



# LA PORTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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La Porte, IN 46350-3400  
(219) 326-6808 ext. 2229

**Connie Gramarossa**  
President

**Richard Mrozinski**  
Vice President

**Joseph Haney**  
Member

## **La Porte County Commissioners' Meeting Minutes Wednesday, August 21, 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 Mike Seitz.

**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 under Requests: **Fire Door at Small Projects building at the fairgrounds and remove item 11 'd' - Solar Project Decommissioning Agreement/Road Use Agreement; Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

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

**Auditor Tim Stabosz** read the Claims with Payroll ending 8/9/2024 - \$1,541,296.49. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

**Auditor Tim Stabosz** read the Operating Expense Claims - \$1,435,279.97. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve the claims. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

### **Public Comment**

**Steve Holifield**, 6782 E. 100 S., Mill Creek, thanked Commissioners for removing Solar agreements from the agenda, a special meeting on these two agreements is better so questions can be asked, requested a special meeting for the Plan Commission as well. **Commissioner Haney** replied next Tuesday there is one item for the Plan Commission agenda that is not related to Solar so a Public Hearing will take place during this meeting for Solar. It has been advertised as a Public Hearing with notice. **President Gramarossa**, prior to our September 18<sup>th</sup> evening meeting we will have Attorney Scott Pejic present to answer questions on both the agreements, this will be an hour before the 6:00 p.m. meeting. **Commissioner Haney**, for clarity, he knew nothing about the special meeting planned but he motioned for a workshop at 5:00 p.m. for the Commissioners. **President Gramarossa**, no motion is needed for a workshop. **Commissioner Haney**, you said 'we' decided, we as a Board decide here at public meetings, not in private behind closed doors.

**Timothy Powers**, 2934 N. Clark Street, Chicago, past resident of St. Joe County for 14 years, Development and Policy Manager for Inovate Solar, a solar company based in South Bend, works in development as well as engineering procurement in construction, built about 750 megawatts in the last 15 years. Addressed the current Solar Ordinance revisions now being heard in the Plan Commission. We strive to have the highest priorities, specifically the construction should be harmonious and beneficial to the agriculture in the County. One aspect of the current revised Solar ordinance regarding the setbacks though causes concerns for possible negative impacts for feasible project developments in the County going forward, longer setbacks require leasing more land for the projects, land that they may not be able to use but will still have to pay for which raises the cost of power that is sold from the projects, making it difficult at times to secure a competitive energy contract for purchase of that power. Local utilities, both inside and outside the State, are currently looking for power contracts so there is a significant demand for 'in state' Solar which benefits Hoosiers and creates local jobs. Proposes the County implements a minimum standard of 75-foot setback with the ability to determine on a project-by-project basis any additional setbacks along different parcel boundaries bordering any areas of concern. Consider the long-term impact of crafting a workable Solar Ordinance and the revisions associated with it which allow for responsible harmonious development for these projects in the County.

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**Patrick Fullenkamp**, 1913 McKinley Avenue, South Bend, Project Manager and Precon/Operations Manager for Inovateus Solar. Working on the Honeysuckle Solar Project located in New Carlisle, knows the social and economic impact solar projects have on our local communities. In 2023, the Honeysuckle Project employed 250 workers on site everyday with 75% of that workforce from the local region, including the La Porte County area, as Journeymen to young men/women working their first experience underneath experienced Tradesmen. Electricians, Mechanical Contractors, Operators, Civil Contractors, Landscapers, and other trades that work under the Solar Projects. Solar construction is less invasive to the local community as other sources of construction projects, little to no light pollution, the only noise pollution is at the very beginning of the projects when piles are going in the ground and dust pollution is greatly mitigated by seed going down before construction even begins. There are economic reaches outside of the solar farm as well, workers from the site spend their time and money at local businesses. Broad ordinances and guidelines for Solar Projects are not beneficial to our local communities.

**Justin Kiel**, via Zoom, requested his travel expense reimbursement claim approved in January for February travel to Washington, D.C. be paid. At the January 17<sup>th</sup> meeting it was approved 3-0 for him to attend the national Association of Counties conference, he noted then that the airfare and conference admission cost were already covered and he requested lodging and meals, about \$550, however the costs were lower at \$364 which he submitted for reimbursement. Normally attending this conference would have been several thousand dollars and this is what we paid to send other elected officials in the past so this was an opportunity for him to represent our County and learn about issues impacting county government at a significant savings to the taxpayers. He submitted receipts for reimbursement on February 28<sup>th</sup>, a week or two after he returned and to date he still has not been paid. During the January 17<sup>th</sup> meeting, he suggested that expenses may be able to be paid from the Elected Officials Training fund, no one corrected him during the meeting and later found out that a very narrow restriction requires that fund only be used by Councilmen for 'state called' conferences and not for a 'national' conference. It's a nuance distinction and we all know better now, ordinarily Commissioners decide where travel expenses would be paid from administratively, you did this routinely for in-state travel by other employees and officials and since that hasn't happened administratively, he requested the Commission to direct Ms. Gonzales to submit his expenses for payment from the Employee Education and Training budget which has about \$9,500 in it. **President Gramarossa** thanked him for his comments.

#### **Department Reports/Comments**

**Jeremy Sobecki**, Parks Department, updated the Commission on a project he has been working on with Attorney Guy DiMartino, the project is with DNR at Bluhm Park which will acquire 43 acres, a purchase option that's been agreed upon and will be signed at a special meeting for the Parks Board at Red Mill Park on Tuesday at 5:00 p.m. This includes an affidavit for non-compliance on an oil/gas lease from 1939 that was never used. The DNR will pay us for a conservation easement that will buy the land, they will do the restoration work, put in the trails and then the land will be ours at no cost to the County. This will be 43 acres added to Bluhm Park that will be a nice stream restoration and wetland project plus trails as well so it is a win-win for the County.

**Mike Seitz**, Office of Economic Development, reported good progress being made for the housing project situation in our County. Carlton Bishop and Mike Seitz are putting together list of possible properties and builders for housing developments. No joint task force meeting between St. Joe and La Porte Counties this month.

**Darlene Hale**, IT Director, thanked Commissioners and Council for getting her department back in the Complex on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor after the 12-25-2022 water pipe flood.

**Auditor Tim Stabosz** read a letter from Center Township Trustee Lisa Pierzakowski pertaining to the completion of 400 West to Johnson Road, along the Toll Road, which former Commissioner Bill Hager started but was not able to finish it. **Commissioner Mrozinski** suggested a small sign under 400 West honoring Bill Hager with 'Bill Hager Way' or 'Bill Hager Trail.' **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to add a small sign at 400 West and Johnson Road as 'Bill Hager Way.' **President Gramarossa** stepped down and seconded. **Motion carried 2-0. \*\*\*Letter attached to minutes**

**Commissioner Joe Haney**, followed up on public comments, sees no issues with reimbursing Councilman Kiel for what was approved out of regular training fund that was mentioned, the Employee and Training fund that has money still in it. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to reimburse Councilman Kiel \$364 for his travel to Washington D.C. in February. **Commissioner Mrozinski** questioned why it had not been paid yet, was it from the wrong fund? **Seconded to have a discussion.** **President Gramarossa**, investigating the reimbursement, Councilman Kiel faults the Commission when he sent an email request for travel at 3:15 p.m., a few hours prior to the Commissioners' evening meeting. No sufficient notice and it was not sent to the Secretary of the Commission to add to the agenda, Councilman Kiel stated at first it would not cost the County any money yet it ended up costing money. She is not ready to vote on it tonight, a change has been made in the Auditor's office to an account on June 11 and she would like to know why, an investigation is ongoing and she is not ready to vote on it right now. **Commissioner Haney** recalled during that meeting Councilman Kiel stated the reason for his late request was because he was already in Washington D.C. and learned of the opportunity to attend another conference. **Councilman Kiel**, via Zoom, he was not in Washington, D.C. when he requested permission to travel but the opportunity was made available to him at the last minute and it was the last Commissioners' meeting prior to the dates in February for the conferences to get permission. He explained it at the meeting and still received a 3-0 vote. There was a comment

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about him saying there was no cost but he said straight up that it would cost about \$550 and it came in at \$364 so it was less than what he presented at the meeting. **President Gramarossa**, there is another travel that is also under investigation that has yet to be paid, December 11, 2022, she attended a 'state called' conference where she was billed \$459.28 and has not been reimbursed either. **Attorney Guy DiMartino** recommended tabling this issue, if it is denied then it is denied. **Commissioner Haney**, he could withdraw his motion. He does remember an issue in 2021 when he took office as President of the Commission in 2022, he investigated the travel claim, requested a folio or a receipt from the hotel stay so Commissioner Gramarossa could get reimbursed, he offered personally to hand deliver it to the Auditor's office. **President Gramarossa**, and you did. Discussion took place with Commissioner Haney saying the receipt was never given to him and Commissioner Gramarossa saying yes, she did give it to him. **President Gramarossa**, there is a motion and a second on the floor. **Commissioner Haney** said there are two different issues here, one reimbursement has full documentation and the other has no copy of the hotel receipt. **Both Commissioner Haney and Mrozinski withdrew their first and second motions. No vote was taken.**

**Requests**

**Considered** permission to approach the Council for additional appropriation for Juvenile Service Center Fire Protection, Complex basement water damage, Fire door at small projects at the fairgrounds and Garbage pickup, **Sheryl Lestinsky**, Director of Facilities. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded** but had a question if Sourcewell was used for the Fire Protection, Johnson Controls. **President Gramarossa** showed him the paperwork with the Sourcewell number. **Commissioner Haney** asked if the mitigation work for the Complex Basement Water Damage may exceed \$50,000 if an industrial hygienist is brought in more quotes would be required. **President Gramarossa**, the industrial hygienist did come out therefore there will not be any additional fees to the \$49,174 amount. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, point of order, this is just for permission to approach the Council. A motion was made and we need a second. **Commissioner Haney, I did second it but I had a few questions, that is all. Motion carried 2-1. Commissioner Haney - Nay.**

**Considered** permission to approach the Council for appropriation for computer replacement, **Eric Fenstermaker**, EMS Director. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.** Echoed thank you to both Commission and Council for getting his department back on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor after the 2022 flood in the Complex.

**Old Business**

None

**New Business**

**Considered** acceptance of Comprehensive Plan Update contract, **Mitch Bishop**, Planner. County received \$140,000 grant from NIRPC which covers 80% of our 20-year Comprehensive Plan update. This is the contract. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

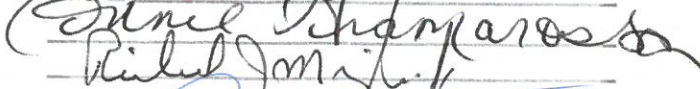

**Considered** acceptance of Bridge 189 contract for Engineering Services, **Mitch Bishop**, Planner. Grant received through INDOT, through the Federal Highway passed through DNR and then to the County, recently scored. This bridge is South of La Crosse. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

**Considered** appointing La Porte County Project Management as Project manager to scope and solicit bids for Complex windows. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded but asked if there is a reason why Building Maintenance would not source this work or sealed bids. President Gramarossa** explained the work is very close to the building and electrical lines are near the windows, better to have a Project Manager for this job. **Motion carried 2-1. Commissioner Haney - Nay, needs more information as to why this cannot be done 'in-house.'**

**Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to adjourn at 6:39 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 9-4-2024

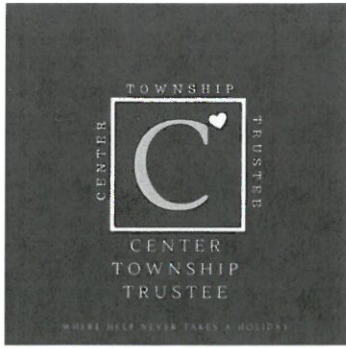
  


ATTEST:

Auditor

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

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**Center Township – La Porte County**

**Lisa M. Pierzakowski, Trustee**  
**1108 W State Road 2**  
**La Porte, IN 46350**  
**E-mail: centertownship@gmail.com**  
**Phone: 219-362-2736**  
**Fax: 219-362-1021**

**Where Help Never Takes a Holiday**

08/20/2024

Commissioners,

I am sorry that I am not able to make the meeting in person to thank you.

I want to thank the commissioners, especially Commissioner Mrozinski for getting the road finished at 400 West. This has been a work in progress and for Commissioner Mrozinski to take off where Bill Hager left off was greatly appreciated. It has been a long time coming, but to see it built and finished is a huge accomplishment and will save many lives from future accidents.

Myself and my department are very grateful for the new road!

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Pierzakowski,

Center Township Trustee-La Porte County

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