



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, May 7, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. County Complex Room 3

President **Connie Gramarossa** called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Considered the agenda. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to amend the agenda by removing 9 'c' then added Appointment for Plan Commission, Travel Form Request update and Records Retention/Destruction meeting request. **Commissioner Haney** seconded then added water damage settlement. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded the additional item. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered approval of the April 16, 2025 minutes. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor **Mike Rosenbaum** read the Claims with Payroll ending 4/18/2025 - \$1,486,035.70 & ending 5/2/2025 - \$1,467,024.32. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor **Mike Rosenbaum** read the Operating Expense Claims - \$2,760,120.70. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve the operating claims. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Public Comment

Andy Skwiat, La Porte County Project Management/Marquiss Electric, requested permission to get on a future agenda for structural work done on the Franklin Street Bridge, tread plates, not this fall but next fall. Pricing for the second half of the structural repairs needs advertising.

Rich Mrozinski, 2303 E. 150 N., La Porte, thanked the Commissioners for taking quick action with the sewage coming in the basement of the Hiler Building. Why are tax payer's dollars spent on campaign literature included in the tax bills by the Recorder? November 6th, this Board passed the Road Use Agreement with RWE, several people worked on this project with him. Attorney Guy DiMartino, Attorney Scott Pejic, Attorney Anthony Novak, and Charity Glaser, Highway Department. Apparently, Mr. Haney did not understand it because it passed with the Board. When heavy hauls are done, RWE will pay for the repairs of the roads being used for the solar project. To say \$65,000 will be paid by the tax payers is not true, it will be RWE paying. 'Keep up the good work, you two.'

Department Reports/Comments

Ela Bilderback, Recorder, reported she and her Deputy attended a 'State called' Indiana Recorders' conference in April. She addressed the issue of 'campaign' materials in the tax bills; it was information on a program offered from her office. Her name and photo were on it however to assure tax payers that it is legitimate. She cannot run for this office again so no one can say she is promoting herself. There have been 1,374 new subscribers signed up for this program, many people call her office, several are elderly who cannot afford programs offered and they are very grateful to have that service, the fact that she is trying to help residents of this county should not be an attack on her personally, claiming that she is 'campaigning.' Frankly that is insulting, trying to help residents is not promoting myself. **Commissioner Holifield**, we did not say you were campaigning, the question I had...**Attorney DiMartino**, this is comment, this is Department Head comment. **Recorder Bilderback**, attended a great Recorders' conference and very happy with the result of letting our constituents know about the free program, giving them a peace of mind. Just a few days ago, we had a document recorded and a title company had to reverse documents saying 'this was fraudulent, this is the correct one.' A genuine signature and stamp of a Notary is applied to a fake document, AI doesn't help because it makes it so easy to 'copy/paste' and her office has no way of knowing if it is a fake document being recorded, then issues happen, even in our county. Being able to protect people I think is a good thing to do. Thank you.

ORIGINAL

Mike Rosenbaum, Auditor, our mandated 'State-called' meeting is next week and we are looking to send five people, it is free. Yesterday there was training by AIC and the county was represented by six people, two Commissioners, Auditor/Deputy Auditor and Assessor/Deputy Assessor. Several topics were discussed. State Board of Accounts is currently finishing their audit for year 2023, there were some findings and we're working on Corrective Action Plans, improving Internal Controls for the future so these issues can be eliminated and instead of a 50-page report to a next-to-nothing page report. Reported also on the Remote Claims Process, Departments will now have to sign the documents that are scanned in for proper approval. Budget process will begin soon and are scheduled for July 14, 15 and 16. A conference will follow the next week and that is why it is a bit earlier this year. June 30th will be a strict deadline to get everything in from the Departments, the 144 forms are employees/salaries listed for next year then form 1 for what Departments think they need, also will be adding for Capital Improvements for the next few years. Funding will be tighter.

Stacey Switzer, Deputy Assessor, Form 11s from their office was mailed out last week, a bright green form indicating what your assessment will be for your tax bill **next year** which can be confusing because tax bills are currently due right now, the form 11 does not affect the tax bill for May and November of this year, it is for your bill **next year**. There is a QR Code on the form to scan if you prefer to submit it online or you can come to the Assessor's office, call or email the department as well. Monday, June 16th, is the deadline to file the appeal.

Joe Haney, Commissioner, followed up on the comment made on the \$65,000 contract. Couple of months ago it was discussed that at the end of last year in December, former Commissioner Mrozinski had unlawfully signed a contract for \$65,000 for a consulting company to do some work but as you know we were able to stop that contract and as our Attorney said former Commissioner Mrozinski acted unlawfully, followed up with the State Board of Accounts on that, La Porte County will be written up for that violation because we, with your help Commissioner Gramarossa, stopping that contract before money changed hands, since there was no financial transaction with that, State Board of Accounts is just going to give us that letter, it's just one of those unfortunate things when it comes to White Collar Crime and Politicians, the State and Justice Department seems to be.... **Attorney Guy DiMartino**, Mr. Haney, I don't know if anyone mentioned any crimes or anything, you're free to make the comment but... **Commissioner Haney**, sure, right, I mean you would agree you put it in writing he acted unlawfully. **Attorney DiMartino**, it was a civil matter. The contract shouldn't have been signed unilaterally. **President Gramarossa**, much like the contract that Joe Haney signed with Nyhart that he singlehandedly signed and was not approved at this... **Commissioner Haney**, all three Commissioners voted and approved that contract. **President Gramarossa**, we did not approve it and you signed it anyways. **Commissioner Haney**, all three Commissioners approved that, we can show you the meeting minutes. **President Gramarossa**, then we had to correct your problem and we had to come back and... **Commissioner Holifield**, can we move on from this please? **Attorney DiMartino**, honorable Commissioners, I asked Mr. Holifield not to comment back, can we move the meeting on and if additional comments need to be made at the end for Commissioners, that's fine, we have a lot of business to take care of but I'm just giving you my position on it. **Commissioner Haney**, appreciate that, Mr. DiMartino, just wanted to make sure the board was up to speed that we'll be receiving a reprimand from the State Board of Accounts for that. **Attorney DiMartino**, nothing I can do about that at this point.

Requests

Considered travel to Lansing, Michigan for Midwest Gang Investigation Association Conference, **Steve Eyrick**, Chief Probation Officer. Two officers attending the annual conference and to put it in perspective I pulled the jail record this morning and this is the list of all gang members currently incarcerated (holding two pages up for Commissioners to see) that we will or have had contact with and will need to be aware of so I think it's an important component of the job to be aware. **Commissioner Haney motioned to approve. Commissioner Holifield seconded. Motion carried 3-0.** **Steve Eyrick**, Probation Officers are required to maintain a certain number of educational hours every year and this goes towards that certification. Travel is covered by Probation Fees.

Considered travel to Illinois/Iowa for Fidar Symposium May 19-21, **Ela Bilderback**, Recorder. Training specifically through our software vendor about all the new changes, upcoming programs. This is used daily and we need to stay up to date on all the new things coming out. We do this every year; it gives us a chance to speak to the developers who create all these programs that we use daily and it gives us a chance to work out the kinks before we have to deal with them daily so it's a great opportunity for us to learn. **Commissioner Holifield**, this is not State mandated though or for training hours or anything. **Recorder Bilderback**, it's not. **Commissioner Holifield**, it's a vendor organization. **President Gramarossa** held up two documents, one a full page and the other an insert that was included with county tax bills. They did this for you? **Recorder Bilderback**, yes. **President Gramarossa**, and what did this mailing cost? How was this paid for? **Recorder Bilderback**, that was paid through my office, it's not - **President Gramarossa**, you paid to print this through your office? **Recorder Bilderback**, yes. **President Gramarossa**, who gave you permission to put it through to pay \$31,000 that we had to pay for tax bills? Who gave permission? **Recorder Bilderback**, it was not \$31,000. **President Gramarossa**, we paid \$31,000 to mail out the tax bills, correct? **Recorder Bilderback**, that I don't know. **President Gramarossa**, I can tell you it was over \$31,000. Who gave permission to put 'this' (holding the insert) inside the tax bills? **Recorder Bilderback**, I spoke with the Treasurer and he agreed to check into the cost and we had that done, yes. The cost of printing and including this in the tax bill. **Commissioner Holifield**, the cost of printing was \$1,800. **Recorder Bilderback**, correct. **Commissioner Holifield**, paid for by the tax payers. **Recorder Bilderback**, no. **Commissioner Holifield**, yes, it was. Did it come out of your revolving fund or whatever it is called? **Recorder Bilderback**, perpetuation. **Commissioner Holifield**, perpetuation fund and those are Recorder fees that are paid by tax payers. **Recorder Bilderback**, correct but the taxpayers pay for more than just that

and this is something that helps everyone. **President Gramarossa**, I highlighted here because it says, 'Fidlar Technology and the County that provides the information is not responsible for the accuracy,' and this is stated twice, I went ahead and I signed up for it this morning. If there is no accuracy, the company nor yourself are going to take responsibility for this, you paid \$1,800 to have this printed, you inserted it in our tax bills without...only the permission of the Treasurer? **Recorder Bilderback**, I asked the Treasurer if he'd be willing to have that included, yes. **President Gramarossa**, there's no accuracy to this and I did get my confirmation and it just says they will monitor and if anything comes up with my name on a deed then they will contact me. I think you should have come to this Board before you went ahead and decided to do all of this, I just think when you're not taking responsibility for any of the actions that you're putting out there, you clearly get the advertisement of your picture and name put out on the website and here (holding up the insert and a printout of the website), I think that this is wrong and now - **Recorder Bilderback**, it's not advertising. **President Gramarossa**, the company is paying you back by - what do you get by going to this symposium, you're going to go to this company's symposium. **Recorder Bilderback**, they're the ones we use - not for - this is a side benefit of the fact that we use their program for recording, 92 counties in the state use either this company or another one, there is only two that do this, how are we supposed to stay up-to-date and be able to do our job correctly. **President Gramarossa**, your job? You're saying that to do your job - **Recorder Bilderback**, it's a side benefit. **President Gramarossa**, but you're saying that your job is to make sure there is no fraud but here, clearly it says twice, not once but twice, it says, 'neither the company nor the County that provides the information for is responsible for the accuracy, providing the information shall not be reliable for errors containing here within or any damages in connection with the use of the information contained' so you did this with this company, you're taking no responsibility - **Recorder Bilderback**, if you ever read any agreement from any company there's always something of similar nature because there's always...**President Gramarossa**, so hence, you agreed to get into a contract with this company, even though it wasn't a written contract, you took \$1,800 of taxpayers' money, you had this printed out, you had it put into our tax bills without the Commission knowing and you went ahead and mailed it with the approval from the Treasurer. Thank you, that's all we need to know. **Recorder Bilderback**, the contract with the company has been in place since 2005, if not even before that, this is a side benefit. **Commissioner Holifield**, I've got one comment, I'm not defending this action, but I spoke with State Board of Accounts; technically, you could have done this with permission but they also suggested open communication be more involved and the reason we're requesting this information is because we're scrutinizing all forms of travel because as we attended yesterday, we're in big trouble financially so we need to look at whether or not it is required. **Commissioner Haney**, I'll just say last night, for example, at the Association of Indiana Counties District meeting, they were promoting this program that you informed the La Porte County residents on so I'd just like to say thank you for making sure that people and the amount of people that signed up, this is a good thing, it's utilized by most counties - **President Gramarossa**, even though it's not accurate. **Commissioner Haney**, all over the state. It's utilized in most counties all over the state. **President Gramarossa**, even though it may not be accurate. **Commissioner Haney**, you can feel free to read any contract for any of the different things that you'd like - this symposium that you're going to, it's *symposium*, **I would make a motion to approve your request to travel. No seconded therefore motion died.** **Recorder Bilderback**, thank you, I feel this is a personal attack and I see you approve travels to Florida, everywhere in the Country and you're making it difficult for me - **President Gramarossa**, it dies for lack of a seconded. Thank you. **Recorder Bilderback**, thank you for your personal vendetta.

Old Business

Considered appointment replacement for Plan Commission members. **Commissioner Holifield nominated Andy Chlupacek for the Plan Commission Board.** He has voted Democrat, he lives in the County and he is not on any other boards. **Commissioner Haney nominated Tim Cavinder.** Has voted Democrat in the last two primaries, lives in unincorporated and isn't serving on any other compensated boards. **Auditor Rosenbaum called the roll: Commissioner Haney - Tim Cavinder; Commissioner Holifield - Andy Chlupacek; and Commissioner Gramarossa - Andy Chlupacek. Appointment will be Andy Chlupacek to the Plan Commission with a 2-1 vote.**

Considered establishing updated Travel Form. **Commissioner Holifield**, several months we've talked about getting the Travel under control, if it is 'State-mandated' but if it's for a vendor or something like that, we need to have a strict policy about how they're going to do it. A form showing where the money will come from, who's paying for it, is it required for credit hours and is it 'State mandated.' Spoke to Representative Pressel and he will get me a copy of their form as well as INDOT, very strict on what they pay for and what they expect the taxpayers to pay for so **I make a motion that we ask Attorney DiMartino put together a standard form for all County employees and Department Heads. Commissioner Haney seconded for discussion.** Obviously need to make sure it is enforced equally across all departments and all elected officials, preferential treatment, sort of like we've - or dispreferential treatment if you will like we've seen here this morning, is certainly concerning, you know I obviously worry about hypocrisy with what the Board does. We talked about the AIC meeting yesterday that several of us attended, including myself and you, obviously we don't take credit hours or anything else for attending these meetings while the cost was not high, there was no overnight stay or anything like that, its one of those things where if we're going to hold our employees to only exact bare minimum amount of training that they need to keep their certifications or licenses up, then we should be holding that, our same selves accountable to that here on the Board, yesterday you and I received no credit for what we did yesterday. **President Gramarossa**, did you go to the class? **Commissioner Haney**, I'm going to take it online. **President Gramarossa**, so you did not attend the class yesterday even though you signed up for it? **Commissioner Haney**, I didn't sign up for it, I appreciate the question, I'd love to clarify that so I didn't sign up for the class, our Secretary inadvertently signed me up for the class, afterwards she told me about it and I was not able to attend earlier in the day luckily we were able to reach out and contact them and since I wasn't able to attend in person, I can do remote - they'll have a

remote option available to be able to view. At the same time that she signed me up, the cancellation period was beyond that for that class that I didn't ask to be signed up for so you can try and smirk and do whatever you want here but you're only throwing your Executive Assistant under the bus and not me. **President Gramarossa**, you asked her to. **Commissioner Haney**, no. **President Gramarossa**, moving on. **Commissioner Holifield**, Mr. DiMartino, do you have something to say? **Attorney DiMartino**, I do have a comment, so now that we're in May and you're coming to budget hearings, if there are departments that need travel, they need to try to put it in their budget and try to get it approved by the Council. We've heard comments over the months 'well, we do this every year.' If that's something that is needed, they can take care of that in the budget process and then they don't have to deal with those issues should the Council think that it's appropriate for travel. His recommendation for Department Heads as we're coming up to Budget Hearings. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Records Retention/Destruction meeting. **Commissioner Holifield**, over the last four months Building Maintenance has been asked to store, remove, and destroy documents from departments. Building Maintenance came to me for direction, by state statute we are to have a Records Retention meeting **every year**, we haven't had one four years in a row. I called down to the Records Department and checked online to be sure the ones they're destroying or classifying are done correctly, and every time I've called the State they ask why have we not had this meeting. I reached out to Circuit Court Judge Julianne Havens because she is on that Board as well as other people, and I guess a meeting date has been set but we need to have these meetings every year and certify that these records are being taken care of properly because the State is asking questions. Do we need a policy? **Attorney DiMartino**, yes, we can put together a policy and in the minutes of the meeting the next meeting date can be set. **Commissioner Holifield**, the statute has a list of members required to be on the Board and we could use that as policy. **Attorney DiMartino**, is there a Commissioner on the Board and if so, who is it? **Commissioner Gramarossa** motioned for **Commissioner Steve Holifield to sit on the committee this year**. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.** **Auditor Mike Rosenbaum**, an email went out and I believe May 21st has been set for the meeting.

New Business

Considered insurance renewal with Michiana Insurance, **Stacy Green** and Kar Nallenweg. Presented the Commission with the Property & Casualty and Workers' Compensation renewal for the County. Thanked all staff members for assisting her with information for this year's renewal. All of our carriers remained the same with the exception of one building. This year's renewal has been a bit different than previous years. Pleased with the incumbent carrier's customer service, claims service and many of our carrier premiums remain flat or saw decreases which is good. As we did in December of last year, we short rated the Workers' Comp so that we could now move the Workers' Compensation renewal to align with all of our other lines allowing for easier budgeting for the County level. We've been pleased with Key Risk as we have worked alongside with them implementing the return to program which has a positive impact on the rate. I'm pleased to report that the experience modification decreased from 1.73% to 1.48%, allowing a significant decrease in premium for that line. This year, Travelers did elect to **exclude** 809 State Street from the property schedule, discontinuing property coverage due to over 11.7 million dollars in claims payout since 2022 on this building. I immediately reached out to several brokers and carriers trying to secure coverage for the building in hopes that we would not have to attempt to self-insure. I've requested quotes from the County as a complete package as well versus just trying to insure 809 State Street. Many of the carriers advised that 'the County is too large for their appetite and we're also not interested in providing coverage for 809 State Street due to claims severity and/or open claims.' Others advised they don't have an appetite for jail buildings. I do have several offers of coverage which I've presented to each of you prior to this meeting. Requesting approval for the renewal of the lines presented, in addition, I've also presented coverage options for State Street, the carriers that are offering are layering the coverage, meaning that several carriers are accepting a portion of the risk for 809 State Street. Each carrier has advised that they will continue to seek additional layers with the hope of increasing coverage at an affordable price. Requested the renewal for the entire package as a whole but then separating out one of the options that I've presented for 809 State Street. **Commissioner Holifield**, does this need to be two motions? **Attorney DiMartino**, I would do that, everything excluding 809 and then bring 809 to the floor. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to **approve the renewal policy for everything except 809 State Street building and keep the \$1,000 deductible rate for Comp/Collision**. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.** **Commissioner Holifield**, Option 2 is \$30,000 more in premiums however we gain five million dollars in coverage since we can no longer Bond in the County to do a project like this, **he then motioned to approve Option 2 for the 809 State Street building**. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.** **Attorney DiMartino** clarified for the record Option 2 is with Lexington (Layer 1), Risk Smith (Layer 2) and Arch (no play in this) for a total of \$350,000 for 809 State Street Building coverage. The Layers are \$10,000,000 (blanket for Building and contents) plus \$15,000,000 (coverage) for a total of \$25,000,000. **Stacy Green**, will continue to look at additional layers and bring them back to the Commissioners. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to **allow Stacy Green to continue looking for additional coverage for 809 State Street**. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Special Detail Duty during Fair Week. **Ron Heeg**, Sheriff, annual contract with the Fair Board, dates have changed and a small raise was secured through the Fair Board. **Commissioner Holifield**, the numbers of Deputies working daily are not the same. **Sheriff Ron Heeg**, we add staff during the big shows that draw a larger crowd. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to **approve**. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

ORIGINAL

Considered Ordinance establishing La Porte County Stormwater Management Department. **Attorney DiMartino**, we've been working with MS4 and Stormwater in order to get everything compliant with the State, policy/procedures have been reviewed to meet the permit last year, this is one step further in establishing the Department with a Board of Directors and hopefully have its own budget and income and will be self-sustaining with its own fees. Commissioners retained Attorney Jim Meyers to assist with this project. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve on First Reading by Title only. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Commissioner Holifield**, as a farmer with livestock who deals with IDEM, FSA, NRCS, and Army Corp of Engineers for wetlands, I'm concerned this is going to create another level of bureaucracy that they're going to have to jump through hoops which they already jump through a tremendous number of hoops just to have a cow on their property. **Attorney DiMartino**, this is not another level of bureaucracy, our permit comes from IDEM, we're responsible to follow those rules and regulations, it is not additional to what they have now. It should make it easier for people. 'La Porte County Board of Commissioners Ordinance 2025-1 Establishing La Porte County Stormwater Management Department Managed by a Board of Directors.' **Motion carried 3-0. ***Ordinance 2025-1**

Considered Baker Tilly Contract for Internal Controls under the Auditor. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to Table until the next meeting. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered appointment to Kankakee River Basin Board. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to reappoint Dick Welsh. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**


Considered Pre-Litigation settlement with Shambaugh on the Water Damage Claim. Fire sprinkler that flooded the basement in the Complex, tentative agreement reached with the insurance company for \$90,000. Work can be done plus the mitigation at the time of the flood for this amount so there will be no cost to the County to get this wrapped up. Shambaugh's independent adjuster evaluated the loss at \$82,000 however Attorney DiMartino was able to settle for \$90,000. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to accept the settlement. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Commissioner Holifield reported concrete will be poured at the Hiler Building for sidewalks after the deadline for taxes; Monday at the Michigan City Courthouse, between 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., NIPSCO will be replacing a meter so the gas will be shut off during that time, no hot water for that timeframe. Hiler Building bathrooms downstairs will be closed Monday during the remediation repairs, the bathrooms on the second floor will be open.

Commissioner Haney motioned to adjourn at 10:55 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 5-21-2025



ATTEST: _____

Auditor

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

ORIGINAL