



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 21, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. County Complex Room 3 & via Zoom

President Connie Gramarossa called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.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; and Commissioner Joe Haney - Present. Quorum present therefore meeting commenced.

Considered the agenda. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to add to the agenda an appointment to the Swanson Center Board and a request for Project Manager on continuing the project on the Franklin Street Bridge. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered approval of the February 7, 2024 minutes. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Claims with Payroll ending 2/9/2024 - \$1,540,927.07. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0. **Auditor Stabosz** read the Operating Expense Claims - \$2,793,049.22. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve the claims. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Public Comment

Steve Holifield, 6782 E. 100 S., Mill Creek, thanked Commissioners for hosting a Workshop on Solar Farms prior to the meeting. It is a hot topic right now, on one hand to do as you wish on private property but you don't have a right to infringe on your neighbor's property, lowering the property value. Concerned with the projected economic growth, economic impact of leaving 2600 acres out of farm production will be taking money from the business' pockets. The ground has raised corn, soybean, tomatoes and other crops. There is no guarantee that the company bringing in the solar farm will still be in business at the end of this discussion or if the bond will be sizable enough to cover any issues. Urged the Commission to remove board members that vote for the solar farms.

Mike Ekovich, Jr., 2828 N. 500 E., Rolling Prairie, goal is to protect the land owners, La Porte County tax payers by amending the solar ordinance. Believes there will be a negative affect where the proposed areas are for the solar farms. Best farm ground in the county, no risk of floods and should continue to grow commercial crops. When considering these projects, please gather all the information and make the best decision for La Porte County.

Tim Shortt, Department of Indiana Marine Corps League Toys for Tots Coordinator, final numbers reported for 2023: Ten marines had 170 collection sites throughout the County; 16,179 toys collected and distributed to 4,720 children; Indiana collected 108,032 toys and were distributed to 25,335 children. 52,000 volunteers in 2023 collected 25.4 million toys for 864 Toys for Tots Campaigns, 10.3 million children received the toys. 4.1 million books were passed out as well as part of their Literacy Program. 332,000 At-Risk children and 220,000 Native American children received toys. **Devil Dogs**, Marine Corp social group, held their 2023 convention in Oklahoma City and presented a check for \$74,000 to the Oklahoma City Children's Hospital. This is money they raise between themselves. Tim presented the Commission with a certificate for participating in the 2023 Toys for Tots Campaign.

Don Hufgard, 10078 N. Halstead, La Porte, Galena Meadows HOA representative, commented on the 'No Parking' signs that County Highway posted throughout subdivisions and other areas in the County. Wondered why the signs just now went up. Will the neighborhood be allowed to have a picnic. Can the ordinance be amended? Be more specific to certain amount of snow? **President Gramarossa**, I will have a representative from the Highway Department attend our next meeting to explain the signs.

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Commissioner Haney, had several different neighborhoods reach out to him and he has requested the County Attorney to draft a new ordinance. The intent was for snow removal by County Highway, in areas such as cul-de-sacs, during snow emergencies or along snow routes.

Francine Kalita, 4372 N. 675 W., Michigan City, a sign appeared in her neighborhood as well, she does not live in a cul-de-sac and wondered what was going on, posted comments on Facebook, sign belongs in the city not the county where residents are 3 acres from each other. No warning and it doesn't make sense but it's expected with the lack of transparency from this Commission. **Attorney Scott Pejic**, via Zoom, we don't need personal attacks. **Francine Kalita**, oh, yes, you do.

Chad Beadles, 3052 N. 450 E., Rolling Prairie, property owner at 1000 N. and Taylor Road in Mill Creek. Major issues with solar farms and the toxic chemicals that can cause cancer, kidney problems, renal damage, nervous system and circulatory system damage. Possible irreversible damage to the environment. Blockage or alternation of drainage canals, encroachment of agriculture land which can affect food production. Loss of habitat for native vegetation and wildlife. Direct contact to those panels potentially causing injury or death to wildlife. More toxic waste is produced from solar panels than nuclear power plants. If you Commissioners, voted in by us continuants of this county, vote to let the project move forward, 'you'll prove to us that you do not represent the people who voted you into this position, at that point, even more of the trust that we have in you will be brought into question.' Are you willing to stand and tell the developers that their plans are not welcomed and not wanted in our community.

Scott Pejic, County Attorney via Zoom, the Board of Commissioners have **no authority** over the decision of the solar farms, that is the BZA, Board of Zoning Appeals.

Dean White, La Porte, Waverly Road and Pine Lake intersection, entrance to Soldier's Memorial Park, years ago a vista view was present of the Grangemouth Wetlands and Stone Lake. He was Board Manager of the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, believes in tourism, improving the local economy. He met with Mark Schreiber, La Porte City Parks and Jeremy Sobecki, La Porte County Parks, who can work together on the vista view. Looking for support from the Board of Commissioners.

Jerome Hesters, 0307 S. 400 E., where does the solar ordinance come from, the Commissioners or the Board of Zoning Appeals? **President Gramarossa**, please allow the Commission to share the information just received from the Solar Farm Workshop held prior to this meeting with the Board of Zoning Appeals. **Jerome**, when he moved to his property, he wanted to put a modular home on it, he had to notify the surrounding neighbors of his intentions with his property. **President Gramarossa**, that would have been the BZA, not the Commissioners.

Department Reports/Comments

Sean Fitzpatrick, Director of Facilities via Zoom. **Considered** permission to advertise Quotes for Sewer Line Pipe Project in the mechanical room and the pit area in the Complex, lower level of the building. **Commissioner Haney asked if the project would be under \$150,000 then motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carries 3-0.** **County Attorney Pejic**, via Zoom, pursuant to I.C. 36-1-12-4.7, if the project is under \$150,000, only quotes are required and not sealed bids. He will work with Sean to advertise the quotes, and will have them prior to our next meeting. **Sean Fitzpatrick**, he has three contractors that do this type of work, H&G, D.A. Dodd and La Porte County Project Management. Quotes will be received until the time of the meeting on March 6th.

Bailey Tombers, Office of Community and Economic Development, gave a report for February 2024. ***Attached to minutes

Commissioner Joe Haney gave a heartfelt thank you to all the men and women that came out to search for a missing child this afternoon. Thanked the La Pore County Sheriff's office, EMS, EMA, E-911 Center, Westville Police Department, Coolspring, Westville, Scipio and New Durham Volunteer Fire Departments, Indiana State Police, DNR Conservation Officer and Porter County EMA and Search/Rescue who brought their dogs, Lake County supplied a helicopter to use for aid in the search and our County Highway Department who closed roads off during the search. Excellent coordination of all local agencies and the 2-year-old child was found, unharmed and safe about an hour after he went missing. Number of resources that turned out within minutes, he heard it while in the Warden's office at Westville Correctional Facility when the call came in requesting the use of their dogs, was just amazing, a total community event and we owe them a debt of gratitude, thank you.

Requests

Considered travel request to Pittsburg, PA July 14-18 for two employees, **Amanda Lahners**, Health Department. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carries 3-0.**

Considered 12th Annual Prevent Child Abuse Walk, April 18, **Megan Nearn**, First United Methodist Church. **Megan** handed out fliers and buttons to the Commissioners. Event is open to the public and after the walk, guest speakers will be heard outside La Porte Courthouse on the south side of the building. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carries 3-0.**

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Considered permission to close one lane of traffic for annual NewDay Foundation Resurrection/Walk. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carries 3-0.**

Considered travel request to Detroit, Michigan, Aug 4-7 and Lake Tahoe, Nevada, Sept 29-Oct 3, **Sean Fagan**, Prosecutor. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carries 3-0.**

Considered permission to approach the Council for updating on premise security system, **Barb Huston**, E-911. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carries 3-0.**

Considered travel request to Anaheim, California, May 22-25, Veterans Treatment Court, **Judge Jeff Thorne**. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carries 3-0.**

Old Business

Considered bids for the **2024 Community Crossings grant** for the Fish Lake area. Both Milestone and Reith-Riley bid on the project, after review **Planner Mitch Bishop** recommended Reith-Riley who were \$300,000 less than Milestone, all requirements were met and he will go to the Council for matching funds. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

New Business

Considered contract renewal for software with Carlson used in Real Estate Office, **Tim Stabosz**, Auditor. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered contract renewal with East Isles/Berkley for Stop-Loss policy, **Tim Stabosz**, Auditor. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered appointment of Mark Yagelski to the Swanson Center Board. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Project Manager to oversee Phase 4/Phase 5 of the Franklin Street Bridge Repair Project for 2025-2026 to create a scope of work to be bid out, Council President **Randy Novak**. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to adjourn at 6:51 p.m. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

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

DATE 3-6-2024

Connie Thompson

ATTEST: *Richard J. Mrozinski*
Auditor

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

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February 2024

Housing

Coordination with Unity for initial meeting on 2/16 – They are finalizing a concept paper. New meeting planned for April for them to report findings

Discussion with planning dept on 2 locations (Westville and Michigan border for new units)

Developer with interest to build 500 units. Office is working to provide them information on the desired areas for consideration

Broadband

Surf and Mercury submitted NLC round 4 on Feb 9

Tier E license received for challenge process in March 2024

LPC appears to have 43k addresses on BEAD list. Office is working on how we best navigate this process to ensure best outcomes for LPC.

New Business

Several leads in pipeline and continue to grow. Land request continues to total over 100+ desired acres

READI grant for road work submitted in January this year

Office working with local delegation on bills downstate to ensure new manufacturing will be uninhibited

Marketing

Radio show in Feb was Carlton Bishop and Matt Reardon

March Show to have One Region on to speak to quality of life projects

County website – regular updates from various depts.

BRE Site Visits

5 visits occurred in 2024 so far

Additional being scheduled by Mike and Carlton

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