



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, September 4, 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 Carlton Bishop.

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

Considered the agenda. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered approval of the August 21, 2024 minutes. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Claims with Payroll ending 8/23/2024 - \$1,497,598.66. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Operating Expense Claims - \$2,107,641.43. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve the claims. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Public Comment

Cheryl Gall, 8473 Lake Shore Drive, Hudson Lake, roadway along the side of her house has a stairwell that leads to Hudson Lake. Neighbor has a pontoon boat trailer that he parks at the end of the undeveloped roadway. Parking is limited in this area. Spoke to Mr. Wheatbrook, thought this would be discussed at this meeting. **President Gramarossa** requested Cheryl's contact information be given to Secretary Gonzales for follow up.

Mike Kellems, 159 Regency Parkway, La Porte, reported the Railroad has closed 600 West, south of US 6, without notifying Emergency Services and/or the school transportation system. Hopefully it was closed for repairs which is needed, this is a well-traveled road in the southern part of our County. Possibly the Commissioners can reach out to the Railroad stressing the need for notification of closures. **Commissioner Mrozinski** thanked Mike for his report.

Department Reports/Comments

Darlene Hale, IT Director, an email about security concerns with the Michigan City Courthouse was brought to her attention, **Commissioner Haney** asked her to facilitate the concerns, she does not do Security nor Building Maintenance however she has arranged for a quote to address the concerns. The funds have been approved months ago and now its in the hands of the vendor.

Barb Huston, E-911 Director, August 27th a storm came through the County and five (5) Dispatchers answered 536 calls, 244 were 911 calls and 292 were administrative calls, her office was busy but the staff did a great job. Barb then requested permission to approach the Council to pay an annual Motorola invoice for \$95,638. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.** **President Gramarossa** asked Barb Huston to give a report on one of her employees. **Barb Huston**, Nikki Nixon, 911 Dispatcher, was recognized by the City of La Porte for her professionalism and calmness while relaying police radio updates during a recent apprehension of a fleeing suspect during a motor vehicle pursuit. The suspect was involved in a very bad assault. Nikki, along with police officers involved in the case, were recognized at a recent La Porte City Council meeting. She is the training officer for the 911 Department.

ORIGINAL

Heather Stevens, Clerk, via Zoom, possible confusion on Absentee Voting locations, Election Board approved Wanatah and Wills Township locations but both the Complex in La Porte and 8th Street in Michigan City are pending Commissioners' approval. **President Gramarossa**, the Complex is needed now that both rooms are available for public meetings. Follow up with Nate Loucks for the use of the previous La Porte location and give the contract to Attorney Guy DiMartino. The La Porte Absentee Voting site is considered a 'satellite' location, an extension of the Clerk of the Circuit Court's office, therefore a contract is required. Absentee Voting begins October 8th. Authority was delegated to Attorney Guy DiMartino pending the contract. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0. Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve the use of the 8th Street location in Michigan City. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Sean Fagan, Prosecuting Attorney, distributed a handout to the Commission. After looking at the document, **President Gramarossa** stated there is a current investigation on this item and she believes open discussion should not take place. **Attorney Guy DiMartino**, this is information that was requested by President Gramarossa and agreed should not be discussed in the public meeting. **Prosecutor Fagan**, considering it is now a news story, he would like the public to hear his side of the story. **President Gramarossa**, you can go to the news media and state your side, when she was contacted by the media she reported 'no comment.' There is a current Whistleblower investigation and she believes it should not be discussed here at the meeting. **Prosecutor Fagan**, on August 27th his staff in Michigan City held an office party to celebrate their children. We try to have an office culture that is family friendly due to our Prosecutors and staff working 24/7, always available and in recent news, we've had a lot of activity, especially in Michigan City with a double homicide. He gave 'props' to the Michigan City Police Department who, within a span of 24 hours, came across a crime scene and within 20 - within 48 hours identified a suspect and an arrest was made. There was a recent murder here in La Porte. His office is very busy with a lot of activities, they've had convictions, recently Jason Wetzel and with anyone in Public Safety, it can take a toll on mental and family health. Many people know, the shirt he is wearing, the 'thin blue line' represents police and there are some other things on the back of his shirt. The shirt was part of a fund raiser for the FOP in Michigan City and he wears it to show support for Public Safety and police. His office is very busy with a lot of things going on but with this being a public news story he felt it was important to mention it. On August 27th the party was spontaneous, on August 23rd his staff emailed him asking if they could throw a party in celebration of their kids and for their mission with Child Support as well so he agreed. He sent out the invite that was prepared by his staff to his Michigan City staff, about 10-15 people, and Child Support, approximately 12-13 people. The party was at 2:30 p.m. Using private funds, they bought various materials, party supplies, pizza on their own dime and several guests attended as well. Staff was still working during this event. Police were there, representatives in a non-official capacity from the Indiana State Police, and non-official representation from the Michigan City Police Department. A sizeable law enforcement presence that just happened to be so this event was probably an hour at most, people continued working, it was a Tuesday, Court Day, so there was a large number of staff present. **County Attorney Guy DiMartino** asked Prosecutor Fagan to move along with his story about the get together that took place. **Prosecutor Fagan** stated the fact that the event happened is clear, from news reports - actually he did not know about any issues until he was contacted by Stan Maddox, Hometown News Now, with photos of the party asking for comments. On Monday, August 26th, his staff told him they wanted to use the Walmart credit card, which a copy of the receipt was distributed to the Commission earlier, to buy coffee and other allowed expenses using the Walmart credit card, his office has three (3) Walmart cards, one for La Porte, one for Michigan City and one for Child Support. We can use it for office expenses such as coffee, cutlery, pens, legit expenses so they asked to use it to buy some supplies for the party and he said yes. **Attorney Guy DiMartino** asked Prosecutor Fagan to keep the receipt part out of the discussion. **Prosecutor Fagan** continued, the receipt reflects a mixture of 'allowed' and 'not allowed' items so when they asked how to pay the bill, he did not direct them to use any public funds, in the interest of transparency and he didn't want to have a debate with the Auditor's office about what is allowed or not allowed, because he was sick for 3-4 days, he went to the Auditor's office yesterday with a money order that he paid for himself along with the original receipt for the credit card statement. In the end, no public funds were used for this event. The public should hear from him as to what happened and the events that took place. **President Gramarossa**, after the investigation started the intent was to use the credit card, an internal credit card was used, correct? **Prosecutor Fagan**, with the intention of paying for it out of private funds which we had done. **President Gramarossa**, why didn't you use private funds to begin with? **Prosecutor Fagan**, because the office at the spur of the moment told me 'Hey, we're going to have - buy some allowed expenses that are necessary for the office, like coffee'... **President Gramarossa**, and was this party for the police or extended family? **Prosecutor Fagan**, well, it was for the office because we used it as an office morale kind of thing, these kind of things happen all...are normal within county government like for instance when we do Administrators Professional Day in late April, I will personally buy lunch for my staff and personally give them...**President Gramarossa**, and you don't use the credit card and then reimburse the credit card? **Prosecutor Fagan**, well, in times past there were issues years ago with my predecessor and his predecessor...**President Gramarossa**, but we're not going to talk about him, in your office have you used this credit card in the past and then come in with money orders and pay for these items? **Prosecutor Fagan**, let me give an explanation as to - **President Gramarossa**, it's a yes or no question sir. **Prosecutor Fagan**, I didn't know that there was question and answer during direct comments. Both **President Gramarossa** and **Attorney DiMartino** stated this is Department Head comments. **President Gramarossa**, and I asked you not to speak about this but you wanted to continue to speak about this sir. **Prosecutor Fagan**, well, when you speak to the media and don't bring your concerns to me individually. **President Gramarossa** stated she was contacted by the media just as he was and this is a Whistleblower investigation. **Prosecutor Fagan** told her she provided photos. **President Gramarossa**, people from your own office turned this in to us. **Prosecutor Fagan**, speaking of that, lets talk about that for a minute. **President Gramarossa** reminded him that an investigation is being conducted and this discussion should not take place here at this public meeting. **Attorney Guy DiMartino** agreed however did say if there was any information that the

Prosecutor wanted the public to hear **not** pertaining to the investigation then continue with his comments. **Prosecutor Fagan**, the news media contacted me and no one brings concerns. "We have a culture in La Porte County where Public Officials don't communicate and we tried to set up a meeting with the Commissioners through your Counsel to talk about this to lower the temperature but we were denied." **President Gramarossa**, because there is an investigation. **Attorney Guy DiMartino**, that's not appropriate based on our conversations however its my understanding that this matter came to a forefront because of somebody in your office that filed a Whistleblower and we have a Whistleblower policy, an Ordinance, so at this point in time that needs to play out. **Prosecutor Fagan**, he has a number of concerns - one, APS, the State signs the contract with him, they do not report to the Commission. They work remotely, they've done that for a long time, he's been left out of the conversation and finds out the Commission has been talking to the staff about office space and he, as their boss, is not included and he finds that offensive. **Attorney DiMartino** stated he understands that APS (Adult Protective Services) is going to become its own unit with funding sought outside the Prosecutor's office. If a workshop is needed to discuss APS further then okay but this is not the appropriate place to discuss it. **Prosecutor Fagan**, "County government is dysfunctional, we all know that and we're trying to do our best as the Prosecutor's office, to get along, to make sure, to stick to our core mission which is protecting the public because if we don't protect the public then what are we doing, we have serious issues within La Porte County in terms of public safety and we're working on it and then for us, you know, for a trivial matter such as this event to blow up, its just...I don't know, I don't have words to describe it, I'm a pretty eloquent guy so having these kind of things where I, you know, if people would talk to me, you all have my number, you all can contact me at any time and instead of bickering in the press why can't we just like normal Americans and normal adults, just sit and talk to each other and hash out our differences because I don't have to come here and talk about things, I hate coming to meetings because whether it's to the Council or the Commissioners because all I see is bickering and confusion and we're just trying to do our mission which is to protect the public and that's the only mission that we really have, we are a State office dedicated to protecting the public and when we have things that we can't just talk and try to get these things done then it makes...it just continues the stereo type that La Porte County Government is dysfunctional and I as a tax payer and as a citizen and as an elected official hate that because there are times within county government that I'm just like hey, you know what, to hell with this, I quit! you know why? because government sucks and you know why government sucks? it's because of the people we elect and I vote" - **Attorney DiMartino** asked to bring down the rhetoric or volume a bit. **President Gramarossa**, do you want us to disregard the Whistleblower because its your department? When people come to us are we not to do an investigation because its your department? **Prosecutor Fagan**, no. **President Gramarossa** asked to allow the investigation to take place. **Prosecutor Fagan**, if there is no communication between you and me. **President Gramarossa**, when you do investigations do you contact us to let us know where you're at in the investigation? **Prosecutor Fagan**, because we haven't had any kind of County Commissioners under investigation for a while, we've had five or six incidences with public officials within the last year and a half. **Attorney DiMartino**, Mr. Fagan, that's getting far for you. **Prosecutor Fagan**, well that's how emotional I am at this point. **Commissioner Haney**, he understands where he is coming from, last Friday, the first he had heard of this was an email with the news article or a text about this, because he was curious, he reached out to Prosecutor Fagan, the first communication he received from the Board about this was this morning, an email asking for this receipt. **Prosecutor Fagan**, and we proved it. **Commissioner Haney**, and extremely promptly. **President Gramarossa**, you provided it to the Auditor's office, I requested an email to the Auditor's office, they contacted you and now you've shown up here. **Prosecutor Fagan**, they didn't contact me, I was copied on that email, besides the bill - for this bill its an advance so it won't be paid until later this month. **President Gramarossa**, this still needs to be taken offline, we need to stop. **Attorney DiMartino** agreed. **Commissioner Haney**, at the same time for the Board to receive information generally speaking, especially from a Department Head, that's why we have Department Head comments, that's why we meet as a Board because officially the three of us can't get together outside of that and take in information and in his capacity so it's one of those things where it kind of has to happen here, to a point, obviously now if there are names and things with an individual Whistleblower we don't want to talk about that or...**President Gramarossa**, we went through a Whistleblower investigation in January and we did not bring it to the Commissioners meeting. **Commissioner Haney**, excuse me Madame President, I'm speaking, take a moment and let me finish my comment and then you can finish speaking, that's how it works with adults, we talk and we draw things out and then you can comment back, my point is that as long as we're not speaking about any information that may or may not reveal who a Whistleblower is or identity or anything like that we can have this slightly higher level conversation and no one is being negatively impacted by that so I think it's important that those different levels... **Attorney DiMartino**, and this is where we have to be cognizant because if the Whistleblower is out there watching this, there's issues there, people are concerned about their jobs so I understand you need to receive information because you can't speak but (to Prosecutor Fagan) how much more information do you need to provide? **Prosecutor Fagan**, for any Whistleblower complaint, today was the first we've heard as an office that... **Attorney DiMartino**, but I don't think you will receive notice once that happens, I don't believe that the Department Head receives notice that there is a Whistleblower complaint. **Prosecutor Fagan**, given a number of, like the security concerns I've addressed an email to everyone where we had a breach at the Michigan City office and my main concern is that internal investigations that are currently going on are being disclosed to third parties and its not us and we have proof that's its not coming from us because I have documented proof that's its not coming from us and that stuff related to investigations are being disclosed to third parties who have no business knowing what's going on. **Attorney DiMartino** asked for clarification. Are you saying third parties are disclosing to the public your criminal investigations? **Prosecutor Fagan**, sensitive data is being disclosed to somebody and I'm trying to figure that out. **Attorney DiMartino**, then that problem is in your office. **Prosecutor Fagan**, well, I don't want to get into it at a public meeting regarding this, regarding some of this. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, what are we doing here then? **Attorney DiMartino** asked if there were any further comments. **Prosecutor Fagan**, thanked the Commission for their time and reminded them to contact him if they have any questions.

Tim Stabosz, Auditor, unrelated to anything discussed so far, thanked his staff and reported to the Commission that the County has been converted to 'Remote Claims.' Up until recently, the County has required departments to bring claims paperwork to his Accounts Payable Department in his office. This process has since been modernized, it was done systematically and carefully, at the beginning of this year we started asking departments to volunteer to use the Remote Claims process. What does it gain the County? Departments don't have to take claims paperwork to the Auditor's office, especially during inclement weather; saves on paper and ink; paperwork will no longer have to be stored in the 'purple room' but instead will be 'in the cloud' or through the financial software provider; increases efficiency of employees and most significantly during recent SBOA audits, as they catch up on the audits, not because of his office but due to the former Treasurer and financial statements fell behind, when SBOA needs paperwork his staff goes to the 'purple room' to find the paper claims information. This will be 'on the cloud' and easier for SBOA to view the claims. He is very proud and grateful to his staff which was spearheaded by Deputy Auditor Rhonda Graves. A manual was created with step-by-step instructions of the new process for the departments. "It's fully implemented. It increases efficiency and effectiveness and a nice legacy that will be useful for the next Auditor, thank you."

Requests

Considered 44.75 sick days pay for County Highway employee, **Charity Glaser**, Superintendent. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered job title changes from Administrator to Director for EMS and Health Department. **Commissioner Haney motioned to approve the change.** He believes this is the last two departments to make the change, more clerical than anything. **Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Old Business

None

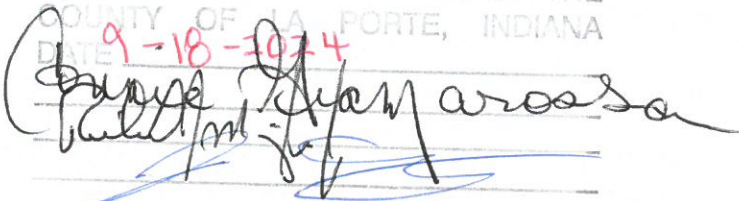
New Business

Considered Health Insurance renewal for the upcoming year. **Eric Gibson**, Employee Benefits Advisor and **Craig Menne**, Agency President at General Insurance, scoured the market, went to many different insurance companies, received multiple quotes, and recommend staying with UMR/Berkley which is the current plan with a projected 3% increase. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to open for discussion then approved. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Contract for Construction Inspection for Bridge #97, **Jay Sullivan**, Engineer. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Contract for Design for Bridge #46, **Jay Sullivan**, Engineer. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to adjourn at 11:43 a.m. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

EXAMINED AND APPROVED BY THE
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE
COUNTY OF LA PORTE, INDIANA
DATE 9-18-2014


ATTEST: _____ Auditor
LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

ORIGINAL