

MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE LA PORTE COUNTY COUNCIL
December 15th, 2022 at 6:00PM

A Special Meeting of the La Porte County Council was held on December 15th, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. (central time) in the Assembly Room of the La Porte County Government Complex, 809 State St., La Porte, IN 46350.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:08pm by the Council President, Randy Novak.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Councilman Rosenbaum.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Novak, Mr. Cunningham, Mr. Yagelski, Mr. Rosenbaum, Mr. Mollenhauer, and Mrs. Gramarossa were all physically present for the meeting, while Mr. Garner appeared electronically via Zoom.

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 15TH, 2022 AGENDA

Mr. Rosenbaum requested to add additional items to the agenda:

1. Since the "Approval of the December 15th, 2022 Agenda" was not listed, Mr. Rosenbaum requested to add it below "Roll Call."
2. Since "Department Head Reports" was not listed, Mr. Rosenbaum requested to add it below "Public Comment."
3. Under New Business: item no. 3 "La Porte County Juvenile Services requesting not-to-exceed \$16,400 for Holiday time payout for accrued holiday time over five days."
4. Under New Business: item no. 4 "MS4 requesting to transfer \$500 from telephone 100.30004.00000.0161 to Office Supplies 1000.20001.00000.0161."
5. Under New Business: item no. 5 "Animal Shelter requesting to transfer \$20,000 from spay/neuter 1106 to part time account 1000.10130.00000.0156."
6. Under Ordinances and Resolutions "Resolution 2022-12-1: A Resolution Approving Transferring Certain Funds to Resolve Deficits in Community Corrections Grant Funds."

Mr. Rosenbaum explained that any changes to Appropriations, Transfers, and Requests would be addressed when the Council got to them later in the meeting.

To ensure that it was noted on the public record, Mr. Cunningham informed the room that no Commissioners had made themselves present for the La Porte County Council & Commission Joint Workshop just prior to the Council meeting.

- i. Motion to approve made by Mr. Rosenbaum and seconded by Mrs. Gramarossa.
- ii. All members voted in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jeff Koon – La Porte County EMS Captain

Mr. Koon approached the Council to wish them a happy and safe holiday, and recognized how difficult it was in integrating employee pay raises during that last year and a half while Covid was still very active, and stated that employees were not only grateful for the aforementioned pay increases, but also for approving funding requests to fulfill the needs of their respective departments. Mr. Koon asked the Council to not overlook the Sheriff's Garage Maintenance employees, who performed the necessary work in maintaining the emergency vehicles of the County, when even area dealerships did not have the qualifications to work on said vehicles. Mr. Koon added that there had even been occasions when these employees worked outside of regular County hours to ensure that the vehicles received emergency care.

Dion Campbell – Former Chief of the Michigan City Police Dept/Juvenile Services Center Staff Member

Mr. Campbell approached the Council on behalf of the staff of La Porte County's Juvenile Services Center. As a recently employed staff member of the Center, Mr. Campbell stated how he was appalled at the state of the staffing of the facility. He additionally explained the importance of offering competitive wages to County employees, to assist with retention and recruitment of staff. He emphasized that the Juvenile Services Center was no exception when it came to offering competitive pay, especially when the center's employees were subjected to 16-hour shifts where they needed to manage La Porte's troubled juveniles, often with mental health needs and potential violent tendencies, as delicately as possible. These shifts, he continued, ensured that the minimal need for coverage was met, and the resulting understaffing meant that all staff members of the center needed to act and work as Youth Specialist Workers, even if the positions that they were hired for did not list this as a requirement. He noted that 5 injuries had been reported as a result of working with violent juveniles since he had been working at the center, which was roughly under one month.

Mr. Campbell also asked that any negative opinions of the Juvenile Services Center be reconsidered, as the hard work by the center's staff could not be broadcast – and therefore not fully understood by the public – for privacy reasons on behalf of the center's resident juveniles. He requested the Council to show value to the current Juvenile Services Center staff and asked that additional staff members be hired to assist with the increase of intakes of violent juveniles at the center, and urged for equal pay amongst the Juvenile Services Staff.

Mr. Novak noted that the disparity in wages could only be addressed to a certain point due to employees' designated job classifications, and when pay raises were applied, an employee's pay could not be raised out of the scale of the classification for which their hired positions were designated. He

added that with the Council's recent acquisition of a salary study, they were looking into ways to increase pay within the letter of the law, research for which would continue into 2023.

Mr. Cunningham noted that employee jobs may need to undergo reclassification to allow necessary pay increases. Mr. Novak cited the recent increase in the County Highway Department's wage increases as an example, and explained that the pay raises were possible because most of the employees that received these increases were classified as LTC 3s, and were increased to LTC 4s or LTC 5s to allow for their wage increases. The Sheriff's Garage Maintenance employees, however, were already maxed out within their job classifications as LTC 5s, and as such, could not receive pay raises within their designated classifications; however, the Council had been advised against creating an LTC 6 position due to the high amount of those job classifications that already existed in the County. Mr. Novak reassured the public that the Council was considering all of its options, including job reclassifications where there was room to do so, and a workshop on the topic was already scheduled in January of 2023.

Melissa Barker – Juvenile Services Center Staff Member

Mrs. Barker asked how long it would take to potentially recategorize Juvenile Services Center employees to ensure that none were left out of a 15% pay raise that was approved in October. She continued to explain that, in the October meeting that included discussion about increasing the County Highway Department's pay increases, the Juvenile Service Center employees were designated to receive 15% pay increases; however, in December, it was discovered that only 70% of the center's employees were classified in the job classification that was scheduled to receive the 15% pay increase in 2023. As a result, the remaining 30% of Juvenile Services Center employees would only receive the Council's previously approved 10% for all other County employees, despite doing the same amount of work as those who would be receiving the 15% pay raise.

Mr. Yagelski noted that for as long as he had worked in the county, pay raises were distributed by either applying a direct percentage to an employee's wage, or assigning a different wage when an employee was hired into a different position within the County. He added that although the Council had received a salary study in late November, the time it would take to review it and decide on any wage alterations could not be done before the year's end, and as such, would take place in 2023. Mr. Novak stated that the recently approved 10% pay increase for all County employees was to try and close in on the general wage gap; however, some departments would still need to be looked into further to ensure that employees were receiving an appropriate wage, research for which could begin as early as January 1st, 2023. Mr. Novak clarified that giving 30% of the Juvenile Services Center only a 10% raise was never the intention of the Council, and that a reclassification of said employees might be considered to ensure that they received a 15% raise. Mr. Barker stated that she hoped to see action on resolving the pay raise issue quickly, as the affected employees felt unappreciated.

Lynn Rowe – Juvenile Services Center Supervisor

Mrs. Rowe noted that in the meeting that included the reclassification of the County Highway Department's employees, nothing had been noted regarding PAT employees at the Juvenile Services Center, and she felt as though the rug had been pulled out from underneath her and her staff when it was discovered that not every Juvenile Services Center employee would receive a 15% pay raise. She emphasized that every one of the center's employees performed the same roles, and as such, deserved the same pay raise. Mr. Yagelski added that the Council was unaware that the classification differences would cause some employees to receive 10% increases instead of the proposed 15% increases.

Allen Stevens – Chairman of the La Porte County Republican Party

Mr. Stevens informed that he had accepted the resignation of Councilwoman Gramarossa, which would be effective at 11:59:59 on December 31st, 2022. A caucus would be held for her seat the upcoming Saturday, December 17th at 10am in the meeting room of the County Complex building, which would be open to the public. He listed the five candidates who would be running: Adam Koronka, Brett Kessler, Tom Fath, Deb Vance, and Ron Schafer.

Mr. Cunningham noted that in the past twenty years of the County of La Porte, an across-the-board 10% pay increase had never been administered, while some years didn't see any pay raises at all. He added that while things weren't always fair, the Council was working to resolve pay concerns as best it could.

DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORTS

Michael Callahan – Juvenile Services Center Assistant Director

Mr. Callahan reiterated the statements of his colleagues who had spoken before him. He cited the description of the PAT and COMOT job descriptions for the center's employees which read: "incumbent might be exposed to irate, hostile individuals and have to respond to situations involving potential physical harm to self and others," and urged the Council to ensure that all of the center's staff, who were dedicated to their line of work, would receive a 15% pay increase.

Mr. Callahan additionally informed the Council that as of January 1st, 2023, the Juvenile Services Center would be receiving funding in the amount of \$1,907.07 per diem per child, which was an increase from the \$776 per diem per child the year prior. The funding received by the Juvenile Services Center would go directly into the General Fund. Mr. Callahan also informed the Council that while the center was currently servicing a total of 29 juveniles, 6 juveniles were living at the center, 5 were coming to the La Porte center everyday for day reporting, 5 were going to the Michigan City facility for day reporting, and two more scheduled to begin day reporting as of January 1st, 2023.

Mr. Yagelski inquired with Mr. Callahan if outsourcing the center's kitchen work and food production onto area public schools would assist with the workload of the Juvenile Services Center staff. Mr. Callahan stated that he had reached out to area schools, who in turn had informed them that their own workload was too great to assist with his request. Additionally, area schools would not be able to provide meals for the center's juveniles in the evening, or on weekends and holidays. Mr. Yagelski informed Mr. Callahan that he had reached out to a state representative who stated that the Juvenile Services Center could demand this service from area schools, and that any meals needed outside of schools' hours could be gleaned from local restaurants, which Mr. Yagelski confirmed that some restaurants confirmed that they would be willing to assist. Mr. Callahan explained that strict nutritional guidelines needed to be adhered to in the preparation of the juveniles' food, but additionally, the Juvenile Services Center did not currently have any issues staffing for food service. In fact, he noted, he would have rather seen his food budget cut during recent budget hearings over having the center's maintenance budget being cut, as the center's building was not in ideal shape.

Darlene Hale – IT Director

Ms. Hale agreed with the context of Mr. Cunningham’s statements regarding employee wage increases, and noted that the 10% increase was appreciated, and that she was looking forward to additional wage discussions in January of 2023. She also wished Mr. Garner the best in his retirement.

Amanda Lahners – Health Department Administrator

Ms. Lahners informed the Council that repairs on the Health Department’s ceiling were complete, and thanked them for the approval for the Health Department to utilize its own funds to ensure that the repair could be done. She also noted that the Fetal Infant Mortality Review Team had its first meeting earlier in the month, and that in January of 2023, it would begin reviewing 13 infants’ deaths that dated back as far as 2020. The information from the review would hopefully benefit mothers and infants in La Porte County. She also noted that she met with the Job Reevaluation Committee, and was curious if their recommendations would be taken into consideration in 2022, or in January of 2023. Mr. Novak stated that since the jobs in question were part of the salary study, action would not be taken on them until January of 2023.

Citing La Porte County’s B- “report card” rating for infant mortality rates, Mr. Yagelski asked Ms. Lahners what the plan would be to increase La Porte’s standing with surrounding counties and the state. Ms. Lahners confirmed that La Porte County ranked 72nd out of 92 counties when it came to infant mortality rates. She explained that maternal health, availability of services, access to insurance and healthcare, immunization rates, education, and getting mother to partake in healthful practices would all increase La Porte’s general numbers. She also noted that La Porte’s average for mothers who smoked while they were pregnant was higher than both the state and national average. She explained that the Governor’s Public Health Commission had considered giving funding to the Health Department to help run its operations, funding which could equal upwards of 80% of the Health Department’s budget. She added that if this were to happen, it would aid in decreasing La Porte County’s less desirable health statistics.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

Resolution 2022-12-1: A Resolution Approving Transferring Certain Funds to Resolve Deficits in Community Corrections Grant Funds

- i. Motion to read by title only made by Mr. Yagelski and seconded by Mr. Rosenbaum.
- ii. All members voted in favor.

Mr. DiMartino clarified that the purpose of the Resolution was to balance two of Community Correction’s grant accounts that had deficits. The deficits in question had been incurring audit exceptions, resulting in the Indiana Department of Corrections contacting both Community Corrections and the State Board of Accounts to ensure that the deficits would be balanced and taken off of the books. Mr. DiMartino explained that the plan was to take funding from LIT and transfer

them directly into the two grant accounts in question, which would allow them zero out and no longer incur audit exceptions, including for 2022. The total funds taken from LIT would be in the amount of \$276,091.92.

- iii. Motion to approve made by Mr. Yagelski and seconded by Mr. Rosenbaum.
- iv. All members voted in favor.

NEW BUSINESS

- 1. Consider approval of Council President's authorization to hire replacement positions for:
La Porte Community Corrections – Counselor position**
 - i. Motion to approve made by Mr. Rosenbaum and seconded by Mr. Cunningham.
 - ii. All members voted in favor.
- 2. La Porte County E-911 is requesting to have two Assistant Shift Supervisors added at a total cost of \$4,000**
 - i. Motion to approve made by Mr. Rosenbaum and seconded by Mr. Cunningham.
 - ii. All members voted in favor.
- 3. La Porte County Juvenile Services requesting not-to-exceed \$16,400 for Holiday time payout for accrued holiday time over five days**
 - i. Motion to approve made by Mr. Yagelski and seconded by Mrs. Gramarossa.
 - ii. All members voted in favor.
- 4. MS4 requesting to transfer \$500 from telephone 1000.3004.00000.0161 to Office Supplies 1000.20001.00000.0161**
 - i. Motion to approve made by Mr. Garner and seconded by Mr. Cunningham.
 - ii. All members voted in favor.
- 5. Animal Shelter requesting to transfer \$20,000 from Spay/Neuter (1106) to part time account 1000.10130.00000.0156**
 - i. Motion to approve made by Mr. Mollenhauer and seconded by Mr. Garner.
 - ii. All members voted in favor.

Mr. Rosenbaum noted that an additional request from the Highway Department needed to be added to the agenda.

- i. Motion to amend the agenda to add item no. 6 under New Business "Highway Department requesting a pay increase of \$5,000 for the General Foreman" made by Mr. Rosenbaum and seconded by Mrs. Gramarossa.
- ii. All members voted in favor.

6. Highway Department requesting a pay increase of \$5,000 for the General Foreman

Mrs. Gramarossa asked why this item was only just now being looked into, to which Mr. Yagelski explained that it was only after the Highway Department was granted a pay increase to some of its CDL employees that it was discovered that the General Foreman was now receiving less pay than the employees that he presided over. Mr. Novak additionally stated that the item had been advertised previously at \$10,000 instead of \$5,000.

- i. Motion to approve made by Mr. Yagelski and seconded by Mr. Rosenbaum.
- ii. All members voted in favor.

APPROPRIATIONS, TRANSFERS, AND REQUESTS

La Porte County Commissioners

Requesting Additional Appropriations from Riverboat (1191) or ARP (8950/8951) or General (1000) or Emergency Reserve (1186) for:

Liability Claims Account	\$305,000
Professional Consulting Services	\$55,000
Professional Services Account	\$75,000

In addition to reducing the original appropriation request for the Liability Claims Account from \$305,000 down to \$55,000, Mrs. Gramarossa explained that the Commissioners had an additional claim of \$2,552 that would be coming in, and proposed adding the cost of the claim to this appropriation. She clarified that the motion would allow for \$188,000 of funding to cover the total amount of the Commissioners' appropriations.

- i. Motion to approve \$188,000 out of Riverboat (1191) made by Mrs. Gramarossa and seconded by Mr. Rosenbaum.
- ii. All members voted in favor.

La Porte County Superior Court No. 4

Requesting Additional Appropriation from Riverboat (1191) or ARP (8950/8951) or General (1000) or Emergency Reserve (1186) for:

Bailiff Account

\$3,752.61

- i. Motion to approve out of General (1000) made by Mr. Mollenhauer and seconded by Mrs. Gramarossa.
- ii. All members voted in favor.

COUNCIL/ATTORNEY COMMENTS

Having been elected into his position at the same time as Mr. Garner, Mr. Yagelski thanked him for his years of friendship and his fulfillment of his duties to the Council.

Mr. Novak additionally thanked Mr. Garner for the friendship he offered and his years of service, which Mr. Garner thanked the Council for in return.

Mr. Stabosz additionally wished Mr. Garner the best in his retirement, and gave his thanks to him for his duty as a liaison to the Auditor's office, and as a dedicated Council member who truly cared about the citizens of La Porte County.

Mr. Rosenbaum thanked Mr. Garner, in addition to Mrs. Gramarossa, who would be leaving her seat on the Council to serve on the Board of Commissioners in 2023.

Mrs. Gramarossa thanked Mr. Garner for always being available when she had questions, and noted that she appreciated their conversations together. She playfully added that, while she was no longer going to be sitting on the Council, she would still be working closely with them in her upcoming role as a Commissioner.

Mr. Rosenbaum wished the room a happy holiday, and noted that the Council appreciated every employee.

Mrs. Gramarossa wished the employees a Merry Christmas, and commended them for their patience and working with the Council during the trials and tribulations of the past two years.

Mr. Cunningham read aloud a quote that he felt appropriate for the time and season: "The definition of Christmas is when kids ask Santa for things and adults pay for them. The definition of deficit spending is when adults ask the government for things, and their kids pay for them."

Mr. Novak recognized two members of the audience: First, Mericka Beaty, who he designated as "Best Holiday Dressed," and second, outgoing Sherriff John Boyd, whom he thanked for his friendship and dedication.

ADJOURNMENT

- i. Motion to adjourn made by Mr. Garner and seconded by Mr. Yagelski.
- ii. All members voted in favor.

Examined & Approved by The La Porte County Council this 23rd day of January 2023.



Councilman Earl Cunningham



Councilman Adam Koronka



Councilman Justin Kiel



Councilman Mike Mollenhauer



Councilman Randy Novak



Councilman Mike Rosenbaum



Councilman Mark Yagelski

ATTEST: 

Timothy Stabosz, Auditor