



**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, October 2, 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.

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

Considered the agenda. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to add Consider changing the Commissioners' meeting date from December 4 to December 9, 10:00 a.m. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered approval of the September 18, 2024 minutes. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Claims with Payroll ending 9/20/2024 - \$1,507,384.96. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Operating Expense Claims - \$1,863,607.98. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve the claims. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Public Comment

Steve Holifield, 6782 E. 100 S., Mill Creek, commented on the Burn Ban, as a farmer and a Lincoln Township Board Member, spoke to Lincoln Township Fire Chief and believes it is very prudent to extend the current Burn Ban. We did have rain but it was not enough. Would appreciate the Burn Ban to continue to stay in place.

Tommy Kulavik, 1314 Ohio Street, Michigan City, via Zoom, through the end of October the Farmer's Market will continue in Michigan City at its current location of 8th Street and Washington Street. Next year though it will be moved due to a 200-unit Workforce apartments planned for that area. Tax sale coming up, he saw the list of properties. Go Wolves, Beat the Slicers!

Department Reports/Comments

Mike Mollenhauer, Councilman, read a statement from Councilman Earl Cunningham then added he supports the request. "The Council by a vote is requesting Commissioners to agree to extend 'read only' access to Low to all Councilmembers. Just as the Auditor reads access to the County software to do his job, so do we. There are dozens of reports that give us insight into the County's finances. Previously it has been agreed that Councilmembers would come into the complex to access Low however this requires us to do so during business hours and some Councilmen work day jobs and one lives about 80 minutes roundtrip journey to the courthouse. We would hope that you would remove barriers, this would be on a County owned laptop that requires multifaceted authentication. Other officials have remote/read/write access meaning they can make changes to the ledger remotely. We're asking that for us to 'read only' access. Fears of being hacked are overblown because that same risk applies to every Low user whether they are on site or remotely accessing the system. We want to empower our members to be able to come up with financial questions and quickly check into them by having access. Thank you very much." Mike added that he is in complete support for it, he does learn a lot during the Council meetings but it is a chance to have a better understating of the finances with access. It is embarrassing at times when we do not have the knowledge or information ahead of time. This was voted on at our Council meeting on Monday night.

Justin Kiel, Councilman, via Zoom, joined Councilmen Mollenhauer and Cunningham in supporting increased access to Low, he is the Councilman who lives 80 miles roundtrip from the Courthouse, he lives in La Crosse, the furthest municipality from the Courthouse and having access to run reports. **President Gramarossa** asked if he is currently in New York.

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Justin Kiel, yes and one Councilman is in Florida on business and another in Chicago, all of us are all over at different times. Its about having remote access so we can continue to do our job remotely sometimes, having this access is what makes it possible for us to run reports that are sometimes more detailed, at times we may have ideas outside of business hours that we might want to check into...two of you are former Councilmen so you should appreciate that when there may be moments late at night when you're thinking what the ledger may be able to tell you and you would be able to do that having remote access at all hours in order to do our job. Security is a concern, he understands that however there are County issued laptops, multifaceted authentication could be required with a VPN, traffic is routed through the County's firewall already. Other County officials have access to Low with remote read/write access, if issues arose, it could be far worse than just reading ledgers. We're trying to remove barriers, make it so Councilmen have access to these financial reports and can do our job more effectively, we ask that you consider taking a vote to grant access to us. Thank you for the consideration.

Earl Cunningham, Councilman, via Zoom, agrees with everything Justin said. Next year both Earl and Justin will be gone, what bothers him is when they walk in a meeting, the agenda went from 6 pages to 7 pages with new financial information, a considerable amount of financial information and if they have access to the ledgers, it helps them to make better decisions. At times they look foolish when they are getting information at the last minute or right at the meeting, currently they are in a 'crunch' with the timeline for the budget and every opportunity they to review the figures the better off they are, appreciates the consideration for the remote access. Agrees with Justin that it knocks down barriers and makes it easier for Councilmen to do their job. Thanked Councilman Mollenhauer for reading his statement, he wasn't sure if he was able to Zoom in or not for the meeting.

Commissioner Joe Haney motioned to grant permission to Councilmen for remote 'read only' access to Low, our financial system. There are several County Employees with remote read/write access now to Low, especially during Covid when employees worked from home, and with 'read only' it really is a minimal exposure to the financial system. **Commissioner Mrozinski** asked if this has been discussed with our County Attorney. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded the motion for questions/discussion. **Attorney Guy DiMartino**, via Zoom, clearly Council members have access to Low now but this is a security issue. He requested the IT Director to contact Low and ask their opinion or rules for remote access. A county laptop will have to be used with a VPN and not a personal laptop. This is only if Low says it is not a security risk. **President Gramarossa**, a Councilman came to the Commission in the past with a request that was not stated correctly and blamed the Commission for not correcting the statement. Our meetings are held every two weeks, this was not on our agenda, we are not able to verify with Low yet a vote is expected at our meeting right now. The same way the Councilmen say they are clueless about the finances because they have not met with the Auditor prior to their meetings now they want the Commission to grant them remote access to Low. It is believed the system is secure when the same system was used to scam \$2,995.38, the money was lost, the tax payers' money which was designated for the Highway Department, less pot holes will be filled because that money has not been replaced. Neither the Council nor the Auditor have come up with a solution to replace the money that was lost. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, we need to hear from Low. **Commissioner Haney**, because of your concerns with remote access to Low, should we remove all Department Heads and employees' remote access to Low? **President Gramarossa**, this was just brought up and not ready to vote right now on it. **Commissioner Haney**, if Councilmen are going through the same security steps and hoops that other employees do, then why is there an issue with 'read only' access. The Councilmen's main purpose is the finances, to deny them access due to security issues, why not be concerned with the other employees that have the same access. Are you denying them? **President Gramarossa**, you stated at one time in a press release that there was \$650,000 taken out of employee health care when that was not true so are you saying this is true? There are no risks to the remote access? **Commissioner Haney**, it was true, we were able to recover some of it, remember you spent months trying to keep us from getting the documents? **Auditor Stabosz**, point of order, can we return to the subject at hand please? **Commissioner Haney**, why is it ok for an employee that is not an elected official or a department head to have access but not the Council? The exact same security is there for either one, if it is granted for one then it should be for the other, doesn't make sense unless you're purposely hiding something from the Council. **President Gramarossa**, here we go again. **Attorney DiMartino**, via Zoom, I just don't know how something could be hidden from the Council because Council has access to the information, the issue is whether they have to physically come to the building or can do it from home, any Council member can go to a computer on County property and view it, it is the remote access and not the information that is in question. **Commissioner Haney**, do you think there is greater risk for a Council member than an employee or department head having remote access? **Attorney DiMartino**, he's not an internet security person, needs to be brought up with the IT Director or Low. If an individual accesses it from say a Starbucks, then that's a problem. **Councilman Cunningham**, via Zoom, part of my argument, we have some now and probably more in the future where a Council member works during the day, it's impossible to get to the County building before closing time and some of the best work is done at two in the morning when you start thinking about stuff and you want to look it up. You probably don't really know how many people have access. We're asking for 'read' only not to change anything, we're in a tight timeline right now, we need to get numbers together for the 2025 budget. **Attorney DiMartino**, via Zoom, would there be a compromise to allow access through the budget process? That way Low can look at the issue. **Councilman Justin Kiel**, via Zoom, followed up by agreeing with Councilman Cunningham on the budget process, right now we have about five million dollars more being spent than what we will have coming in next year in the General Fund, it's a problem we have to address and we need to be able to look at data extensively in order to work through that, this was brought up at our Council meeting on Monday, two days ago, and voted on by the Council. Frequently department heads request something that is not on the agenda and the Council has that too, he respects a decision to take time to think about it however they are under a time constraint. **President Gramarossa**, questioned whether this is the first time this has happened

where the Council has a budget, is under a deadline and don't have the information. **Councilman Kiel**, this has been an issue in prior years as well but the ability to respond to it just depends on the resources we have. **Councilman Cunningham**, via Zoom, has been on the Council for 12 years and this is the first time he has seen numbers coming into the last couple of months of the budget. We're in a crisis. **Councilman Kiel**, via Zoom, we're asking for your help to resolve it, that's why we're here. **Councilman Mike Mollenhauer**, this is my 8th year as Councilman, this year seems to be more difficult to get the numbers, just different, and we're in a crunch. We're all responsible enough to take care of this, Monday night when the Auditor gave us a stack of papers right before our meeting, that is difficult to start going through the paperwork during the meeting. **Commissioner Mrozinski** asked why did they get the paperwork that night of the meeting, why not earlier? **Councilman Mollenhauer**, at times it is not ready. I guess the Auditor would have the answer to that question. **Commissioner Mrozinski** said when he was a Councilman for 8 years, they always had their packets days before the meeting. **Auditor Stabosz**, we get the packet out a week before, six days prior to the meeting. **Councilman Mollenhauer**, but then there is additional information at the meeting like the other night. **Auditor Stabosz**, there are additions to the agenda at times. **Councilman Earl Cunningham**, via Zoom, suggested amending the motion by adding the IT Department's secured multifaceted authentication, as secure as we can possibly get it. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, amended his motion by adding approval contingent of the IT Department after they have verified with Low. **Councilman Cunningham**, via Zoom, thank you. **Commissioner Haney seconded the amended motion. President Gramarossa**, open for discussion, you are now putting all of this on one department. I'd rather table it, investigate, even if we come back at a special meeting in a day or two, don't like the idea of rushing through on this request. Budgets are made every single year, now something has gone wrong, it has filtered down to us and we have to hurry up to make a rash decision because someone else had poor planning. I'm not comfortable with voting on this right now. **Commissioner Haney**, Commissioner Mrozinski's amendment to the motion the Council people would be subject to the same security requirements that everybody else is already accessing remotely so I don't see why a Councilmen would be treated any differently than the others. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, I don't know who all has access to Low and that's not what we are discussing here. It was brought to us today, we could have talked about it earlier, I have a lot of questions about it. Maybe I should rephrase my amendment that it would still be the Commissioners' decision but I think the Commissioners need to talk to IT and Low to be sure it's okay with them, **I withdraw my amendment and my second, I motion that we table this until further investigation. Councilman Cunningham**, via Zoom, I would like to withdraw my 'thank you.' **President Gramarossa stepped down and seconded. Motion carried 2-1. Commissioner Haney - Nay. Commissioner Haney**, moving on from granting access, given the concerns my fellow Commissioners have on security for remote access, **motioned to suspend ALL remote access to Low pending further investigation. Councilman Cunningham**, via Zoom, that's a great point because I just heard Mr. Mrozinski say he doesn't know who all has remote access. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, not going to suspend all users. **President Gramarossa, no second heard therefore motion dies.**

Jay Sullivan, County Engineer, reported Bridge #39 had to be closed due to damage. Currently has two quotes to repair the bridge from our 'On-Call' agreements with Engineer Companies, USI - \$43,800 and Lochmueller - \$57,700, for the design repair for the Bridge. La Porte Construction - \$145,000 for construction. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, thanks for your work on this, it was a surprise when this came up. **Jay Sullivan**, bridge inspections are every two years, if the bridge is determined to be deteriorating then it goes to a yearly schedule. From 2020 to 2024 this bridge deteriorated fast. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to use the 'On-Call' company with the lowest bid. Commissioner Haney**, not sure if Commissioner Mrozinski is allowed to make that motion with a conflict of interest because his daughter is a representative of that company. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, she has nothing to do with that part it. **President Gramarossa**, there is a motion on the floor and a concern for a conflict of interest, Mr. DiMartino, what constitutes as a conflict of interest? **Attorney DiMartino**, assuming you filed a conflict of interest statement? **Commissioner Mrozinski**, I sure did. **Attorney DiMartino**, someone in your family works at USI? **Commissioner Mrozinski**, yeah but... **Attorney DiMartino**, would she benefit from a county contract? **Commissioner Mrozinski**, she has nothing to do with this bridge at all and we're looking at a difference of \$13,900. **Attorney Guy DiMartino** sees no issue, it's been disclosed, there is no gain going to Mr. Mrozinski or his family. **Commissioner Haney** seconded due to a question, if the bridges are inspected every two years yet the years 2020 to 2024 was stated, what did the year 2022 report show? **Jay Sullivan**, the 2020 Bridge report did not have #39 listed in the top 50 however the 2022 report had it listed as #7 then the 2024 report was bad so we closed it down. **President Gramarossa** clarified in 2020 it was not on the list, 2022 it was #7 then 2024 it is closed. **Jay Sullivan**, yes. Two bridges a year are usually done. We look at the top 2 or top 4, try to get funding for the repairs. It was on our schedule. **President Gramarossa**, how does it go from not being on the list to #7? **Jay Sullivan**, if you look at the 2022 pictures, the bridge doesn't look that bad. **President Gramarossa**, I looked at those photos and the pictures were not taken under the carriage, they were taken from a distance, of the top. **Jay Sullivan**, if they had questions in 2022, they should have inspected it in 2023, if a bridge is deemed in deterioration, it can be inspected every year which wasn't done either. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, there are farmers on both sides of this bridge, that could be most of the heavy traffic, maybe a school bus too. **Jay Sullivan** stated when they were out there, truckloads of tomatoes were being transported over the bridge. **President Gramarossa** spoke to the school district, there are 3 buses in the morning and then again in the afternoon that pass over the bridge. We had a meeting about this, there are a lot of concerns. What is the role of the Highway Department versus the 'On-Call' company to inspect the bridges? **Jay Sullivan**, we have 118 bridges in our County that need inspection, majority are ever two years, Franklin Street Bridge is an exception, consultants review the bridges, a four-year contract with them. Safety and Construction of the bridges are relied on with the certified consultant. **Commissioner Haney**, roughly two years ago there was an issue with a bridge in Michigan City near Blue Chip, there was graffiti on this bridge, I believe the same company took photos or had photos of this bridge that looked old, usually I go with the lowest bidder but I'm inclined to - this is the same company that inspected

the bridge two years ago, old photos were shown as current pictures but they were not. **Commissioner Mrozinski** asked when the bridge was built and who built it. **Jay Sullivan** replied 1984. **President Gramarossa**, we hire inspectors to handle this for us. The inspector should not be doing the plans for us until we sort out what is going on. We need to be sure in the future that the underneath of the bridges are inspected as well. There were concerns from the Highway Department that were discussed about a year ago and it was addressed. Can we go to Lochmueller and ask why such a discrepancy? Can we ask the two 'On-Call' inspector companies to come up with a plan as to how to repair it and looking at La Porte Construction to do the repair work. **President Gramarossa stepped down and motioned not-to-exceed \$58,000 and \$145,000, this amends the current motion on the floor by Commissioner Mrozinski.** She asked Auditor Stabosz for the deadline or cutoff day for the Council's agenda. **Auditor Stabosz** said he would have to ask his staff. **Jay Sullivan**, if Lochmueller won't come down on their price, those are the only two 'On-Call' vendors we have unless he finds another company but they are not our 'On-Call' and their fee is not appropriated where the other two have already been appropriated. **Commissioner Haney amended the motion by giving authority to Engineer Sullivan to get additional quotes if needed. Commissioner Gramarossa seconded the motion.** **Commissioner Mrozinski** clarified that instead of going with the lowest bid we are now going to ask the higher bid vendor to come down on their price? If the price does not come down then we will get additional bids? **President Gramarossa**, the 'On-Call' inspector that has the lowest bid is the one to come up with the plans however if it was inspected and the damage was not noticed or caught at that time, how do we use that company to give us plans on how to fix it? **Commissioner Haney** echoed President Gramarossa's concerns; we don't encourage and reward bad behavior with additional incentives. **President Gramarossa**, I wouldn't say bad behavior. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, I don't think you want to go there. **Commissioner Haney**, potential bad behavior, what we're looking at here at least as a Board where I sit, an organization that's had a couple of different issues now with bridges in the past two years, I don't know what's going on but the inspections don't reflect what is actually going on with the conditions of the bridges and this isn't the first time we've had some sort of issue, this is obviously the biggest and it's concerning to me. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, you have a tier that was supposed to be filled with concrete and instead it was sand, it deteriorated quicker, who's fault is that? **President Gramarossa**, I'm not going to put the Engineer on the spot here, we're looking to move this project forward, we have school buses using that bridge that now are being rerouted, do you have anything more for us Mr. DiMartino? **Attorney DiMartino**, if you have concerns with the consultant that did the inspections then you can go with the higher bid, you're entitled to do that if you have concerns with the work, you can ask Engineer Sullivan to request the higher bid to come down to the lower bid, you can get another bid outside of the current two so those are really the options. **Commissioner Haney**, I believe the motion on the floor covers all those bases. **President Gramarossa asked for the vote. Auditor Stabosz**, tomorrow is the deadline for additional appropriations. **Commissioner Haney** suggested voting on the current motion then he will make an additional motion to clear up funding if needed. **Commissioner Mrozinski repeated his motion to go with the lowest 'On-Call' bid. Commissioner Haney repeated the amended motion by Commissioner Gramarossa and seconded by him as authorizing our County Engineer to ask Lochmueller if they can come down on their price of \$58,000 and giving him permission to seek additional quotes if Engineer Sullivan feels it is needed and approve La Porte Construction, up to \$145,000 for repairs plus approach Council for anything additional that may be needed. Motion carried 2-1. Commissioner Mrozinski - Nay. Commissioner Haney motioned to authorize Engineer Jay Sullivan to approach the Council for any additional funding if he does not currently have it in his budget; not-to-exceed \$58,000 for the consultant and not-to-exceed \$145,000 for the construction repairs. President Gramarossa stepped down and seconded. Commissioner Mrozinski asked for the current motion to which Commissioner Haney repeated it, then he said we have a bid of \$43,800 but we're going to ask permission not-to-exceed \$58,000? Answer by Commissioners Gramarossa and Haney was yes, correct. Motion carried 2-1. Commissioner Mrozinski - Nay. Commissioner Mrozinski, not my money.**

Brian Beach, EMS, requested motion of support for additional appropriation for fuel and other opts to get them through the rest of the year. He does not have figures yet but they are working on it. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned granted for permission to approach the Council. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.** **Brian** reported recently Amanda Collins was promoted from FTO/Paramedic to a Lieutenant beginning October 8th. Two EMTs, Nick Orzech and Angel Reed, have completed their training and are currently interns. Richard Eddy completed a course allowing him to be an instructor for EMS. **Brian** announced La Porte County EMS was named the 2024 Paramedic Provider of the Year in the State Indiana. Eric Fenstermaker will be accepting the award Friday evening, thanked Jeff Rose for getting all the information submitted, this is the 6th time La Porte County has won this award. This is the La Port County EMS' 50th year of existence.

Amanda Lahners, Health Department Director, updated the Commission on their Water Lab which is now open/operating, the bacteria side is fully certified and the chemistry side has been verbally confirmed, just waiting for the certificate to arrive from the State. Employee Flu Clinics will be starting next week: Wednesday, October 9, 2024, in their Complex office 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.; Michigan City office Friday, October 11, 2024, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. then back in La Porte at the Complex office October 18, 2024, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Please contact their office with any questions at extension 2200.

Sheryl Lestinsky, Director of Facilities, reported the two heating units have been delivered at the County Museum, the south unit has been installed while the north unit is in place and waiting to be connected. Requested permission to approach the Council for additional appropriations for the Elevator Account and the Electric Account. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve the request. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Mike Polan, Building Commissioner, announced a new software transition should be completed by the end of the year. Two programs that are currently used will consolidate into one with both Building Permit and Code Enforcement. He has a concern though that without having a GIS Department to assist with the transition he will be relying on IT and the Assessor's office. **President Gramarossa**, we have done interviews for the GIS position and will continue until one is hired. **Mike** reported for the month of August there were eight (8) new homes built worth over two million dollars total and 180 permits were issued for work in our County. Recently we have recovered liens on condemnations.

Commissioner Joe Haney, thanked La Porte County EMS as well as E-911 as he was on the receiving end the last few months with the care of his dad who passed away last month. The care and devotion said a lot.

President Gramarossa, Prosecutor Sean Fagan changed the locks in his Michigan City office at the Courthouse. The Commissioners oversee the buildings and for safety reasons, there are lock boxes for the fire departments in case of an emergency, the keys for all the offices are kept in the lock boxes. A work order was submitted for the Prosecutor's office in Michigan City however due to maintenance not having a key because the locks were changed, the work order could not be completed. We need to work together, if locks need to be changed, please contact the Commissioners to get it done properly.

Requests

Considered permission to approach the Council to replace Four (4) vehicles, **Dion Campbell**, JSC Director. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered travel permission for Assistant Director to Salt Lake City for a conference, **Dion Campbell**, JSC Director. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Old Business

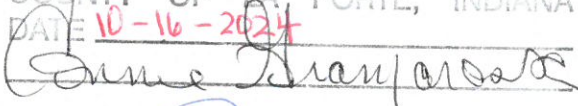
Considered review on Burn Ban Executive Order, **Rob Sabie**, EMA, **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve the ban for an additional two weeks. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**


New Business

Considered appointment to the Animal Shelter Advisory Board of Veterinarian Adrienne Pinks Rosenbaum. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered changing Commissioners' meeting date of December 4, 2024 to December 9, 2024 due to a Commissioners' Conference. Time will be 10:00 a.m. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to adjourn at 11:20 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 10-16-2024



ATTEST: _____ Auditor
LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA