



LA PORTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

555 Michigan Avenue, Suite 202
La Porte, IN 46350-3400
(219) 326-6808 ext. 2229

Connie Gramarossa
President

Steve Holifield
Vice President

Joseph Haney
Member

La Porte County Commissioners' Reorganization Meeting Minutes **Thursday, January 2, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. County Complex Room 3 & via Zoom**

Auditor Mike Rosenbaum called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m., everyone silence their phones and stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. A moment of silence followed for former President Jimmy Carter who passed away at age 100.

Auditor Mike Rosenbaum called the roll: **Commissioner Gramarossa** - Present; **Commissioner Haney** - Present; and **Commissioner Holifield** - Present. Quorum present therefore meeting commenced.

Election of Officers: **Commissioner Steve Holifield** nominated **Connie Gramarossa** for President; **Commissioner Joe Haney** nominated **Steve Holifield** for President. Nominations closed. Vote called: **Commissioner Gramarossa** - **Connie Gramarossa**; **Commissioner Haney** - **Steve Holifield**; and **Commissioner Holifield** - **Connie Gramarossa**. **Auditor Mike Rosenbaum** declared **Connie Gramarossa** as President of the Board of Commissioners and handed the meeting over to her. **President Gramarossa** asked for Vice President nominations. **Connie Gramarossa** nominated **Steve Holifield**. **Joe Haney** nominated **Joe Haney**. Nominations closed. Vote called: **Commissioner Holifield** - **Steve Holifield**; **Commissioner Haney** - **Joe Haney** and **Commissioner** - **Steve Holifield**. **Commissioner Steve Holifield** was declared Vice President of the Board of Commissioners.

Considered the agenda. **Commissioner Gramarossa** added a request to hold a Right to Life prayer vigil. **Commissioner Steve Holifield** motioned to approve agenda with the added request. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered approval of the December 18, 2024 minutes. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** questioned two items then seconded. On page 3, middle of Old Business, question on the closing of the Franklin Street Bridge the first week of January - is the bridge closed now or next week? **Andy Skwiat**, Marquiss Electric/LPCO Project Management, the bridge closed December 1st for the season but construction work will begin middle of January. Part of the work will be done with the bridge in the open position therefore the road will be closed for traffic. **Commissioner Holifield** then pointed out **Commissioner Haney's** name is listed twice for the Eminent Domain Resolution. Correction will be paid to the minutes. **Record reflects** **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve and **Commissioner Haney** seconded for the Eminent Domain Resolution 2024-7 in the December 18, 2024 minutes. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor Mike Rosenbaum read the Claims with Payroll ending 12/27/2024 - \$1,497,875.80. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor Mike Rosenbaum read the Operating Expense Claims - \$2,879,682.52. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve the claims. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered **Department Heads/Professional Advisors Appointments:** **Commissioner Steve Holifield** motioned the following -
Insurance Agencies of Record - Michiana Insurance and General Insurance Services
Financial Advisors - Cender & Company and Baker Tilly
Attorney - Guy DiMartino
Animal Shelter Director - Rachel Delaney
Building Department Director - Mike Polan
Community Corrections Director - Mericka Beaty
Director of Facilities - Sheryl Lestinsky
E-911 Director - Barb Huston
EMA Director - Rob Sabie

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EMS Director - **Eric Fenstermaker**
Engineer - **Jay Sullivan**
Hazmat Director - **Jeff Hamilton**
Health Department Director - **Amanda Lahners**
Highway Superintendent - **Charity Glaser**
Museum Curator - **Danielle Adams**
Office of Community & Economic Development - **Matt Reardon**
Parks Superintendent - **Jeremey Sobecki**
Veterans Service Officer - **Eduardo Lozano**
Weights & Measures Inspector - **Dakota Euler**

Commissioner Haney motioned to amend the list by submitting Doug Newland for Facilities Director. Vote taken for all departments except Director of Facilities. Motion carried 3-0. Discussion held for the position of Director of Facilities. Commissioner Holifield, Sheryl Lestinsky has been doing a great job, she brings more information to the meetings and he believes she should remain in the position, then motioned to approve. President Gramarossa stepped down to second Sheryl Lestinsky as Director. Commissioner Haney motioned to approve Doug Newland as Director of Facilities. President Gramarossa seconded for discussion. Commissioner Holifield, the first meeting of the year is not appropriate to change out Department Heads and Sheryl should be allowed to see projects through that was started last year. Vote called: Commissioner Gramarossa - Sheryl Lestinsky; Commissioner Haney - Doug Newland and Commissioner Holifield - Sheryl Lestinsky. **Sheryl Lestinsky** will be Director of Facilities for 2025.

Considered Boards and Commissions Appointments:

La Crosse Public Library - **Molly Stewart**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Michigan City Public Library - **Matt Kubik**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Wanatah Public Library - **Kelli Scurlock**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Alcoholic Beverage Commission - **Rodney McCormick**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Animal Control Advisory Board - **Connie Gramarossa, Lisa Polazzi, Dr. Adrienne Pinks, and LuAnn Troxel**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney motioned to amend by replacing his name instead of Commissioner Gramarossa but accept the other three names. Vote called: Commissioner Holifield - Connie + the three others; Commissioner Gramarossa - Connie + the three others and Commissioner Haney - Joe + the three others. Connie Gramarossa will be the Commissioner on the Animal Control Advisory Board. Vote was 2-0.

Board of Construction Review - **Marcella Kunstek, John Carr and Robert Byers**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Board of Health - **Dr. Mark Nelson**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Board of Zoning Appeals - **Jeff Baltes**

Commissioner Holifield motioned for Jeff Baltes. Commissioner Haney motioned for Tony Oss. Vote called: Commissioner Haney - Tony Oss; Commissioner Gramarossa - Jeff Baltes and Commissioner Holifield - Jeff Baltes. 2-1 for Jeff Baltes.

Community Corrections Board - **Mike Berby, Steve Crittendon, Tom O'Neal, Pastor James Lane Timberlake and Jackie Dermody**. Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Gramarossa seconded. Motion carried 2-1.

Commissioner Haney - Nay.

Convention & Visitors Bureau - Commissioner Holifield motioned for Rich Gramarossa. Commissioner Haney nominated Tony Oss. Vote called: Commissioner Holifield - Rich Gramarossa; Commissioner Haney - Tony Oss and Commissioner Gramarossa - Rich Gramarossa. Vote 2-1 for Rich Gramarossa to fill the seat.

Drainage Board - Commissioner Holifield motioned to keep **Commissioner Gramarossa** on the Drainage Board.

Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0. Commissioner Holifield motioned for District 2 Seat - Chad Hertges and District 3 seat - Mark Scarborough. Commissioner Haney seconded for discussion. He questioned about the two current members. Commissioner Holifield, John Cuson is moving and Hugh Glasgow no longer wishes to be on the Board. Motion carried 3-0 for both new members **Chad Hertges and Mark Scarborough**.

Economic Development Commission - **John Carr**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Park and Recreation Advisory Board - **Michelle Braddy**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Pioneer Cemetery Commission - **Rodney Peters and Patricia Harris**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

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Plan Commission - Tom Fath

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals - Commissioner Holifield motioned to retain Matt Bernacchi, Amy Blind and Tracey Cummins. Commissioner Haney nominated Ken Purze. Vote called: Commissioner Gramarossa - Matt Bernacchi, Amy Blind and Tracey Cummins; Commissioner Holifield - Matt Bernacchi, Amy Blind and Tracey Cummins and Commissioner Haney - Ken Purze...doesn't matter, we have our vote. **Matt Bernacchi, Amy Blind and Tracey Cummins** will be on the PTABOA Board for 2025.

Redevelopment Commission - Commissioner Holifield motioned to appoint John Carr, Scott Cooley, Mark Parkman and Chris Williamson - Non-Voting. Commissioner Haney nominated Tom Fath, Mark Parkman and Tony Oss. Vote called: Commissioner Holifield - John Carr, Scott Cooley, Mark Parkman and Chris Williamson - Non-Voting; Commissioner Haney - Tom Fath, Mark Parkman, Tony Oss and retain Chris Williamson; and Commissioner Gramarossa - John Carr, Scott Cooley, Mark Parkman and Chris Williamson - Non-Voting. Vote: Tom Fath - 1; Tony Oss - 1; Mark Parkman - 3; Scott Cooley - 2; John Carr - 2 and Chris Williamson - 3. RDC will be **John Carr, Scott Cooley, Mark Parkman and Chris Williamson (Non-Voting Member)** for the 2025 Commissioners' appointments.

Regional Sewer & Water District - Mitch Bishop

Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered Commissioners Liaison Appointments: Commissioner Holifield motioned to appoint -

Animal Control Board - **Connie Gramarossa**

Community Corrections - **Joe Haney**

Drainage Board - **Connie Gramarossa**

E-911 Board - **Steve Holifield**

Fair Board - **Connie Gramarossa**

Fairgrounds Management & Events Commission (FMEC) - **Steve Holifield**

Highway Department - **Connie Gramarossa**

Job Evaluation Committee - **Connie Gramarossa**

Juvenile Service Center - **Joe Haney**

Kankakee River Basin & Yellow River Development Commission - **Steve Holifield**

Museum - **Steve Holifield**

Northwest Indiana Regional Plan Commission (NIRPC) - **Connie Gramarossa**

Pioneer Cemetery Commission - **Connie Gramarossa**

Plan Commission - **Steve Holifield**

Redevelopment Commission (RDC) - **Connie Gramarossa**

Regional Sewer & Water District - **Steve Holifield**

Right-to-Know - **Steve Holifield**

Solid Waste - **Connie Gramarossa, Steve Holifield and Joe Haney**

Weights & Measures - **Steve Holifield**

Workforce Development - **Connie Gramarossa**

Health - **Steve Holifield**

Commissioner Haney seconded for discussion. Discussion held then vote taken. Motion carried 2-1. Commissioner Haney - Nay.

Designation of Publication: Legal Notice/Commissioners' agendas and Public Notices - Commissioner Haney motioned to keep using both the La Porte County Herald-Dispatch and The Westville Indicator/Regional News. Commissioner Holifield motioned to use the La Porte County Herald-Dispatch and the Northwest Indiana Times. Discussion was held. Commissioner Holifield, using the Westville Indicator/Regional News could be a conflict of interest since a current Councilman runs the paper. Attorney DiMartino, the Northwest Indiana Times meets the requirements because it does print in our area. Commissioner Holifield motioned to table until the next meeting. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Public Comment

None

Department Reports/Comments

Mitch Bishop, Planner, Community Crossings will be advertising for bids for the recent grant that was awarded, advertising will be January 7th and 14th with bids opened at the February 5th meeting, 10:00 a.m. Thank you.

Requests

Considered 30 sick days for Nancy Smith who is retiring after 30 years in the Recorder's office. Commissioner Haney motioned to approve. Commissioner Holifield seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

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Old Business

Considered using ZOOM for meetings. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to **discontinue the use of ZOOM**; it is too costly plus the IT Department pays overtime to staff running Zoom during the meetings. Luke Britt's Public Information office in Indianapolis stated there are options to comment or watch meetings. **President Gramarossa stepped down and seconded. Commissioner Haney**, steps were taken after the Zoombombing at the Council meeting a few months ago and most likely will never happen again, this was the first time and hopefully the last for that to happen. There are many reasons why to keep an access point for everyone to see and participate in the meetings, especially the evening meetings. If a Department Head lives in either the North or South part of the County, they will not have to drive here, they can join the meeting for five minutes then spend the rest of their evening with their family. Pay attention to the folks that join Zoom, there are people that have a difficult time traveling, some with ailments that hinder them from getting out. Yes, we have ALCO, Access La Porte County, for viewing. The only way to allow someone to participate would be to show up in person. For Elected Officials, it's important to show up and look the public in the eye. Majority of the Elected Officials last year attended at least one meeting via Zoom except myself, in four years I've attended every meeting and I've attended every meeting in person. Once or twice, I've used it for Plan Commission because I was in Indy for a conference, it was convenient to use Zoom and attend the meeting. I don't know if this Board has the ability to 'bind' the Council and the others to restrict access to use Zoom. Again, I've always shown up in person for our meetings. If you live in the southern part of the county, it may take you 45 minutes to get here for the meeting. **Commissioner Holifield**, while speaking to Luke Britt in Indianapolis, majority of the counties have stopped using Zoom because there is no Covid catastrophe. People can use their phone to call in for the meetings if need be according to Mr. Britt. **President Gramarossa** made clear Zoom was never used prior to Covid. Only a few Departments still use Zoom, the cost is \$7,000 per year to use it plus comp time and overtime paid to IT staff for attending the meetings. **Darlene Hale**, IT Director, yes precautions have been taken since the Zoombombing, no longer allowed to show faces or video just names appear. If you are not seen then the question is whether a board member can vote. There is always a chance that it could happen again. **Commissioner Haney**, we have 'home rule' here in Indiana and just because the State gives us the bare minimum to do, doesn't mean we have to do the bare minimum. The State also says we don't have to have Public Comment during our meetings. I'd like to see us do more than the bare minimum. Vote taken; **Motion carried 2-1. Commissioner Haney - Nay.**

New Business

Considered Right to Life prayer vigil January 11, 2025. **Paul Coronado**, and his wife are co-directors of Right to Life of Northwest Indiana, last year both La Porte County and Porter County merged their Right to Life program and it is now Right to Life of Northwest Indiana. Porter County has held a prayer vigil in front of their courthouse in Valparaiso in January, January is recognized as Sanctity of Life Month, which was put forth by President Ronald Reagan on the 11th Anniversary of Roe vs. Wade decision, Porter County has conducted a prayer vigil for several years and they would like to bring that event to La Porte County. Request is to hold the prayer vigil on January 11, it will be stationary and not a march, it is not a protest. A table will be set up with microphone and speaker, depending on the weather, the vigil will last one hour or less with 30 minutes before/after to set up and tear down. Two hours is the time frame for the event in front of the La Porte Courthouse. **Commissioner Holifield**, is the sidewalk around the La Porte Courthouse City or County? **Attorney Guy DiMartino**, believes they are the City's however this event will not be held on the sidewalks, just the grass area. **Commissioner Holifield**, will Right to Life retain liability insurance? **Attorney DiMartino**, yes, he has a copy of their insurance. **Paul** was hoping an extension cord could be provided. **Andy Skwiat**, Marquiss Electric will donate their services for the event and provide an extension cord. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to **approve. Commissioner Holifield seconded. Motion carried 3-0.** Vigil will be 12:00-1:00 p.m. with total time 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Commissioner Haney motioned to adjourn at 10:47 a.m. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

EXAMINED AND APPROVED BY THE
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE
COUNTY OF LA PORTE, INDIANA
DATE 1-15-2025

Paul Coronado
[Signature]
[Signature]

ATTEST: _____ Auditor

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LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA