even though he had represented him in the past.

Commissioner Mrozinski additionally asked why the County Highway Director had not been reappointed, to which Commissioner Gramarossa explained that this was due to disciplinary action against the previous Director, which Commissioner Haney added could not be openly discussed during Commissioners' meetings. Commissioner Mrozinski debated that executive meetings were previously required to oversee staff removals regarding disciplinary actions; however, Commissioner Gramarossa noted that in 2018 when she had previously been a part of the Commission, Commissioner Mrozinski had terminated an employee which she had not been notified about until after the termination itself took place.

Motion to approve the list of appointments made by Commissioner Gramarossa. Commissioner Haney seconded. **Motion carried 2-1 (Commissioner Haney and Commissioner Gramarossa AYE, Commissioner Mrozinski NAY).**

Board of Commissioners Appointments: Commissioner Haney read aloud a list of recommended appointees:

Alcoholic Beverage Commission – Ron Schafer
Animal Control Advisory Board – Dr. Patrick Dorroh, LuAnn Troxel, and Joe Haney
Board of Construction Review – Marcella Kunstek, Joel Florek, Deb Vance, and James Pressel III
Board of Zoning Appeals – Deb Vance and Vern Schafer

Convention & Visitors Bureau – Staci Benning
Drainage Board – Hugh Glasgow, Jeff Mitzner and Pat Vance
Fair Management & Events Corporation – Joe Haney
Pioneer Cemetery Commission – Bruce Johnson
Plan Commission – Deb Vance and Joe Haney
Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals – Tom Fath, Matt Bernacchi, and Amy Blind
Redevelopment Commission – Mark Parkman, Scott Cooley and Joe Haney
Regional Bus Authority – Rodney McCormick
Regional Sewer & Water District – Mitch Bishop

Commissioner Haney added that any additional appointments that had been missed would be scheduled at a later meeting. Motion to approve made by Commissioner Gramarossa. Commissioner Haney seconded.
Motion carried 2-0 (Commissioner Rich Mrozinski did not audibly vote on the motion).

Consider Commission Liaison Appointments: Commissioner Haney read aloud a list of recommended liaison appointments:

Animal Control Advisory Board – Commissioner Haney
Community Corrections – Commissioner Haney
Drainage Board – Commissioner Gramarossa
E-911 – Commissioner Haney
Fair Board – Commissioner Gramarossa
Fair Management & Events Corporation – Commissioner Haney
County Highway Department – Commissioner Gramarossa
Job Evaluation Committee – Commissioner Gramarossa
Juvenile Services Center – Commissioner Haney
Kankakee River Basin & Yellow River Basin Commission – Commissioner Mrozinski
Museum – Commissioner Haney
Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission – Commissioner Gramarossa
Pioneer Cemetery Commission – Commissioner Gramarossa
Plan Commission – Commissioner Haney
Redevelopment Commission – Commissioner Haney
Regional Sewer District – Commissioner Gramarossa
Right-To-Know – Commissioner Gramarossa
Solid Waste – Commissioner Haney, Commissioner Gramarossa, and Commissioner Mrozinski
Weights & Measures – Commissioner Gramarossa
Workforce Development – Commissioner Gramarossa
Health Department – Commissioner Haney
Shared Ethics Advisory Commission – Heather Stevens, County Clerk

Motion to approve all appointments made by Commissioner Gramarossa. Commissioner Haney seconded.
Motion carried 2-1 (Commissioner Haney and Commissioner Gramarossa AYE, Commissioner Mrozinski NAY).

Commissioner Haney added that the Community Corrections Advisory Board had multiple positions that needed to be filled, and listed off his recommendations for appointees: Kurt Earnst, Steve Eyrick, Dan Peck, Bruce Ashley Sr., Gail Bos, Steve Kozlowski, Rodney McCormick, Liam Hobbs, Vaughn

Galloway, Regina Ruddell, Joe Haney, Erika Stallworth, Mike Callahan, Debra Ackerman, and Spencer England. He added that any positions not filled would be held over to a future meeting.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Gramarossa. Commissioner Haney seconded. **Motion carried 2-1 (Commissioner Haney and Commissioner Gramarossa AYE, Commissioner Mrozinski NAY).**

Designation of Publications: Pursuant to IC Code 5-3-1, the La Porte County Board of Commissioners moved that the following newspapers be designated as qualified publications in which La Porte County shall publish notices as required by law: La Porte County Herald-Dispatch, Westville Indicator, and The Regional News.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Gramarossa. Commissioner Haney seconded. **Motion carried 2-0 (Commissioner Rich Mrozinski did not audibly vote on the motion).**

Consider Commissioners Meeting Dates for 2023: Commissioner Joe Haney read aloud the proposed meeting dates for the Board of Commissioners' 2023 meeting schedule: January 4th, January 18th, February 1st, February 15th, March 1st, March 15th, April 5th, April 19th, May 3rd, May 17th, June 7th, June 21st, July 5th, July 19th, August 2nd, August 16th, September 6th, September 20th, October 4th, October 18th, November 1st, November 15th, December 6th, and December 20th. He explained that the first meetings of each month would take place at 10am central time, and the second meeting of each month would take place at 6pm central time.

Motion to approve made by Commissioner Gramarossa. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Public Comment:

Steve Holifield, 6782 E. 100 S., Mill Creek – Mr. Holifield voiced that he was grateful for the appointment of a new County Attorney, and asked if a third party had looked into reviewing the new attorney's contract. Commissioner Haney explained that contracts for the position were previously advertised, and that the attorney's contract in question would be vetted before the next meeting. Mr. Holifield pressed the importance of allowing for public comment during the Commissioners' meetings, and noted his disapproval of the previous attorney's ridiculing of public commenters in the past. He additionally advised enforcing a better whistleblower program for County employees.

Rodney McCormick, 617 Union St., Michigan City – Mr. McCormick congratulated Commissioner Haney and welcomed Commissioner Gramarossa and Commissioner Mrozinski, and additionally voiced his relief to see the appointment of a new County Attorney. He added that, especially given what he considered a rough beginning to the current Commissioners' meeting, that the people of La Porte County wanted to see change, and were tired of the Commissioners arguing with one another, and that now was the time to come together to create great change for the community. He thanked the Commissioners for the appointments he had been given by them.

Tommy Kulavik, 1316 Ohio St., Michigan City – Mr. Kulavik urged the Commissioners to look into the sale of the 8th & Wabash building in Michigan City, which had been purchased in 2002 and had been mostly unused since. He advised reaching out to a real estate broker to ensure that the building could be

sold for a fair market price, and urged not handing it over to the City of Michigan City, as he asserted was previously advised by the Mayor of Michigan City, Duane Parry. Mr. Kulavik also requested the Commissioners ensure that lights in the County buildings were being turned off when unoccupied.

Commissioner Haney assured Mr. Kulavik that he had originally intended sell the 8th & Wabash property in the first or second quarter of 2023; however due to the recent flooding of the County's Complex building, the 8th & Wabash building was temporarily being used to house displaced Complex building departments so they could resume regular functions. He added that once the employees were able to return to their respective departments in the Complex building following its repair, the 8th & Wabash building could then be reconsidered for sale.

Rick Kentaft, 324 Bach St., La Porte – Mr. Kentaft reminded the Commissioners that they were all public servants, and that he would act as a watchdog to the actions of the Commissioners. He added that he wished to see the contract for the newly appointed County attorney, as said attorney had previously been the Auditor's attorney for a private case, and he strongly believed that this was a conflict of interest. He voiced his outrage for the appointment of Allen Stevens as the new County Highway Department Superintendent, citing a 1993 police report involving Mr. Stevens, which Mr. Kentaft alleged was indicative of racism on Mr. Stevens' part.

Sergeant Anthony Lewis (no address provided) – Representing himself as a voting-rights activist and a combat veteran, Mr. Lewis asked the Commissioners if a citizen such as himself would have the ability to apply to be the President of the Commission. Commissioner Haney explained that, to become the President of the Commission, one would first have to run as a Commissioner and be elected as one before the position could be obtained.

Tim Stabosz, La Porte County Auditor – Mr. Stabosz explained he was speaking to allay any concerns about County Attorney Andrew Jones having a conflict of interest in serving the County. Commissioner Gramarossa opposed the idea of an elected official directly addressing the concerns of the public during the public comments section of the meeting. Mr. Stabosz clarified that he was not acting as an elected official, and instead speaking as a member of the public, which Commissioner Haney noted that he would be okay with Mr. Stabosz speaking as long as he did not speak directly to members of the public who had voiced their concerns about his previous involvement with Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones noted that Mr. Stabosz was well within his right to speak as a member of the public, however it was up to the Commissioners to decide what Stabosz could or could not comment on.

Mr. Stabosz clarified that Mr. Jones withdrew from representing him in an action by a vendor of the County, even though Mr. Stabosz believed his and the County's interests coincided, with the County itself interested in fair billing from their attorney as a vendor, and the County having an interest in protecting the Auditor in his role and statements. He added that he had nothing to do with the Jones Law Firm being hired by the County Commission, and that Commissioner Haney had an independent relationship with Mr. Jones and his firm. Mr. Stabosz added that he had no part in the interview process or solicitation of any attorneys that the Commission had pursued.

Michael Quinn, La Porte County Weights & Measures – Mr. Quinn commended his wife, who had worked for the County for 17.5 years and retired from the County's workforce as of December 30th of 2022. The Commission expressed their gratitude toward Mrs. Quinn's service to the County.

Department Head Comments:

Ela Bilderback, Recorder – Ms. Bilderback approached the Commission to report on the activities of the Recorder's Office in 2022. She reported that 16,616 documents had been recorded in 2022, which although was a reduced number from 2021, was likely a result of a slow housing market in 2022. She noted that in 2022, the Recorder's Office had brought in \$754,668.07 in recording fees, with \$242,000 of this income being directed into the General Fund. \$16,382 had been directed into the Security Protection Fund, and an additional \$72,292 had been directed into the Enhanced Access Fund, \$81,910 had been directed into the Surveyors Recorder Fund, and \$314,389 went to the Recorder's Perpetuation Fund, of which \$330,000 went to the Recorder's budget, which paid for everything but salaries for two employees. Additionally, Ms. Bilderback informed the Commissioners that she had attended multiple educational meetings and training sessions, including an annual conference, where she learned that La Porte County did not have an Enhanced Access Fund as was required by the state. She worked closely with the Council Attorney, Chief Deputy Auditor Vaughn Galloway, and the SBOA's Ricci Hofherr to ensure that the account was created and that the Recorder's Office was compliant with state requirements. For her last update, Ms. Bilderback informed the Commission that she would be transporting the Recorder's collection of microfilm rolls to the climate-controlled vault located in the Courthouse once the weather became more favorable, as she had recently discovered that 31 rolls containing 226,642 images had become damaged from improper storage, and she wanted to preserve the remainder of the rolls. Commissioner Gramarossa thanked Ms. Bilderback for approaching the Commissioners with her report, and advised that she hoped to have other departments annually report on their activities as well.

Amanda Lahners, Health Department Administrator – Ms. Lahners informed the Council that all floors of the Complex building had received damage from the recent flooding, and that the Health Department was working with an environmental engineer to closely monitor and clear each floor in addition to checking damaged paper documents to see if they were safe for the County to keep on the premises. Commissioner Gramarossa added that eight departments were directly affected by the water damage, and that Ms. Lahners had been onsite inspecting the building since the damage had been discovered. Commissioner Gramarossa added that insurance information regarding the extent of the damage would be available at the next Commissioners Meeting, and some emergency departments had already temporarily reestablished themselves so they could resume regular function, including the Health Department, which relocated to the 8th & Wabash building in Michigan City. She noted that a new insurance adjuster would be working with the Health Department to assess the damage done, and any new information that the Commissioners received would be shared with the public.

Ron Heeg, Sheriff – Mr. Heeg commended the action taken by the Commissioners and Health Department regarding the flooding repairs in the Complex building.

Darlene Hale, IT Director – Ms. Hale noted that she and her team were working closely with the Facilities and Health Departments to ensure that hard-surface equipment was sanitized and safely relocated, and that they were also working with the environmental engineer to assist with the Complex building's repair.

Andrew Jones, County Attorney – Mr. Jones introduced himself and stated his pride in being able to serve the citizens of the County. He promised that he would never direct ridicule upon any public speaking citizens of the County, and thanked everyone for their comments. Commissioner Haney clarified

at this time that, per an ethics opinion report received, there were no conflicts of interest in hiring Mr. Jones as an attorney for the County.

Sean Fitzpatrick, Facilities Director – Mr. Fitzpatrick introduced himself as the new Facilities Director, and noted that he would work closely with the Commissioners, environmentalist, and various contractors to ensure that the Complex's restoration went smoothly. He addressed that he intended to bring other facilities back into a state of repair along with resolving other pending maintenance issues to make sure that the County buildings get brought back up to standards.

Jeremy Sobecki, Parks & Recreation Superintendent – Mr. Sobecki explained to the Commissioners that a position for a Chief Naturalist had just opened in the Parks & Recreation Department. Additionally, he noted that he received a grant from the Healthcare Foundation which would allow for the addition of new displays in the Nature Center. He finalized his updates by indicating that R&L Roofing had finished working on the re-siding of the Nature Center, and the project would be complete in spring when a new coat of paint could be applied to the siding.

Joe Haney, County Commission President – Commissioner Haney informed the room that the mute buttons that had been previously used during Commission meetings to silence speakers at the podium were officially being removed. [Commissioners Haney and Gramarossa held up the mute devices for public display, and then set them aside.]

New Business:

- a. **Consider retroactive approval of the Dec. 26, 2022 Declaration of Emergency Repair by the Commission President and Council President:** Motion to approve made by Commissioner Mrozinski. Commissioner Gramarossa seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**
- b. **Consider formal recommendation by the insured (La Porte County) of La Porte County Management Inc. as the County Complex Restoration Project Lead Contractor to submit to the Insurer, Chubb Insurance:** Motion to approve made by Commissioner Mrozinski. Commissioner Gramarossa seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**
- c. **Consider Resolution 2021-07 – Current Electronic Meeting Policy:** Commissioner Haney noted that a new policy and Resolution would be established following the repeal of Resolution 2021-07, and the primary change would affect the number of days in which a Commissioner could appear electronically for Commissioners' meetings. **Motion to repeal made by Commissioner Gramarossa. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 2-1 (Commissioner Haney and Commissioner Gramarossa AYE, Commissioner Mrozinski NAY)**
- d. **Consider a Resolution establishing an electronic meeting policy, Resolution 2023-01 – Will allow for electronic attendance at one Commission meeting per year:** Commissioner Mrozinski asked if there would be a second reading, which Commissioner Haney confirmed that there would not be, as a second reading was not required and was not enforced during the establishment of Resolution 2021-07. Commissioner Mrozinski additionally asked if the Resolution had been vetted by the County Attorney, which Commissioner Haney confirmed that the resolution had indeed been vetted. Motion to approve made by Commissioner Gramarossa.

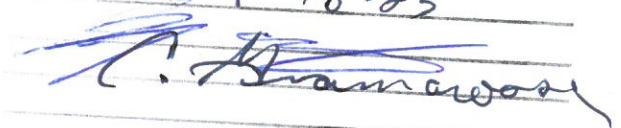
Commissioner Haney seconded. **Motion carried 2-1 (Commissioner Haney and Commissioner Gramarossa AYE, Commissioner Mrozinski NAY).**

- e. **Consider Repeal of Resolution 2013-01 – Office of Economic Development:** Commissioner Mrozinski noted his disagreement with the dissolution of the Office of Economic Development, to which Commissioner Haney explained that La Porte County's Economic Development ranked 62nd in the state of Indiana, and had frequently missed out on grant opportunities that could have provided millions of dollars' worth of funds to the County every year. Motion to repeal made by Commissioner Gramarossa. Commissioner Haney seconded. **Motion carried 2-1 (Commissioner Haney and Commissioner Gramarossa AYE, Commissioner Mrozinski NAY).**
- f. **Consider a Resolution Establishing Center for Economic Development, Planning, and Governmental Affairs:** Commissioner Haney requested to hold off on the item until the next meeting to ensure that it could be put on the agenda properly. He added that work in this area could still be done through the Redevelopment Commission, and that the Commissioners would ensure that nothing important would get dropped in the interim.

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Gramarossa. Commissioner Mrozinski Seconded. **Motion Carried 3-0.**

EXAMINED AND APPROVED BY THE
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE
COUNTY OF LA PORTE, INDIANA
DATE 1-18-23



ATTEST: 
Auditor
LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

ORIGINAL