

**MINUTES**  
**La Porte County Council & Commission Workshop**  
**April 24th, 2023 at 5:00pm**

The La Porte County Commission & Council Joint Meeting was held on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. (central time) in the Assembly Room of the La Porte County Government Complex, 809 State St., La Porte, IN 46350.

Councilman Rosenbaum clarified that the purpose of the workshop was to discuss the damage sustained to the La Porte County Complex Building as a result of flooding that occurred in late December of 2022. He also noted that there would be discussion as to what repairs the County's insurance provider would or would not cover, as well as the current findings in recent cleanup activity, and what needed to be done to get the building rebuilt and ready for reopening.

Commissioner Gramarossa noted that all floors had been cleared, and currently, the county was waiting to receive clearance from the insurance company regarding the fire alarm system, water lines, and HVAC system. She explained that in working with the insurance company, one of the primary challenges in the past three months was that the insurance company had changed the county's insurance adjuster three times. She added that the Commission would ask the Council for an appropriation of not-to-exceed \$3 million so work on various time-dependent projects could begin, including the drafting of a floor plan for the installation of a new fire alarm system which would take 4-6 weeks for plans to be drawn up. She emphasized that the longer the county waited to contract these time-sensitive projects, the longer it would take to finish additional projects and reopen the building.

Councilman Novak noted that the fire alarm system in the Complex building had been outdated, and currently, the county was considering upgrading to Simplex, a popular alarm service provider with up-to-date equipment and software, however the jail was still utilizing the previous alarm system, and the county would need to consider whether to upgrade the jail's alarm system as well. Mrs. Gramarossa added that the Courthouse additionally utilized the older alarm system, however it would be able to be integrated into the Complex Building's new alarm system if selected, as the Courthouse had its own alarm panel.

Mr. Rosenbaum asked consideration should be taken as to whether the fire suppression system should be upgraded as well, since only the fifth floor of the Complex Building had a sprinkler system. Mr. Novak noted that he thought that only the alarm panel and monitoring devices should be considered, citing the lack of smoke detectors in the building, adding that they were not a requirement in the building's original construction. Mrs. Gramarossa added that the jail's fire alarm system was wired into their portion of the Complex Building, which was why their

system was unaffected by the flooding, however the issue was that the entire building shared only one fire panel, and recommended upgrading the jail to match the rest of the building's fire system so they could all remain on one panel.

Mr. Novak clarified that part of the purpose of the construction was to bring the Complex Building up to code, primarily with electric, fire alarms & suppression, and plumbing, however even though the goal was to make the building compliant, the building would not be compliant in its entirety, exemplifying that the restrooms in the building would not be made ADA compliant. Mr. Rosenbaum asked what the cost to repair the fire alarm system alone would be, which Mrs. Gramarossa explained that the cost for the fire system would be roughly \$980,000, the cost to replace galvanized pipes would be about \$1.1 million, and the remainder of the not-to-exceed \$3 million appropriation request would be directed towards the HVAC system.

Mr. Rosenbaum clarified that the galvanized pipes, which had been in the Complex Building for about 48 years, had needed repair due to severe corrosion. Due to construction in the building's repair from the flood damage, these pipes were now exposed and accessible. Mr. Novak added that some of these pipes were in such poor condition that they had been taken entirely out of commission and were no longer in use, and replacing them now that they were physically accessible would cost a fraction of what it would cost to replace them after the Complex Building's repair was completed. Councilman Koronka noted his concerns regarding the cost of galvanized copper pipes, and advised utilizing PEX tubing for any pipes that were under one-inch, which would be cheaper for the county and would still be code compliant. Mrs. Gramarossa noted that they would ask the inspector what the most affordable options would be in replacing the pipes.

Returning to the topic of the fire alarm system and suppression, Mr. Novak clarified that some of the not-to-exceed \$3 million in appropriation was to be used toward fortifying the building's fire blocking, noting specifically that the aluminum fascia that was installed along the windows during the building's construction was positioned in a way that would allow for a fire to easily find a path from a lower floor of the building up to a higher floor if it were not remedied. Mrs. Gramarossa added that the Commissioners wanted to add a fire stop on each floor, which could help restrict a fire to one floor of the building or at least slow its spread to other floors. She added that these repairs were included in the requested appropriation; however, they were listed as a separate cost.

Councilman Kiel confirmed that the projects that would be covered by the requested appropriation were high priority, however asked if there were any medium to low priority projects that the Commission wanted to address. Mrs. Gramarossa explained that, prior to the flooding, 3-4 of the windows in the Complex Building had broken seals which resulted in an opaque film on the glass, which rendered them unable to be viewed out of. Following the flooding, a total estimate of about 8 windows now sustained this problem, which she hoped the insurance company would help in covering repairs. Mrs. Gramarossa noted that she did not

prepare this request to be brought before the Council at this meeting, so the topic would likely be brought before the Council at a later date, as it was a low priority item.

Returning to the topic of the galvanized pipes, Mr. Rosenbaum noted that it was observed that on the same side of the Complex Building on all floors, rusty corrosion was observed in the high-moisture spaces around HVAC pipes, even pipes that had been previously removed. Mr. Novak questioned whether the corroded areas should just be reinsulated, or if the corrosion should be fully addressed now that it has been exposed.

Regarding HVAC concerns, Mrs. Gramarossa explained that the Commissioners wanted to address improving the airflow of the more distant and curtailed ductwork portions of the HVAC unit. She added that free-hanging units located on the fifth floor, which had been having issues with condensation and flooding, could potentially be removed and then replaced with an air handler. She clarified that the original request for appropriation only covered addressing the ductwork, and removal of the units on the fifth floor and replacing them with an air handler would need to go before the Council for additional appropriation at a later date. Mr. Novak added that cost savings could be had by replacing the HVAC unit on the fifth floor, not just by installing a more energy-efficient unit, but the unit would also be more protected, citing hail damage that was observed on outdoor HVAC units. Mr. Rosenbaum also noted that, with most of the walls being removed from the third and fourth floors, and to a lesser extent the fifth floor, the building of a more open floor plan could be explored, which would allow for more efficient installation of the HVAC system. He emphasized the importance of addressing the problems that, although not caused by the flood, were discovered as a result of removing materials and equipment that was damaged by the flood. He noted that addressing these newly discovered and previously existing issues could be important by preventing issues occurring with them in the future, despite the flood not being the original cause of some of them and therefore would not be covered by the insurance company.

Mrs. Gramarossa explained that the cost for carpeting and laminate were about the same price, and the current plan was to replace hallways and main areas - such as near the elevators - with laminate, and anything else, like office spaces, would have carpet installed. She noted that for other areas, such as conference rooms, department heads had different preferences as to whether they wanted carpet or laminate installed, however the cost would run roughly the same regardless of what they decided they wanted. Mr. Rosenbaum supported the plan to install laminate in the main areas, noting that it would be easier to clean and maintain, specifically citing the difficulty of removing salt rocks and residue from carpet during the winter season.

Mr. Novak added that the three trough inlays located in the Complex Building, which were used to house electrical wiring, had also been damaged by the flood and were now corroded and required cleaning. They would now require extensive cleaning and sanitization if they were to be continued to be used, which would carry a high cost, so the County was looking into which ones would be considered salvageable. Any troughs deemed unusable would be filled with

concrete or a low-density foam, and would then need to be closed off so they would not cause any issues in the future. Mrs. Gramarossa proposed prioritizing the repair of troughs located in more confined offices that drew their resources from within the walls, as well as trying to repair half of the troughs in more open-spaced office areas. The troughs in the open-spaced offices, such as the Health Department on the fourth-floor, could be drilled into so new data and electrical units could be installed, which would allow for more flexible equipment and desk placement on said floors. Mr. Rosenbaum added that removing the walls between the fourth-floor office space and storage area would open more area for workspace, which Mr. Novak emphasized would be important to bolster more productivity in any applicable areas that could be expanded.

Mr. Kiel asked if a competitive procurement process would need to be followed to allow for the appropriation of the repairs, which Council Attorney DiMartino explained that the County would likely need to, however this would be difficult to advertise until it was figured out exactly how much the insurance company would be paying for in materials and services. Commission Attorney Andrew Jones emphasized that procurement would be required for anything not covered by the insurance company, including the new improvements that that County wanted to make to the building as a result of removing materials from the flood damage.

Mr. Rosenbaum asked if there was a need to hold a special meeting to continue discussion on how to appropriate funding for the project, or if the Item could be addressed at the April Council Meeting soon to follow. Mr. Novak noted that fixing the fire alarm system, as well as the Complex building's pipes, was imperative, especially if the County wanted the work done before the building began reassembly. Mr. DiMartino added that since the fire alarm system's repair in the Complex was included with the insurance company's coverage, there would be no need to spend time bidding it out, although the alarm system upgrade to the jail would need to be advertised since it was not damaged by the flooding. Mrs. Gramarossa added that Simplex would not begin drawing up plans for the fire alarm system until a contract was drawn up, so a motion of support would allow the project to begin as soon as possible. Mr. DiMartino noted that a motion of support could be made at the Council Meeting following the workshop, and that a special meeting would not be required.

Mr. Kiel asked where funding for the Complex building's repair would come from, and asked what the rate of replenishment was for the Emergency Reserve Fund. Mr. Novak noted that the Emergency Reserve Fund replenished at about 50% of what Riverboat accumulated, building up funding of roughly \$1 million per year. Auditor Tim Stabosz stated that currently, \$9.5 million was currently sitting in the Emergency Reserve Fund.

Examined & Approved by the La Porte County Council the 26<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2023, and by the LaPorte County Commission the 5th day of July, 2023.

  
Mike Rosenbaum, Council President

  
Justin Kiel, Council Vice President

  
Earl Cunningham, Councilman

  
Mike Yagelski, Councilman

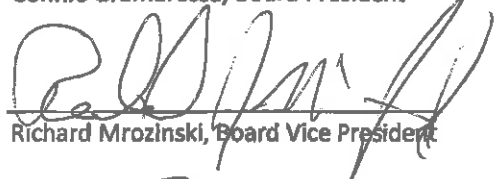
  
Randy Nopak, Councilman

  
Adam Koronka, Councilman

  
Mike Mollenhauer, Councilman

ATTEST:   
Tim Stabosz, Auditor

  
Connie Gramarossa, Board President

  
Richard Mrozinski, Board Vice President

  
Joseph Haney, Board Member