



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, December 18, 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 outgoing Commissioner Rich Mrozinski.

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

Considered the agenda. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to Add 10 a - Franklin Street Bridge bid opening and 10 b - Hanna request for \$100,000 ARP funds. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered approval of the December 9, 2024 minutes. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Claims with Payroll ending 12/13/2024 - \$1,540,737.22. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor Tim Stabosz read the Operating Expense Claims - \$2,195,742.43. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve the claims. **Commissioner Mrozinski** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Public Comment

Mark Parkman, 4052 S. 1100 W., Westville, expressed gratitude to the Highway Department for help at the Fairgrounds. Addressed line of sight when exiting Scipio Sunrise subdivision in Scipio Township, thanked Charity Glaser, Highway Superintendent, for having the brush cut back to allow drivers the ability to see when pulling out of this subdivision. He then stated about 4 years ago there was an issue with 4-H/Purdue Extension with volunteers. As the 4-H Counsel President at that time, he experienced issues that were not good so he reached out to Mr. Mrozinski with his concerns. 'Rich, you were the first guy, I believe, first elected official, to come on board, listen to our concerns and then meet with this group and then say it's not happening in La Porte County, you're not going to treat our people like this, it's not going to happen. You drew that line in the sand.' From the bottom of his heart, he thanked Commissioner Rich Mrozinski for his assistance in the matter. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, it was the right thing to do.

Steve Holifield, 6782 E. 100 S., Mill Creek, hundreds of times over the last 25 years, he's been in front of the dais, not always eye-to-eye with Commissioner Mrozinski, whether it was Council or Commission, but they've always come to a conclusion for the good of the County. He is replacing Rich on the Commission; he appreciates all the advice Rich has given and he knows these are big shoes to fill.

Randy Novak, FMEC President, Farm Bureau is building a new building on the fairgrounds and the old building will be used behind the current location. Requesting permission from the Commission to relocate the building, funding by FMEC. **Commissioner Mrozinski** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Mike Seitz, 212 Lakeside Drive, Fish Lake, thanked the Commission for how great the Courthouse looks, decorated for Christmas. Congratulated Commissioner Mrozinski on his retirement. Mike will not be returning to the County for the year 2025. Appreciates the Commissioners, wished them all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

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George Callas, 708 Toronado Drive, La Porte, in June he approached the Commission about charging non-for-profit groups taxes or fees on their properties. He inquired on the status of his request. **President Gramarossa**, non-for-profits cannot be charged fees from the County. **George**, there is a fee added to the recycling, why can't we add a fire/police fee/fund? He came in June with this question and nothing has been done.

Alan Sirinek, 2710 Franklin Street, Michigan City, here for one reason only, 'Rich, thank you very much, you've been a great Commissioner, you've been the personification of a public servant, I've enjoyed working with you, I've enjoyed your help on a number of projects, I've enjoyed having you as a colleague and as a client unfortunately, but also most as a friend, thank you very much, this County is...will miss you certainly, I know I will, thank you.'

Scott Cooley, LPCO Project Management, update on current projects: **Animal Shelter** - water loss project is moving along, remediation is done, cleanup is complete, drywall is going up this week, no issues. **Jail** water leak - 5th floor, cut-access into the concrete block to investigate the leak, all 3 of the showers in that block are leaking. On the 4th floor, cut-access on the same block cavity to investigate the leak, the leaking pipe has been replaced, flooring has been removed in the area, all ceiling that needed to be removed has been removed, dehumidifiers are running to dry out block walls but the leak from the 5th floor above is still leaking down on to the 4th floor, keeping it wet. On the 3rd floor, cut-access to the concrete walls and ceiling tiles that need to be removed and flooring tiles have been removed, dehumidifiers are running to dry out the floor. Air scrubbers are running to keep the area clean, hard to keep it dry though due to the water still leaking from the 5th floor. Booking area is the most damaged, metal stud and drywall containment walls are being built, two dehumidifiers are running as well as the air scrubbers. The ceiling in the kitchen has been removed, cabinets removed, pipe insulation will be removed. Padded Cell #1 needs all padding removed along with the ceiling. A few issues moving forward: a lot of stuff is being torn apart, a lot of lead-times on these items; lot of insulation is being removed from the pipes/ducts and all of this will need to be replaced. His crew has only been hired to remove everything so keep in mind it will all need to be replaced. Lead-times on doors and hardware need to be installed on all three floors in the chases - the hardware is currently on a 2 to 4-month lead-time and needs to be purchased by the County, not LPCO Project Management, then installed once purchased. Spoke to the vendor that the Jail uses for the padded cells if a contract is signed today for the work, then the earliest the vendor will come out is late February or early March of next year. We do have an estimate. **Attorney Guy DiMartino** has been in discussion with the insurance company of the water damage for the padded cell, the estimate sent did not have enough details for them so a more detailed estimate is in process. It was a 'global' price, materials versus labor were not provided in the estimate, this is a time and material issue.

Ella Kalsow, 112 Abby Lane, La Porte, spoke on the appointment of the Animal Shelter Director position. There has been an individual filling in and helping at the Animal Shelter who has been doing a great job, this person was promised the position and should get it. Ella has been volunteering at the Shelter every day since March.

Department Reports/Comments

Tim Stabosz, Auditor, this will be his last Commission meeting as Auditor, his four-year term ending and he publicly thanked the citizens of La Porte County for this honor of a lifetime, the opportunity to protect them, protect tax payer dollars, support the executive and fiscal bodies in their function, keep the system honest, hold public figures accountable when necessary and open the blinds and shine sunlight on things when necessary. He thanked his staff, 'it's an amazing thing to be the only man on a staff of 14 women but I've learned so much, I've learned what a tremendous honor it is to be in such an arrangement. I've learned that solid hiring is everything, I've learned how to build and support a team, I've learned about trusting and believing in your people, I've learned about bringing out the best in them, empowering them and not micromanaging them. And I've learned about the magic that happens when you establish a family environment in an office where people truly care about one another, and about taking care of the people in La Porte County. I love my staff and I salute them.' He was heartened to hear the incoming Auditor Elect, Mike Rosenbaum, that he intends to retain all the staff and he recognizes the positive dynamic and healthy environment that they've created. He thanked the 'unsung hero' of the Auditor's office, his Chief Deputy Auditor, Rhonda Graves, she has not been given the credit she deserves. She is a workhorse. 'Rhonda is one of the hardest working people I've known and incredibly caring and compassionate person and someone who loves people. Rhonda, thank you for everything you've done and everything you've put up with, especially from select public officials who thought that degrading you, me or our office was more fun than appreciating and supporting you in your function.' He wished everyone a Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Peace in the New Year. 'And maybe I will and maybe I won't see you in an official capacity here next year. Thank you and God save La Porte County.'

Commissioner Haney asked County Attorney DiMartino given the estimate with the padded cell, would it be appropriate to give conditional approval, pending insurance acceptance, to move forward with the padded cell. **Attorney DiMartino**, the estimate is \$42,000. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to move forward with fixing the padded cell pending insurance and attorney approval. **Attorney DiMartino**, clarification, those are the folks who will install the padded walls in the cell. Based on what has happened with the carrier, we still have not come to a scope and La Porte County Project Management does not yet have the authority to go ahead and do the rest of the remodel for TH1 until the insurance company gets back to us, this will be a two-month lead time in order to get this and we should have that information before so you all are aware of that. **President Gramarossa** questioned what was the motion for because she asked earlier and was told we needed time and material. **Attorney DiMartino**, the motion will be

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conditional because we won't have another meeting once the information comes back, the commitment can be made to the company to place the order, whether or not it will be covered under insurance the work still needs to be done. **Commissioner Mrozinski seconded the motion. Motion carried 3-0.**

Requests

Considered recommendation for **Animal Shelter Director** appointment of **Rachel Delaney**. **Andy Hynek**, Animal Shelter Advisory Board member, Sheriff's Department Liaison, last six months has been challenging at the shelter. He thanked all volunteers for their efforts. There were 6-7 applicants, interviews were conducted. All candidates held various qualities; they were all good candidates with several of them having letters of recommendations attached to their resume. Rachel Delaney is the recommendation of the Advisory Board. She has a background running a Humaine Society in Indiana, budgeting experience, and grant writing experience which will benefit the shelter. Andy introduced Rachel to the Board. **Rachel Delaney**, appreciates the support of both the Commission and the Advisory Board as well as the volunteers at the shelter, she hopes to move the shelter forward in a positive direction. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered permission to purchase four (4) vehicles for inspectors to use versus paying mileage for using their own vehicles. **Amanda Lahners**, Health Department Director, approval from the Council has been done and is in her budget for 2025. She has the funds for the vehicles, does not need any additional appropriation. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Old Business

Considered bid opening for Phase 4 of the Franklin Street Bridge repairs for Fall of 2024/Spring 2025. **Andy Skwiat**, Marquiss Electric/La Porte County Project Management, 203 E. Harrison Street, Michigan City. **Attorney Guy DiMartino** recapped from last month's meeting, we received a 'half-bid' from Metropolitan Steel, Marquiss Electric nor La Porte County Project Management did not put in a bid proposal because they were the ones that advertised the bids. Discussed pressing items that needed to be done and those were put out for bid again however the only bid to be submitted this time was from La Porte County Project Management. The bid package was in order and handed back to Andy Skwiat for him to explain the items within the bid. Could a 'smorgasbord' be submitted to the Commission for them to decide what really needs to be done on the bridge this year and a decision be made. **Andy Skwiat** requested the cover letter be read. In the letter, a Crane Barge will need to be mobilized to complete the six (6) most critical items to achieve opening the Bridge by March 15, 2025. **Andy Skwiat**, when working on the bridge and inspections with WJE, fifteen items need attention, due to money spent by both Commission and Council in past years, it was best not to bring them all at once so six (6) top issues that would hinder the bridge from passing inspection that would allow the bridge to open by March 15, 2025 were chosen. The package consists of the six (6) items, the Project Management portion, the field work, the barge and necessities needed to complete the work total **\$1,324,103.00**. This has been advertised twice in the paper. He has reached out to the Coast Guard and acquired the closure permit. The remaining nine (9) items would not be proposed for the Fall 2025/Spring 2026, that would be the replacement of the tread plates, as per the laser track survey done last week, this is more critical than the remaining nine (9) items. If the Commission decides to go with the six (6) items proposed for this year, that would put the bridge in good shape for the tread plates next year and allow the bridge to remain operational. **Attorney DiMartino**, the HJL1110 Crane Barge rental is \$441,945, will this be the only time the barge rental will be required? **Andy Skwiat**, yes and the rental company is requiring \$80,000 to get the equipment to the port in Michigan City with a stop in Muskegon to pick up lifts and other equipment for the work to get the project moving, he will pay the \$80,000 and get reimbursed. If approved by the Commission, Andy will reach out to Michigan City, letting them know the bridge will be closed the first week in January and get started on the work. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve the project. President Gramarossa** indicated Auditor Stabosz wished to consult Commissioner Haney. **Commissioner Haney**, it's almost Christmas. **President Gramarossa**, here's your Christmas present (allowing Auditor Stabosz to ask Commissioner Haney a question) **Commissioner Haney**, Connie, let's behave. **President Gramarossa**, don't start with me, I'm a grown woman. **Commissioner Haney**, yeah, that's the sad part. **Commissioner Haney seconded. President Gramarossa**, any discussion? **Auditor Stabosz**, wondering if Andy Skwiat received more than one barge quote. **Andy Skwiat**, couldn't even find another barge company, they did call a couple of barge companies that they knew but only one would even consider coming here within the timeline for the project and that's the only option they had. **President Gramarossa** reminded Auditor Stabosz that he is the Secretary. **Auditor Stabosz**, with the timeline? **Andy Skwiat**, never needed a barge for any previous work. **Auditor Stabosz**, if we would have done it next season, would they have been cheaper with a longer notice or would there be other options? **Andy Skwiat**, cannot answer either of those because we could not even find another firm to do the field work let alone to engage with a 100-foot barge to be here, his concerns are if some of these items are not repaired, the bridge will not pass inspection in the coming year. **President Gramarossa**, you're here to discuss it with the Commission. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Andy Skwiat, whether it was Commissioner Mrozinski's military service or public service, thank you for the years of that, greatly appreciated. He thanked Auditor Stabosz and his Chief Deputy for their four years of service. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all. **Commissioner Mrozinski** thanked Andy/Marquiss Electric for installing a temporary light in the parking lot at the Museum.

Considered permission to approach the Council for \$100,00 of ARP funds for Town of Hanna. **Tony Wallace**, Hanna Township Trustee, it would be more beneficial to the town/township if a walking trail was installed at the Hanna Community Park, which would

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be utilized by walkers in the morning. Safety, beautification and community togetherness project. **President Gramarossa**, after the last meeting, Tony came to the office with a design of the walking trail. Reith-Riley was contacted and will honor the quote given for the project. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0. Attorney DiMartino**, an interlocal agreement needs to be signed.

New Business

Considered agreement with M. A. Dilts, **Ron Heeg**, Sheriff. Yearly pension advisor is paid from the pension fund, no tax dollars used. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Resolution authorizing eminent domain proceedings, **Attorney Guy DiMartino. Auditor Stabosz** read by Title only. This will complete the Railroad connection in KIP. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0. ***Resolution 2024-7**

Considered continued use of Zoom for meetings. **Commissioner Mrozinski**, a Zoombomb interrupted a Council meeting with pornography a month or so ago. Zoom was used during Covid and is no longer needed. Tax payer money is used to pay for it. **Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to discontinue using Zoom for meetings. Commissioner Haney motioned to amend Rich's motion to hold this over until next year. Commissioner Mrozinski's motion died for lack of a second and Commissioner Haney's amended motion died as well for lack of a second. Commissioner Haney motioned to table. Commissioner Mrozinski**, so we're just going to keep paying for Zoom and the possibility of being Zoombombed with pornography could happen again? **Commissioner Haney**, the IT Director was able to close the loophole on the Zoombombing so that should not be able to occur again. **President Gramarossa**, this is our last meeting so we will just carry it over to the first meeting of the year.

Considered contract with American Fidelity. **Commissioner Haney motioned to approve. Commissioner Mrozinski seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Commissioner Haney motioned to adjourn.

Commissioner Mrozinski asked for five (5) minutes. Granted. **Commissioner Mrozinski** looked back at the last 18 years of his public service: Veterans Recognition Medal to County Veterans; New buildings for Solid Waste, Purdue Extension, Soil and Water, MS4, and Community Corrections; Michigan City Courthouse remodel; Nowak Subdivision water/drainage issue fixed; EMS Base in La Porte moved; Established an EMS Base in Rolling Prairie on Highway 20 as well as relocating the Rolling Prairie Highway office; the former Rolling Prairie Highway office will now be a County Park; Double Track in Michigan City; Sewer lines ran from La Porte to Rolling Prairie which allowed the new Library in Rolling Prairie to be built; Rail spurs in KIP; Passed the anti-fraud ordinance for Building Trades; Grant money was used to remodel the Animal Shelter with a new lab; Museum Improvements; New Center Township Fire Department building as well as moving a portion of road 400 West to Johnson Road, along the Toll Road, for safety reasons and named after former Commissioner Bill Hager; Solar Project that was approved by the BZA and Road Use Agreement. He thanked Joie Winski as Auditor for cleaning up the back taxes mess and saving the County from almost losing \$2.4 million dollars in fraud to a bad actor. The last 18 years he has worked with a lot of good, dedicated people: Amanda Lahners in the Health Department; Economic Development and RDC groups - Mitch Bishop, Matt Reardon, Carlton Bishop, Bailey McGrath Tombers and Mike Seitz. Charity Glaser at the Highway Department; Monique Thomas, Human Resources Director; Darlene Hale, IT Director, is pretty much the glue that keeps this place together except for one other person, Diane Gonzales, 'not only would the job not be fun without her, I don't think I could do it without her, she is always there, she is dedicated.' Rich introduced family members in attendance: youngest grandson, Ben Jones; oldest grandson, Jacob Bates; daughter Lea Anne Jones and wife, Beverly Mrozinski, married almost 32 years. Rich was the Chairman of the National Legislative Committee for Veterans of Foreign Wars and made 18 trips to Washington, D.C. He thanked his wife for being with him throughout all the adventures, she's been his rock. It's been a great experience, two terms as a Councilman and two terms as Commissioner.

Commissioner Mrozinski motioned to adjourn at 7:00 p.m. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

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EXAMINED AND APPROVED BY THE
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE
COUNTY OF LA PORTE, INDIANA

DATE 1-2-2025
COUNCIL HARMAR OSTA
TEST: _____

ADD: FOR

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

Re: *Index – Franklin Street Bridge Rehabilitation*

Dear Commissioners;

Please reference the following information regarding our submission for “The Franklin Street Bridge – Fall of 2024/Spring of 2025 Rehabilitation”.

We have submitted a lump sum package based on priority of repair necessity for the six (6) most critical items which we feel can still be achieved by the scheduled opening date of March 15, 2025.

Included in our submission packet you will find the following:

1. Completed Bid Sheet
2. Bid Bond
3. Second Advertisement – Disclosure
4. Affidavit of Publication
5. United States Coast Guard – Bridge Closure Permit

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To complete the six (6) priority repair items referenced herein’ we will need to mobilize an HJL110 Crane Barge that is 110-feet long and 50-feet wide from the Port of Ludington to the Port of Michigan City. I have also pre-obtained a Bridge Closure Permit via The United States Coast Guard that will be necessary to perform the work during the scheduled closure period in hopes our firm would be selected to perform the repairs on your behalf. Had the closure permit not been obtained it would have been nearly impossible to perform the necessary work in the allotted timeframe. Due to the fact we are already well within’ the closure period of which work could be performed we are requesting immediate approval to proceed so we can secure the necessary materials and release the barge to start it’s journey to the Port of Michigan City.

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