



LA PORTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Connie Gramarossa
President

Richard Mrozinski
Vice President

Joseph Haney
Member

La Porte County Commissioners' Meeting Minutes Wednesday, February 7, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. County Complex Room 3 & via Zoom

President Connie Gramarossa called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by **Steve Holifield**.

Auditor Tim Stabosz called the roll: Commissioner **Connie Gramarossa** - Present; Commissioner **Rich Mrozinski** - Present via Zoom; Commissioner **Joe Haney** - Present. Quorum present therefore meeting commenced.

Considered the agenda. Commissioner **Haney** motioned to amend the agenda by adding **EMS Director Andrew McGuire's** resignation, vacation/sick days pay for 20 + years of service, placing it as 9 'a' on the agenda and moving 11 'c' up to 9 'b.' Commissioner **Mrozinski** seconded. Roll call: Commissioner **Mrozinski** - Aye; Commissioner **Haney** - Aye; Commissioner **Gramarossa** - Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered approval of the January 17, 2024 minutes. Commissioner **Haney** motioned to approve. Commissioner **Mrozinski** seconded. Roll call: Commissioner **Mrozinski** - Aye; Commissioner **Haney** - Aye; Commissioner **Gramarossa** - Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Claims with Payroll ending 1/26/2024 - \$1,578,226.41. Commissioner **Haney** motioned to approve payroll. Commissioner **Mrozinski** seconded. Roll call: Commissioner **Gramarossa** - Aye; Commissioner **Mrozinski** - Aye; Commissioner **Haney** - Aye. Motion carried 3-0. **Auditor Stabosz** read the Operating Expense Claims - \$1,611,859.50. Commissioner **Haney** motioned to approve the claims. Commissioner **Mrozinski** seconded. Roll call: Commissioner **Gramarossa** - Aye; Commissioner **Mrozinski** - Aye; Commissioner **Haney** - Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Public Comment

Steve Holifield, 6782 E. 100 S., Mill Creek, opposed Solar Farm projects on 150 North and on 100 South near Taylor Road, understands property rights however neighboring rights/property values should be considered. Toxic chemicals, after 30 years who cleans them up? Reported on rules/regulations for other counties in Indiana. Suggested a stronger ordinance should include that anyone benefiting financially or a member of a group advocating for these facilities should not be an appointed or elected member of any county government board or abstain from any votes on it. Questioned why is this now coming to La Porte County, approach slowly or at least until there are more answers to this topic.

Mike Ekovich, Jr., 2828 N. 500 E., Rolling Prairie, concerned about the proposed 2600-acre Solar Facility in Kankakee and Wills Township, handed the Commission a packet of information educating them on the negative impacts of industrial solar on local environments. Illustrations of harmful heavy metals, toxic compounds of the solar panels. Provided a data sheet indicating which metals are present and the effects on humans and wildlife, some are cancer causing elements that will compromise the Little Kankakee River which runs through the proposed project but most importantly the wells that supply water to the City of La Porte which are only 2000 feet away from the proposed project. Another negative impact is the constant noise the panels produce. This should be of great concern to the county elected officials and the City of La Porte before any damage is done to the rivers or city water supply.

William Allison, 5791 E. State Road 104, Walkerton, after speaking to Harold and Rita on the Plan Commission, it was suggested he attend this meeting with his comments on amendments to the solar ordinance in the county. Solar projects should have a minimum distance of a half mile from wetlands, rivers, and streams, to avoid eminent damage to water quality and possible contamination, ecologically disasters. Distributed paperwork to the Commission.

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Scott Pejic, Attorney, interjected with the zoning ordinance for the solar farms is a special exception through the BZA, Board of Zoning Appeals. The Commissioners do **not** have authority with the Board of Zoning Appeals, its specifically designed that way to keep politics out of zoning issues so solar farms are a special exception, as far as any private rights of action or a private citizen may have for nuisances, he encouraged everyone who cares about this topic to be aware of future BZA meetings where the authority predominately lies and not the Board of Commissioners. **President Gramarossa** would like to have a public workshop on this topic within the next month with the proper agencies. **Commissioner Haney**, year before last from the Plan Commission side, one of the things he fought for in an ordinance was a decommissioning bond, also pegged to inflation so that even before they get to the step to go before the BZA, there's actually money/funds put aside to decommission these later on because go to the point that some of you have, companies will come into counties around the nation with smaller subsidies or companies for each individual site so then that way if something goes wrong in the end then they just walk away from it while the main umbrella corporation stands untouched, that's a few of the things we put in there, tried to put as many guardrails as we can and the state has regulations that supersedes the County's but the Plan Commission has talked about revisiting our solar ordinance. We're one of the first to develop a solar ordinance in the northern part of the state.

Tommy Kulavik, 1316 Ohio Street, Michigan City, via Zoom, Public Service Announcement - 20th Annual Jerry Karsten's Chili Cook-Off, Saturday, February 17th at the Moose Lodge 980, Welnitz Road in Michigan City. Great event and encouraged everyone to attend. Expressed his gratitude to the Commissioners and especially the La Porte County Convention & Visitors Bureau who are now sponsors for the Michigan City Athletics in the Wolves Den, replacing Harbor Automotive. Michigan City High School will be the host school for the IHSAA Champions Network for Boys Basketball, both Regional and Semi-State. Thanked the Commissioners for pairing up with the City of Michigan City to pave Pahs Road where Michigan City High School is located.

Department Reports/Comments

Sean Fitzpatrick, Director of Facilities, 2023 recap: 12,611 work orders completed with 1,629 done in August. Newsletter released with instructions on filling out work orders when the department is needed. Major infrastructure done at the fairgrounds which included plumbing and electrical. At the La Porte Courthouse, Circuit courtroom was painted. Several offices in the Hiler Building were painted as well. Community Corrections and Juvenile Service Center, three boilers were installed that were greatly needed. Exterior painting done at the Museum. New awnings installed on the outside of the Hiler Building, replacing the worn tattered ones. Continuously updating plumbing throughout all county buildings. Participated in the City of La Porte's Candlelight Tour, extensive decorations were displayed at the Courthouses, Hiler Building and the Complex with the help of President Gramarossa. Daily maintenance, cleaning and paper shredding continued by his staff. Additional funding by the Council enabled the department to add part-time employees who work the evening hours. Monthly meetings with the Maintenance group are every first Thursday of the month at 10:00 a.m. at the Monroe office and the House Keeping meetings are the second Wednesday at 5:00 p.m. **President Gramarossa** thanked Sean for all the work done in 2023 as well as Sheryl Lestinsky, Office Manager and oversees House Keeping. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, via Zoom, inquired about the Museum and the cleaning schedule. **Sean Fitzpatrick**, one full-time and one part-time goes weekly and one additional part-time will be added depending on availability, it is a large facility. **Commissioner Haney** followed up on Community Corrections, is there a timeline for completion on work being done on the ceiling. **Sean Fitzpatrick**, finished installing a new hot water heater today which was costly. **President Gramarossa**, a new design is being implemented for the bathrooms at this facility.

Monique Thomas, Human Resources Director, thanked the Commission for allowing her to further her career as the HR Director for La Porte County, looks forward to working with each one of them and providing/making La Porte County a great place to work.

Requests

Considered EMS Director Andrew McGuire's resignation. **Commissioner Joe Haney** motioned to accept the resignation plus approving any/all sick/vacation days to be paid out. **Commissioner Rich Mrozinski** seconded. Roll call: **Commissioner Haney - Aye; Commissioner Gramarossa - Aye and Commissioner Mrozinski - Aye.** Motion carries 3-0. **Commissioner Haney** thanked Director McGuire for his 26 years of service.

Considered appointment of EMS Director. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to appoint **Eric Fenstermaker** as EMS Director and **Brian Beach** as the Assistant Director. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded the appointment of **Eric Fenstermaker** but not the Assistant Director. **Mr. Beach** lives in Lake County and to be the Assistant may be difficult and therefore he does not support the appointment. Attorney **Scott Pejic**, should the positions be separated, vote one at a time? Motion was repeated by **Commissioner Haney** for **Eric Fenstermaker** as Director and **Brian Beach** as Assistant Director. **President Gramarossa** stepped down and seconded the appointment of both. Roll call: **Commissioner Mrozinski - Nay; Commissioner Gramarossa - Aye and Commissioner Haney - Aye.** Motion passes 2-1.

Considered travel to Grand Rapids, Michigan for Training Conference, April 7-11, **Sean Fagan**, Prosecutor. **Commissioner Joe Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Rich Mrozinski** seconded. Roll call: **Commissioner Gramarossa - Aye; Commissioner Haney - Aye and Commissioner Mrozinski - Aye.** Motion carries 3-0.

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