



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, April 17, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. County Complex Room 3 & via Zoom

President Connie Gramarossa called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Judge William Boklund. A moment of silence in honor of Marilyn Jones, wife of Atley Price, who passed away.

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

Introduction of Judges: Honorable Judge Rich Stalbrink (Superior Court 2), Honorable Senior Judge Steven King (Superior Court 2), Honorable Judge Tom Alevizos (Circuit Court Judge), Honorable Judge Greta Friedman (Superior Court 4), Honorable Judge Jaime Oss (Superior Court 1), Honorable Judge Jeffrey Thorne (Superior Court 3), Honorable Magistrate John Link (Superior Court 4), Honorable Magistrate Pamela Munsey (Circuit Court), Honorable Magistrate Erika Stallworth (Circuit Court Juvenile Magistrate), Honorable Magistrate Nancy Gettinger (Circuit Court Juvenile/Superior Court 4), Honorable Senior Judge Kathleen Lang (Superior Court 1), Honorable Senior Judge Michae Bergerson (Superior Court 1), and Honorable Senior Judge William Boklund (Superior Court 4). Superior Court 2 Judge Rich Stalbrink, on behalf of Judge Baldoni's family and Honorable Senior Judge Steve King, requested a tree be planted on the La Porte Courthouse lawn in honor of Judge Paul J. Baldoni who passed away December 17, 2023 at the age of 79 years old. Paul was raised in Mishawaka, received his undergraduate and law degrees from Indiana University. Moved to La Porte to join the firm of Smith and Smith in the early 1970's. In 1976 he was elected to serve as Judge, a position he held for 33 years, and possibly the longest serving Judge in La Porte County on record. During his 33 years of service, he was a member of the Civil Bench Book Committee. The Civil Bench Book is a book put together by Judges for Judges to assist in navigation in areas of civil law that may not come up every day. Judge Baldoni was a member of the Board of Managers for the Indiana Judges Association, an association of Judges elected by fellow peers, to help serve other Judges. Graduate of the Indiana Program for Judges, and a Graduate of the Indiana Judicial College. After retiring, he became a member of the Senior Judges Committee for the Judicial Conference for the Indiana Supreme Court, he helped initiate the LADS (Alcohol & Drug) Program in our County. Paul's wife Deborah, a retired local school teacher, was introduced as well as their daughter and family. A redbud tree will be planted in his memory on the courthouse lawn. An avid Indiana University fan, Chicago Cubs fan, and an avid golfer, it is only appropriate to plant a redbud tree to signify Spring is here, time to play baseball and golf. A stone will be at the bottom of the tree with words about Paul including 'Justice was his North Star.' Judge Stalbrink asked if any other Judges and/or attorneys would like to say a word about Judge Baldoni. John Link, Magistrate for Superior Court 4, shared a few memories of his time spent under Judge Paul J. Baldoni. As an attorney just starting out, he was assigned as a Public Defender in Superior Court 3's courtroom where he learned a lot. Judge Baldoni would go to Hileman Elementary School in La Porte, to the kindergarten class under teacher Mrs. Justice where she would go by the letters of the alphabet for guest speakers and he would speak to the students about being a Judge. John Link's daughter was in one of the kindergarten classes. Judge Baldoni was a fixture in this building, his roots in this community were deep, he cared about this community and served for a long time. A tree planted in his memory is certainly appropriate as a tribute to Honorable Paul J. Baldoni and his family. Judge Stalbrink, Law Day will be coming up on May 3rd and will be held in La Porte Superior Court 1. The Bar Association and Judges come together to celebrate law and a Liberty Bell Award is handed out to someone that has impacted law in the community, Judge Baldoni will be honored on this day as well as other Judges that have passed away. Commissioners are welcome to attend and this year's theme is 'Voices of Democracy.' Judge William Boklund will be the Guest Speaker. Judge Stalbrink read the Resolution into the record. Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve the resolution. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0. ***Resolution 2024-2. A group photo was taken of all Honorable Judges, Magistrates and Honorable Judge Paul J. Baldoni's family, attached to minutes.

Considered the agenda. Commissioner Haney motioned to approve the agenda. Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to remove item 10 'c' requesting travel to Green Bay, Wisconsin from Steve Eyrick, Adult Probation and move 8, Public Comment, down the agenda to 12 'd,' after New Business. Commissioner Haney declined to second moving Public Comment to the end of the agenda, President Gramarossa stepped down and seconded. Motion carried 2-1. Commissioner Haney - Nay.

ORIGINAL

Considered approval of the March 20, 2024 minutes. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Claims with Payroll ending 3/22/2024 - \$1,506,361.80 and 4/5/2024 - \$1,470,840.37. **Commissioner Haney motioned to approve both payrolls. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Operating Expense Claims - \$2,202,989.14 and \$1,924,128.63. **Commissioner Haney motioned to approve both sets of claims. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Department Reports/Comments

Stacy Sweitzer, Deputy Assessor, tax bills were mailed April 8th and the biggest question from tax payers has been the Mortgage Deduction. State of Indiana has moved the \$3,000 Mortgage Deduction and applied it to the Homestead Exemption, which was usually \$45,000 but is now \$48,000. Nothing was taken away, just moved to a different area on the tax bill. Assessor's office is starting to print Notice of Assessments which will go in the mail April 30th, the bright green sheets that tell your assessment this year compared to last year. Monday, June 17th, is the deadline to file an appeal, there is no cost to take your appeal further if you do not agree with the Assessor's Office, there is an appeal process but no cost to the tax payer however if the tax payer decides to get an appraisal, there will be a fee which is usually \$250-\$300. An appraisal is not required to file an appeal. Assessments are based on Market Value; your assessment should be relatively close to what your home would sell for on the open market. Appeals can be filed online or come to the office. At the request of Councilman Justin Kiel, the Form 11s are being sent out at a bulk mail rate, this will be compared to the cost of mailing them out last year. The three offices, Assessor, Auditor and Treasurer, all work together to help the tax payers. Assessments are done by the Assessor, deductions done in the Auditor's office and the money is collected with the Treasurer. Offices are here to serve the people of the County. Taxes are a year behind, 2023 pay 2024.

Tim Stabosz, Auditor, for the record, he disclaimed any association with property tax assessing or assessments, playfully.

Commissioner Rich Mrozinski, alerted by the Veterans of Foreign War Legislative's office in Washington, D.C. (which he was a part of for nine years) that a 'Claims Shark,' an individual or company that charges hefty fees to assist or consult a benefit claim for a veteran or survivor, is a scam. Be sure to see our county Veteran's Service officers, Eduardo Lozano, and George Watkins.

Commissioner Joe Haney, we have a new Director of Facilities and he has concerns with demotions and pay cuts happening over the last several weeks. **President Gramarossa**, this is a personnel matter, should not be discussed in our meeting. **Commissioner Haney**, when he came in as Commissioner there was a similar incident happening with the housekeeping staff which led to hiring an outside company. Rumors are both the Commission President and Council President may push for a drive to privatize the Maintenance Department. **President Gramarossa**, what evidence do you have? **Commissioner Haney**, at least one person's own words. By bringing this out in the open, if we are purposely driving people away and putting ourselves in a position where we won't have the manpower to do our job, that's completely different than open dialogue on whether or not we should privatize our Facilities Department, these are people that have worked here for a long time, they don't deserve to get their salaries cut and demotions out of the blue. **President Gramarossa**, this is an internal issue. **Attorney Scott Pejic**, first time he is hearing anything about privatization and employee issues with this department, he has no knowledge of this situation.

Requests

Considered four travel requests: Denver, CO June 4-6; St. Charles, MO May 20-21; Anaheim, CA and Louisville, KY June 3-5, Sean Fagan Prosecutor, via Zoom, no additional funds are needed. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered World Creativity and Innovation Day Proclamation, **Cynthia Hedge**. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0. ***Attached to minutes**

Old Business

None

New Business

Considered renewal of property/appraisal and Casualty Insurance, John Jones, Michiana Insurance. **Commissioner Haney motioned for Option 2. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered MOU between Animal Shelter and HealthLinc for Mobile School-Based Health Center & Human Services for June 20, 2024. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered settlement claim of \$4,262.86 for vehicle damaged by debris from County Highway mower. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

ORIGINAL

Public Comment

Dean White, 3066 N. Highway 35, La Porte, Vista View at Pine Lake Avenue and Waverly Road, a Soldier's Memorial Park entrance, this area was cleaned up 8 years ago and has since been neglected again. This issue has not been on the agenda although a request has been made by Commissioner Joe Haney. A picturesque view of the Soldier's Memorial Park wetlands, jointly owned by City of La Porte and the County. La Porte City Council says it is noted 'not to sell' because of the wetlands and this was stated at the County Council meeting. Neglect to maintain this area has allowed 'scrub brush' to obscure the view throughout the whole summer. Terrible not to restore this part of the park which is a background view to our Soldier's Memorial Park sign at the entrance. He addressed the La Porte City Council, La Porte County Council and the La Porte County Commission regarding this issue. Requested both Commissioners Mrozinski and Gramarossa to come to reason on the issue. Commissioner Haney motioned for this issue at the last meeting and Commissioner Gramarossa stopped the opportunity with no valid reason...**Attorney Scott Pejic**, this is Public Comment, not here to cast accusations and personal commentary. **Dean White** continued, the last clearing was done by Foresters Quality Tree Service, about eight years ago. Highway Department said they could do this work. Randy Novak, President of the Council, mentioned a brand-new piece of equipment that is designed specifically for this type of work has recently been purchased by the Highway Department, Forestry Mulcher. Dean had letters of support. **Commissioner Haney motioned to move the project forward. Died for lack of second.**

Steve Holifield, 6782 E. 100 S., Mill Creek, thanked the Commissioner and the Highway Department for roads paved.

Commissioner Rich Mrozinski motioned to authorize County Attorney Scott Pejic to institute legal action against the Auditor's office to require the payment of the County's Legal expenses in defending the Stevens vs. La Porte County matter. Commissioner Haney, Auditor asked that this be sent to the Council, it was on their agenda but then pulled off, for the Council to authorize payment. When it comes to personal lawsuits, both Council and Commission have made the position that anyone sued in their capacity should pay for it until and unless the Courts decide they should have been sued in their professional capacity. **President Gramarossa**, the lawsuit is three individuals against La Porte County, Board of Commissioners. Our budget has Legal Fees included therefore we are able to pay for the invoices without going to the Council. **Commissioner Haney**, the suit is La Porte County, Commissioner Connie Gramarossa, personal capacity, and Commissioner Rich Mrozinski, in his personal capacity. He did sign off on the Eichhorn & Eichhorn invoices when they came through the office, he had received any updates so he reached out to the firm himself and spoke to the attorney handling this case with Eichhorn & Eichhorn, he was informed no discussion would take place with him at all, he was asking about the La Porte County portion of the suit. As a member of the 3-body board of the executives, the Board of Commissioners, we are the County and we represent the County. **President Gramarossa, there is a motion on the table. I'll step down and second. Commissioner Haney**, the legal fees are up to \$20,000 right now. **Motion carried 2-1. Commissioner Haney - Nay.**

Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to adjourn at 7:08 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 5-1-2024

Connie Gramarossa
Rich Mrozinski

ATTEST: _____ Auditor

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA



**Honorable Judge
Paul J. Baldoni
Superior Court 3**

4-17-2024
**La Porte County Honorable
Judges & Magistrates**



Left to Right; Front Row:
Kathleen Lang, Jaime Oss, Pam Munsey,
Tom Alevizos, Nancy Gettinger, Greta Friedman
and Erika Stallworth

Left to Right; Back Row:
Steven King, John Link, Rich Stalbrink,
Jeff Thorne, Michael Bergerson, and William Boklund



LAPORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-2

RECOGNIZING THE HONORABLE PAUL J. BALDONI FOR HIS COMMITMENT AND SERVICE TO THE CITIZENS OF LAPORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

WHEREAS, the Honorable Paul J. Baldoni passed away on December 17, 2023 at the age of 79; and

WHEREAS, Judge Baldoni moved to LaPorte to join the law firm of Smith and Smith in the early 1970's and in 1976 he was elected to serve as Judge of LaPorte Superior Court 3, a position he held with distinction for 33 continuous years; and

WHEREAS, his 33 years on the bench placed him among the longest serving Judges in the history of LaPorte County; and

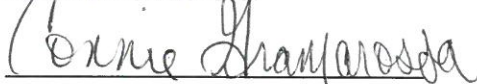
WHEREAS, during his time on the bench, Judge Baldoni and his staff brought an efficient approach to a court that consistently had a very high-volume caseload. His rulings were marked by his respect for the law, combined with a certain wisdom and compassion for those who appeared before him; and

WHEREAS, we wish to recognize Judge Paul J. Baldoni and his wife Deborah for their service and sacrifice to the citizens of LaPorte County and to forever recognize and mark that service by allowing his family members to plant a tree with a memorial marker on the lawn of the LaPorte Circuit Courthouse. Judge Paul J. Baldoni will be missed by all.

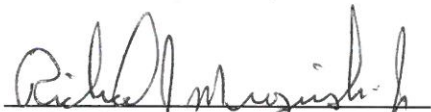
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of LaPorte County, Indiana, that LaPorte County hereby recognizes, commends, and thanks Judge Paul J. Baldoni for his dedicated service to the Citizens of LaPorte County, Indiana.

This Resolution shall be in full force and effect after passage by the Board of Commissioners of LaPorte County.

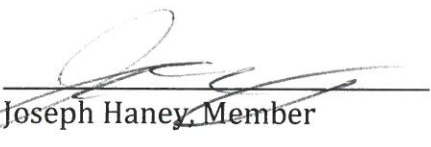
INTRODUCED BY:



Connie Gramarossa, President



Richard Mrozinski, Member



Joseph Haney, Member

ORIGINAL

Passed by the Board of Commissioners of LaPorte County, Indiana this 17th day of April, 2024.

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, The week of April 15-21, 2024, is recognized by the County of La Porte, State of Indiana, and more than 140 countries around the globe as “World Creativity and Innovation Week,” and

WHEREAS, The United Nations has designated April 21, 2024, as “World Creativity and Innovation Day,” and

WHEREAS, The theme for World Creativity and Innovation Week in La Porte County, State of Indiana, is “Inspire! Celebrate Everyday Creativity,” and

WHEREAS, World Creativity and Innovation Week is a celebration and recognition of our ability to generate new and useful ideas, use our imagination and make new decisions so our communities, nation and world may thrive, and

WHEREAS, World Creativity and Innovation Week is also designed to make every citizen aware that our society, our nation, and our economic viability depend on our individual and collective creativity, and

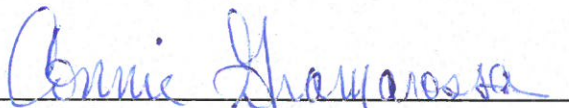
WHEREAS, During World Creativity and Innovation Week, La Porte County citizens are encouraged to recognize and apply their own creativity in their homes, schools, workplaces, organizations, government and communities.

NOW THEREFORE, we, Connie Gramarossa, Richard Mrozinski and Joseph Haney, do declare April 15-21, 2024, as

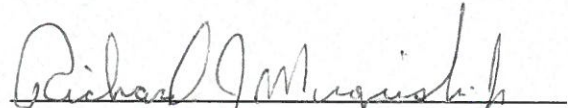
WORLD CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION WEEK

in the County of La Porte, State of Indiana, and we encourage all La Porte County citizens to embrace their own creative spirit and to enjoy and express it in their homes, schools, workplaces, organizations, government and community.


DATED THIS ^{17th} DAY OF APRIL, 2024.



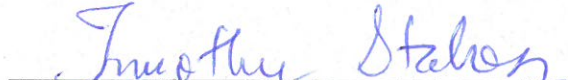
Connie Gramarossa, President



Richard Mrozinski, Vice President



Joseph Haney, Member



Attest: Timothy Stabosz, Auditor

ORIGINAL