



LA PORTE COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Connie Gramarossa
President

Steve Holifield
Vice President

Joseph Haney
Member

La Porte County Commissioners' Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 16, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. County Complex Room 3

President **Connie Gramarossa** called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Considered the agenda. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to amend the agenda with a few changes plus add **Travel Form Request and Records Retention/Destruction meeting request**. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered approval of the April 2, 2025 minutes. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor **Mike Rosenbaum** read the Claims with Payroll ending 4/4/2025 - \$1,498,129.46. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor **Mike Rosenbaum** read the Operating Expense Claims - \$1,406,126.82. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve the operating claims. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Public Comment

Dean White, 3066 N. Highway 35, La Porte, discussion on proposed 'Vista View' on Waverly Road at Pine Lake Avenue in La Porte. The agenda has lots listed for Sale in this area and he believes the Commission should not sell them and instead work with the City of La Porte.

Cheryl Gall, 8473 E. Lake Shore Drive, Hudson Lake, asked why her request for signs to be posted in Hudson Lake was not on the agenda. It was to be discussed under Department Head comments. **Commissioner Haney** questioned whether Cheryl wanted to comment. She explained piers are being installed by non-residents in her neighborhood and she wants signs posted.

Danny Strieter, 210 Crescent Drive, La Porte, working with Parks Department and La Porte City Engineer on property adjacent to what he owns on Pine Lake Avenue. He currently wants to buy additional lots only adjacent to his lots as well as the State of Indiana. They are the **only** owners adjacent to his property.

Department Reports/Comments

Attorney Guy DiMartino, Hudson Lake matter, after looking at the issue we would not be able to enforce posting signs on Lake Shore Drive. 'In my looking at this matter, this is a personal property right issue. We've had one land owner on Hudson Lake already go to court and establish their riparian rights.' He suggested the homeowners having issues should get together, retain the lawyer that the other homeowner used and file for their riparian rights, at that point in time they have access all the way out into the water where the court has said that is their property. The people that put piers in this area is trespassing on private property. At that point you could get them 'trespassed' by law enforcement or file a civil trespass action, often treble damages are available for the homeowners. He spoke to Commissioner Haney, if the County install signs how would it be enforced? We do not have the enforcement mechanism to do this because this is a personal property right issue. If the homeowners are all of one mind, they should get together and resolve these issues because its always going to be a problem. We've had issues throughout the County with the Plan Commission, Building Department and the Commissioners trying to stop people from doing what they're doing on their property. We don't have standing for like nuisance actions, its more powerful if you are the property owner. The road map to follow would be the Teska matter that was in La Porte Circuit Court. DNR may not have the enforcement either, they would only be over the water. **Commissioner Haney**, if

ORIGINAL

we put up signs but can't enforce it as a County and we put up signs at tax payers' expense on private property but can't enforce it. **Attorney DiMartino**, how can the County put up No Trespassing signs when we own **only** the Easement Right-of-Ways. We don't own their land. Private property owners really need to resolve this themselves.

Angie Davis, Assistant Director of Facilities, reported on the sewer project at the Hiler Building. April 11, last Friday, the State Inspector was onsite for the removal of two tanks that was discovered while attempting to replace the sewer pipe. The tanks were cleaned out first prior to removing them from the soil. Soil samples were taken and sent off to be tested for contamination. Also, in the process of replacing two of the toilets at Juvenile Service Center, they did come in but were not the right dimensions so the contractor refused them. Waiting for a date of the correct ones to be delivered. They were ordered correctly but sent out in error.

Member of the Public - No name given. **Gentleman** asked Attorney Guy DiMartino if he stated that the homeowners already own that property in Hudon Lake? **Attorney DiMartino**, under legal theory you have riparian rights but if you want to get them established where you'll be able to hold a trespass, its always good to have a court order stating that right. The roadmap to follow is what the Teska's did in Circuit Court.

Requests

Considered permission to approach the Council to purchase Stryker equipment, **Eric Fenstermaker**, EMS. This is replacing expired medical equipment. A payment plan has been worked out with Stryker. **Commissioner Haney motioned to approve.** **Commissioner Holifield seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Proclamation designating Emergency Medical Services Week, May 18-24, 2025, **Eric Fenstermaker**. Humbly represents the great medical service and the fine 60 full-time EMTs and Paramedics that work 24 to 48-hour shifts for our County, sixth-time Provider of the Year. This will be the 51st year declaring EMS Week. **Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve.** **Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0. ***Resolution 2025-3**

Considered opening proposals for professional & technical services for Michigan City EMS Base. **Auditor Mike Rosenbaum** stated the six companies that submitted RFPs: American Structurepoint, Jones Petrie Rafinski, K2M Design, La Porte County Project Management Inc, RQAW, and SEH. All timely received, several with electronic data. **Commissioner Haney motioned to show all six proposals were timely received and turn them over to EMS Director Eric Fenstermaker for review.** **Commissioner Holifield seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Special Detail Agreement between EMS/La Porte County Fair, **Eric Fenstermaker**. Annual contract for maintaining their First-Aid station as well as covering arena events during Fair week. Only change will be the time starting at 8:00 a.m. instead of 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. daily due to 4-H kids, being available for them if needed. **President Gramarossa** questioned the pay during this time when working fair week, difference in their pay and to be sure employees are aware of the calculations. **Eric Fenstermaker**, there is a formula used by payroll, all deductions are removed except insurance. 'This is above and beyond the normal paycheck but all the applicable taxes and retirement do apply so there is an elevated rate above what our normal cash stand-by is to help compensate for that but everyone's deductions are different.' The base rate is the same that we're charging the Fair, what they actually get varies after those deductions are taken out. **President Gramarossa** suggested the Auditor allow Payroll to meet with the employees prior to working Fair week to answer any questions the employees may have instead of afterwards when they are paid. **Commissioner Haney motioned to approve. Commissioner Holifield seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered permission to approach the Council for Bridge #97, **Jay Sullivan**, Engineer. Request is for \$154,000 and there is money in the Cum Bridge account for this amount. **Commissioner Haney motioned to approve. Commissioner Holifield seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered posting signs in County buildings at entryway, **Monique Thomas**, HR. In any organization the environment we create profoundly impacts both employee morale and public perception. As our County continues to grow and evolve, it is imperative that we foster a workplace culture that prioritizes respect and dignity for all our employees. The signs in our entryways serve as a constant reminder of this commitment. Our employees are our greatest asset. Let us recognize that respect is a two-way street, it is not just about how we treat our employees but also about how we treat each other as members of this community. Let us continue to lead by example and ensure that every employee feels valued and respected in their work place. **Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve the signs to be posted in every entryway to the buildings.** **Monique** read the proposed sign into the record: Thank you for treating our employees with respect. Profanity, verbal threats, or violence towards our employees will not be tolerated. We strive to respect all that enter our facilities and hope to earn the respect as well. Thanks for helping us make La Porte County an enjoyable place for everyone. Violations may result in a ban from our facilities.

Commissioner Haney seconded for discussion. He then asked if there has been an uptick in harassment or anything of the sort recently towards County Employees. **Monique Thomas**, no but we know it still exists at other businesses. **Commissioner Haney**, we're not your traditional business though, the public is *our* employer. **Monique Thomas**, as the HR Director, they're employees. **Commissioner Haney**, respects her position that they are employees under the HR Director. He suggested changes to the wording on

ORIGINAL

the signs. We don't put signs up in our cubicles for our boss but to have something encouraging equal respect at the same time. **Monique**, she is willing to take the suggestions into consideration. **Commissioner Holifield** questioned Attorney DiMartino on the wording. **Attorney DiMartino**, there is no legal prohibition to put up signs asking people to be courteous. **Commissioner Holifield**, the last line on 'may result in a ban from our facilities.' **Monique Thomas** spoke to Sheriff Heeg on enforcing the ban if needed and he agreed. **President Gramarossa** changed the wording - *employees* replaced with **public servants** and *will not be tolerated* changed to **is not appropriate**. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve the amended version. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered permission to hold a 250th Anniversary Celebration of Paul Revere's Ride at the La Porte Courthouse on April 18th. **Bruce Johnson**. **Commissioner Holifield** was contacted in March requesting the use of the La Porte County Courthouse grounds to celebrate the 250th anniversary. Two lanterns were hung in a Boston Church to notify the colonists that the British were coming, One if by land, Two if by sea. Building Maintenance has ordered two lanterns to display in the Courthouse bell tower. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Old Business

Considered two appointment replacements for Plan Commission members. **Attorney Guy DiMartino**, Plan Commission statute requires the citizens appointed not have more than 3 from the same political party and right now there are more than three so it needs to be corrected or changed. **Commissioner Haney**, we would have to 'unappoint' two sitting members. **Attorney Guy DiMartino** suggested the last two appointed should be the replaced positions. **Commissioner Holifield** stated Attorney Biege, Plan Commission attorney, said the statute is very vague and the Commission is allowed to make their own decision. **Attorney DiMartino**, correct, there is no rule so it is the pleasure of the Board. Appointments made on January 2024 and January 2025 should have been Democrat appointments however it is up to the Board. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to appoint Matt Sikorski and Joe Tuholski to replace John Watson and John Carr. **Commissioner Haney**, the last two appointed were Jim Mills and John Watson. Those should be the replaced seats. **Attorney DiMartino** recommended individual votes or nominations from the Commissioners. **Commissioner Holifield: Remove John Watson and John Carr; Commissioner Haney: the last two people should have been Democrat so I'll remove Jim Mills and John Watson; and Commissioner Gramarossa followed the recommendation of the Attorney, the last two that were appointed - Jim Mills and John Watson.** **Attorney DiMartino**, there really is not term limits either for the seats although the County has used four-year appointments. **Auditor Mike Rosenbaum**, based upon the tallies, John Watson and Jim Mills will be removed. **Commissioner Holifield** nominated Matt Sikorski and Joe Tuholski as the appointed replacements. **Commissioner Haney** nominated Gautama Logwood and Tim Cavinder. **Commissioner Gramarossa** nominated Joe Tuholski and Matt Sikorski. **Attorney DiMartino** confirmed all requirements are met by all nominations. **Auditor Mike Rosenbaum, Plan Commission seats will be filled with Matt Sikorski and Joe Tuholski as of today by way of the majority votes. No motion is required.**

Considered Interim Maintenance Director appointment. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to appoint **Angie Davis as Interim Director and motioned to advertise for the position of Director.** **Commissioner Holifield** seconded, when Sheryl stepped down and Angie stepped in, she has been going like gang busters. **President Gramarossa**, this is an appointed position, it does not go out for advertising. His motion included advertising. **Commissioner Holifield**, can we break that off and say - **Commissioner Haney**, for discussion, it is an appointed position however it would probably be a good idea to have some choices to choose from to a point. I would like us to go out and do a full advertisement. **Commissioner Holifield** asked President Gramarossa if a committee still exists for this department and she replied yes. **Commissioner Holifield** continued to say at no fault of their own in the maintenance department, it was not beneficial to the citizens. **Commissioner Haney**, things haven't worked out, its great we've got a committee to look at that but it is a Commissioners' appointment, the three of us, and it would be great to have some options. The acting Director may be the best person for that or there may be someone out there with a good solid background. **Attorney DiMartino** recommended voting on the Interim Director then the advertising a separate vote. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded appointing **Angie Davis as the Interim Director of Facilities.** **Motion carried 3-0.** **Commissioner Holifield** seconded the motion by **Commissioner Haney to advertise the position of Facilities Director for discussion**, questioned how is this usually handled. **Attorney DiMartino**, when the Human Resources Director was open it was advertised. **Commissioner Holifield**, can we bring this to the committee as a recommendation? **President Gramarossa** stated there have been issues in the Building Department due to no Acting or Appointed Director. She used the Highway Department as an example, Charity Glaser was Interim for about a year before she was appointed Highway Superintendent, she did a great job. Monique Thomas was Interim Human Resources Director for two years before finally being appointed as the Director. Our employees should be given the opportunity and the tools to flourish. **Commissioner Holifield** suggested a 6-month timeframe as Interim, giving the committee time to come up with ideas and see if anyone is interested in the position. **Commissioner Haney**, he is not willing to advocate the Commissioners' appointment authority to an ad hoc committee. **Commissioner Holifield**, I didn't say we were going to do that, I'd like to hear their recommendation, that's why we have committees. **Commissioner Haney**, we've never had a committee before to do this, Commissioner Gramarossa brought up some good points but at the same time we have a 20-year, nearly... I forget how many years Ms. Glaser had of institutional knowledge in that department in a quasi-role before she took over that department. **President Gramarossa**, she was the secretary and you voted against her. **Commissioner Haney**, she was the office - I did initially, yeah, and I think she has done an outstanding job. When I look at some of the Facilities' challenges that we've been seeing some of those other kind of choices that you've made over the past few years, it's probably a good idea especially with considering all the issues we've had with that department and our buildings, we

need someone in here with a firm grasp of building maintenance, construction, HVAC...somebody with some of those we've had, some Facilities Directors over the years like that to resolve all of these issues, as in our workshop you pointed out there were a number of different things that were missed and we can equate that to whatever but at the end of the day so a lot of that comes down to not just leadership but leadership who has the experience to deal and an eye to spot these other different problems. I'm not saying our Acting may not have that potential but I'm saying that as we've kind of slid into a few of these things, we're slotting people and raising people up that don't have that kind of background and that's the main thing. **Commissioner Holifield**, at the workshop Mr. Yagelski brought up we had someone with that expertise, I've worked with Angie on a daily basis since Sheryl stepped down, she's very knowledgeable and the issues I've seen so far is because we put a lot of our faith into the 'so-called' person with all the experience, we've got a lot of issues in these buildings, we're tagging them one-by-one and I don't believe you're going to tap into that experience with the dollar amount of the salary that we can afford to pay. **President Gramarossa** asked HR Director Monique Thomas to the podium on the posted HVAC position, how many applications we've received so far or how successful we've been with an HVAC person. **Monique Thomas**, HR, not at all. **President Gramarossa**, how about the maintenance positions? **Monique Thomas**, the people that applied and we've interviewed do not have the background, it's been slim pickens. **Attorney DiMartino**, is the committee looking for what is needed for a Facilities Director or is the committee looking at what is our facilities department going to be, what will be done in-house or potentially sub out because if that is the purpose of the committee, the latter, how would you know what you need for a facilities director? What is the purpose of the committee? **President Gramarossa**, it is the latter, it is to look at the conditions of the buildings. Water was coming in to the Hiler Building, an environmentalist was called in due to the discovery of underground tanks under the sidewalk while attempting to repair the pipes. Angie has done a great job when anything comes up, she gave a report tonight to us. It is not fair to *not* give her an opportunity to the job. **Monique Thomas**, HR, as someone who was in the same situation, it is only right and fair to give her the chance to do the job, I've worked with Angie with employee issues and she does a great job, we have lots of great employees that can do great things, we just need to allow them to do it. It's not a male or female job; it's a job for the best person. **Commissioner Holifield**, no matter which direction we go, you're still going to need a department head to handle the day-to-day activity. Angie has been doing a great job. **President Gramarossa**, is a six-month trial needed? **Commissioner Haney**, appreciates the Commissioners' comments, he sees Ms. Davis walking in/out of their offices just about every day but he is curious why he's not getting the updates they are getting; he sees her walk pass his door. The Acting Director works for all three of us, not just two. **President Gramarossa**, you don't come in until 3:00 p.m., from 3-4 p.m. As a Commissioner you have a right to call them, I call Department Heads all the time, no one is stopping you from reaching out to them. **Commissioner Haney**, why do one or two different Directors just always walk right pass my door, don't say a word but give you two updates but don't provide updates to the third Commissioner. **Commissioner Holifield**, perhaps they feel more comfortable speaking to us and I do not think we need to have a debate or argument over this so. **Commissioner Haney**, I do have a question on what Commissioner Gramarossa said about all the dealings our new director has had with all the contractors in regards to the Hiler, I have not received a single update from our Facilities Department on that but I've received multiple updates from the contractor, I'm curious if that was the case are we not going to see bills of 15% for oversight work from the oversight project manager in relation to these different contractors that were used because you're saying our new Facilities Director did that and not the company? Is there going to be a 15% surcharge for having a project manager? Discussion continued between the Commissioners. **President Gramarossa** suggested Commissioner Haney meet with Attorney DiMartino on the contract. **Commissioner Holifield**, that Hiler Project was to be a simple fix, a roto-rooter job but then two fuel tanks were discovered, probably buried during WWII by the way they looked, and possibly more than one in this city. That project was hard to quote, it was an emergency and both Commission and Council President signed a Declaration of Emergency to get it repaired. **Attorney DiMartino** reminded the Commission there was still a motion on the floor for advertising the position of Facilities Director. **President Gramarossa** called for the vote: **Commissioner Haney - Aye; Commissioner Holifield - Nay and Commissioner Gramarossa - Nay. Motion failed 1-2.**

New Business

Considered Tire Amnesty Day Event, **Clay Turner**, Solid Waste. Applied for an IDEM grant, \$10,000, with just a few guidelines to follow. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Resolution for Mental Health Awareness Month, **Jennifer Heath**, Swanson Center. Respectfully proposed recognizing May as Mental Health Awareness Month in La Porte County. Recent data for La Porte County shows 15.8% of residents reported experiencing poor mental health and 22.1% of community members have been diagnosed with depression. Our youth are more vulnerable and in La Porte County's school system alone, we have observed an increase in self-harm or suicide, specifically doubling from 42 cases in one recent year to 75 cases in 2023. Recognizing May as Mental Health Awareness Month would provide an opportunity to educate, reduce stigma and provide resources to those in need. Two stats handouts were provided to the Commission for the State and County level. Encouraged everyone to wear green on Fridays in the Month of May to show support. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0. ***Resolution 2025-4**

Considered request to purchase 4 parcels in Center Township. **Attorney DiMartino**, Mr. Strieter provided an appraisal for the four lots adjacent to his property in Center Township, typically two appraisals are required however you can ask the Assessor for the value of the property. If you are inclined to sell the property then you should advertise it and hold a public hearing. **Commissioner Holifield**, could we have everything done by our next meeting? **Attorney DiMartino**, yes, ask the Assessor to give a value of the property, look at the two prices, publish it out for bid, set a public hearing for any remonstrators to be heard. You can open bids if

there are any and you do not have to accept the bids. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded for discussion. Looks like only a portion of the county-owned property is in question right now. **President Gramarossa**, it is four lots. As explained in the past, this was platted as a subdivision but never developed and the County acquired it due to owed taxes. **Commissioner Haney**, it shows one large piece on Beacon but platted. **Commissioner Holifield**, clarify which lots. **Attorney DiMartino**, lots 8, 9, 10 and 11. **Commissioner Haney**, the County would still retain lots 12-13. Discussion took place on the lots. Lot 7 belongs to the State of Indiana as an easement or in relation to Pine Lake Avenue intersecting at Waverly Road. Lot 6 belongs to Danny Strieter. **Danny Strieter**, I own 6, the City (La Porte) owns the lot behind me which we are working together on and the State owns 7. I'm proposing to buy 8, 9, 10 and 11 which is landlocked by the County and the State of Indiana. I am a tax paying citizen of a lot of parcels, lot 6 is back on the tax rolls which it has not been for a long time, I have been maintaining it for 20 years, picking up trash, removing unwanted guests, I've mowed the corner and I'm more than willing to work with everybody, that's the guy I am. **Commissioner Holifield**, you've purchased a lot of property and put it back on the tax rolls and improved it over the years. **Danny Strieter**, can I ask Dean what his idea is because I don't know? **Attorney DiMartino**, we'll handle that at a public hearing. **Commissioner Haney**, I want to throw this out for consideration of the Board, since the total number of parcels here, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13...I don't want to see another situation...**President Gramarossa**, 8, 9, 10 and 11. **Commissioner Haney**, right, that we're talking about right now but that would leave the two outstanding properties, 12 and 13 - **President Gramarossa**, no, it goes all the way down, that's just a small clip of it. **Commissioner Holifield**, second page. **Commissioner Haney**, oh, so it goes to 22. **President Gramarossa**, the actual entrance to the park is all the way down the street, there is a small sign here telling you to turn here to get to the entrance and the actual entrance is down here. **Attorney DiMartino**, maybe *all* lots should be put out to bid if that's really the goal of the County. **President Gramarossa**, the County shouldn't own land, we need to get it on the tax rolls. This is land within the City (La Porte), we offered it to the City after several conversations with the Park District. **Danny** stated he is working with the City to restore the Hennessey Wetlands behind and in his parcels. Discussion continued on the wetlands and lots. **Commissioner Holifield** recommended Attorney DiMartino proceed with the sale. **Auditor Rosenbaum**, the first motion was for lots 8-11. **Commissioner Holifield** amended his motion by adding lots 8-22. **Attorney DiMartino**, two appraisals will be needed and you do not have to accept any offers. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered conducting a Records Retention/Destruction meeting for outdated items. **Commissioner Holifield** called the State and was informed we should be having one meeting per year and we have not had one since 2021. Rumors in the Courthouse is that the meetings are no longer required and that is not true. A committee is formed with elected officials from the County, City and School Board within the County seat which is La Porte. Committee members include Circuit Court Judge, Commission President, Auditor, Recorder, Clerk, Superintendent of La Porte Schools and Clerk-Treasurer of the City of La Porte. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to move forward with holding a meeting for Record Retention/Destruction. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered creating a standardized Travel Request form. Discussion held on different types of travel, mandatory, and/or required credit hours. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to create a new standardized Travel Request Form. **Commissioner Haney** would like to wait until a form is created. Discussion held on the creation and approval of the form for Commissioners' approval. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Commissioner Haney motioned to amend the agenda by adding a request for millings in Clinton Township for the ball field from Highway Superintendent Charity Glaser. **Commissioner Holifield**, this is a township property, millings have been donated and we've done this before for other ball diamonds. The request is for our Highway Department to haul the millings from Salisbury stockpile, dump and spread the millings then use our roller. We need to have the manpower available and the time to do it. Superintendent Glaser assured him it can be done with no issues. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.** **Commissioner Haney**, that was a motion to amend the agenda by adding it. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to allow the Highway Department to proceed with the millings project. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Commissioner Holifield motioned to adjourn at 7:43 p.m. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

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

DATE 5-7-2025

Comuel Gramarossa

[Signature]

ATTEST: _____

Auditor

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

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