



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, July 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 **Member Joe Haney** - Present. Quorum present therefore meeting commenced.

Considered the agenda. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to amend the agenda by adding two items, 11 'a' Public Records Request and 11 'b' Appointment to Johnson Township Board, basically for discussion. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

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

Auditor Mike Rosenbaum read the Claims with Payroll ending 7/11/2025 - \$1,509,732.67. (Date was incorrect on the agenda as 6-27-2025. The correct date for this payroll is 7-11-2025). **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor Mike Rosenbaum read the Operating Expense Claims - \$2,042,128.39. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve operating claims. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Public Comment

Leigh Morris, 424 Upper Lake Side Drive, La Porte, 'Commissioners, I appreciate so much the opportunity to come and speak to you tonight.' Over the past few months, I have been doing research into the history of the La Porte County Courthouse, it's an amazing structure, as you know. I was able to find great detail on many aspects of the building, the materials used, how they got here, I got back...and with Diane Gonzales' help, even the order for the original clock, the mechanisms that were installed in the building, a copy of that but the one thing I was not able to find any meaningful information about the 83 stained-glass windows that are in that building. We knew they were a remarkable collection of windows, they are unique in so many ways, I was hoping to find out who designed them, who fabricated them, what they might have cost, why we have so many beautiful stained-glass windows in the building. I found a little bit of information but nothing about the windows themselves. With the help of Gary Ashby, a member of Preserving Historic La Porte and Jack Allen, a local stained-glass artisan, they have joined with me in this effort to try and learn more about the windows and with their help we learned of the William Lupkin Designs Firm in Ft. Wayne specializes in the identification and preservation of such windows. A principal from that firm came to the courthouse and examined many of our windows. He verified that they are extremely valuable and a remarkable collection but he also noted there were quite a few areas with a lot of deterioration, cracks in the windows, gaps in the glass, rotted frames, and that many of them needed maintenance badly. Last repair we've found was on the large stained-glass window in the courtroom in 1986. Photos were taken and recommendation was to take a full photographic inventory of the pictures, identification of current condition and priority of maintenance work to be done to get all windows in good condition. Another firm out of Chicago specializes in this field as well and came to the same conclusion after their inspection of the stained-glass, take photographs for inventory then prioritize as to the current condition they are in for repairs. Recommended a 10-year plan to complete the work. The cost for this study at that time was from \$3,000 to \$15,000 depending on how detailed we wanted it to be, toward the lower end of that spectrum. We hope you might authorize the solicitation of proposals from these firms and if there are others that can partner with us in considering how best to preserve and protect this remarkable and valuable stained-glass window collection in the courthouse. We'll deeply appreciate your appreciation of that possibility. Thank you.

ORIGINAL

Ryan Flaherty, 7485 E. Point Road Extension, New Carlisle. Here on behalf of the resident at 7697 East Lake Side Drive, Hudson Lake. Currently there is a blockage on the end of East Lake Park Avenue and I presented documentation to the Commissioners of photos showing the blocked area, I request the blockage be removed from the end of the county road. There's been many instances of parking on that county road, I am also proposing that 'no parking' signs be placed all along East Lake Park Avenue to prevent further infringement and blockage of the right-of-way to get to 7697 East Lake Side Drive and the three properties adjacent to that property which the landowner south of the extension of East Lake Park Avenue has repeatedly parked on the road prevented navigation.

George Callas, 708 Toronado Drive, La Porte, thanked Commissioners and Administrative Assistant Diane Gonzales for a one-day sit-in visit in the Commissioners' office. It was very eye-opening, learned a lot, good, bad and in the middle. At one time I thought we had 650 employees, I was corrected, we have 700 yet that day I learned we have 800. **Commissioner Holifield**, I've been told there are 650 full-time employees and the rest are part-time. **George Callas**, we need 150 part-time employees? **Commissioner Haney**, that list includes Board Appointees who get paid, elected officials, things like that as well, Plan Commissioner has nine Board members and since they get paid \$90 then they're included in the count. **George Callas**, they're still employees whether they're elected or not. Mr. Holifield says instead of hiring more, we need to lower everything. The next thing I have are the work hours, eight hours, right? I'm really going to upset some people now but if you're here eight hours, you get an hour lunch, now you're at seven, you get two 15-minute breaks so that's another half hour, it takes you 15 minutes to get started because you have to get a cup of coffee, a doughnut, and you start cleaning up 15 minutes later then you only have six hours of work time. Six hours times five is 30 hours of work time, we're getting paid for 40 hours. That doesn't make any sense to me except everybody's part-time now. At 32 hours, you have to pay insurance, correct? Never mind, don't answer. Everybody wants a raise, I understand that, perks are necessary. Okay, EMS building is on hold because the Council will not fund it, I understand. Twenty years and the Sheriff's area is still leaking; we haven't fixed it yet but Mr. Rosenbaum informed me that we've already spent two million that still didn't get fixed, right? Okay, I think that needs to be addressed. Why does the County still own that Westville Oil Company? Why do we own that, how did that happen? **Commissioner Holifield**, do you want to buy it? **George Callas**, no, I don't want to buy it but how did the County end up with it? **Commissioner Holifield**, I believe it was a tax sale, Empire Oil Company. **George Callas**, all right, okay, I was just curious. Income? I kind of hate plastic bottles, I know that just came up today so maybe a voluntary tax on plastic in the County, especially water bottles. He asked Commissioner Haney if he was using a water bottle at the meeting. **Commissioner Haney**, it certainly is. **George Callas** asked the other two Commissioners if they were drinking out of a plastic water bottle. **Commissioner Holifield**, yes. **Commissioner Gramarossa**, no. **George Callas**, there's the smart way to go. Throw away the water bottles. Pop bottles, pickle bottles, ketchup, that don't bother me. Water bottles, what a pain in the ass, go to the fountain and just fill it up, a bottle, your cup. Okay, that's enough. Postage machine? It sounds like we got a problem with that, whether it's good, bad, I think maybe somebody needs to sit down and work out that problem. I thought we might get an update by facilities but I don't see them here today so no update? The bathrooms downstairs? **President Gramarossa**, this is public comment. **George Callas**, I know you don't mean no questions or answers. **President Gramarossa**, we do it for you, we've got to do it for everybody. **George Callas**, understood. My public comment then is for this, we don't have nothing going on, Angie hires Holifield, hires Jimmy the builder, takes measurements, today, tomorrow, Angie buys 10 sheets of plaster board, open it up. If it isn't operable by Monday morning, HR closes the building. It's been down for three months, close the damn building down until somebody can come up with a reason. It doesn't have to be pretty, just usable, workable, right? Put planking up, put walls and toilets in. Thank you.

Department Reports/Comments

Commissioner Joe Haney, briefly touched on the Stained-Glass windows in the La Porte Courthouse. Consider solicitation, obviously we already have two here, see if we can get anything else to try and move forward on doing something with the windows in the Courthouse, those beautiful stained-glass windows and get up to a couple of them, look at them very closely. I don't know what the technical word is, it's not mortar but it's almost solder if you will, what's holding... **Commissioner Holifield**, lead-like. **Commissioner Haney**, the lead stuff that's holding it together is really in some spots looking really fragile, is the best way to put it so I think if it pleases the Board, I'd be happy to **make a motion to solicit for...to go out and solicit for the two so that we can accept the two that we have as well as see if there's any other companies that might be interested helping us figure out what the right path forward on those windows would be.** **Commissioner Holifield**, while I understand the basis for that... **Attorney DiMartino**, hold on, we have a motion. **Commissioner Holifield**, I'll second for discussion. I understand the concept of it but while we are going through Budget Hearings, if we are to spend anywhere from \$3,000 to \$15,000 to come up with a plan, is there a guarantee that the money is going to just be spent and the Council say no? I think this is something that can be done after the Budget Hearings, talk to the Council members to see if we're even going to be able to get funding for this, I understand where you're coming from Mr. Morris and your group, there is getting to be fewer stained-glass in the world but again, in this day and age, it all comes down to the dollars and cents, we have major issues with a lot of our buildings and I would hate to spend this money then the Council says they will not fund it and the money is gone. That's my concern. **President Gramarossa**, since we are having an open discussion on it, we don't see your (Mr. Morris) group here a lot and I appreciate the fact that you've come out here but currently as one of our constituents has said, we have the men's/women's restrooms on the first floor of the Hiler Building shut down. We have been told that we have to get an engineer out here, look over the restrooms and produce prints then send those prints down to Indianapolis for approval due to requirements for ADA compliance. Although both restrooms had handicap stalls, it wasn't a 5x5 and now the plumbing will have to be rearranged. If you look at stained-glass with a protective glass on the outside versus 50+ employees plus the general public using one set of restrooms, it's difficult to spend money on what is already protected on the outside when we need to

get the restrooms up and running, that's a large cost and we have another large cost of two showers in the Jail that are leaking, that will go out to an engineering firm, we still have not received any responses to that request. We do have someone to fix both bathrooms for \$40,000 but there are concerns that it needs to go out to engineers. We look at items that need repair or necessities, not to say if we lose a piece of stained-glass, it would be devastating for us and our town, maybe the Historical Society can raise money and have that done. We've allowed the Historical Society to use the Courthouse during the Christmas Walk; they raised money yet none of the funds came back for the use of the Courthouse. Maybe in the future funds could be raised, just a few options. We are just trying to figure out how to get these repairs done. Any more discussion? **Vote taken: Commissioner Haney - Aye, Commissioner Holifield - Nay and Commissioner Gramarossa - Nay. Motion fails 1-2.**

Requests

None

Old Business

Considered Public Hearing for Ordinance approving MS4 Stormwater Development review fee schedule. **Public Hearing opened at 6:20 p.m., no one appeared for the hearing, Public Hearing closed at 6:21 p.m.**

Considered 2nd Reading for Ordinance approving MS4 Stormwater Development review fee schedule. **Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve by Title Only. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0. Attorney DiMartino read the Ordinance by Title Only. Ordinance Approving MS4 Stormwater Development Review Fee Schedule. Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**
*****Ordinance 2025-2**

Considered 2nd Reading for Ordinance regulating disclosure/use of Public Records for Commercial Purposes. **Commissioner Haney motioned to read by Title only. Commissioner Holifield seconded. Motion carried 3-0. Attorney DiMartino read by Title Only. An Ordinance Of The County Of La Porte, Indiana, Regulating The Disclosure And Use Of Public Records For Commercial Purposes And Protecting Certain Lists From Disclosure Under The Indiana Access To Public Records Act (IC 5-14-3). Commissioner Holifield motioned to approve. Commissioner Haney seconded. Commissioner Haney reiterated for the public that this is in regards to commercial requests, not for the average citizen making requests here in La Porte County. Motion carried 3-0. ***Ordinance 2025-3**

Considered La Porte County Public Library appointment replacing a resignation. At our last meeting, the nominees voted on did not live within the boundaries of the La Porte County Public Library district. **Commissioner Holifield nominated Jamie Novak. Commissioner Haney nominated Gautama Logwood. Auditor Mike Rosenbaum called the vote: Commissioner Connie Gramarossa - Jamie Novak; Commissioner Steve Holifield - Jamie Novak and Commissioner Joe Haney - Gautama Logwood. Jamie Novak won the nomination with a 2-1 vote to replace Corey Campbell on the La Porte Public Library Board.**

New Business

Discussion on Public Records Request. Commissioner Holifield, I'm under the impression there is a protocol for any department that receives a request and the way I understood it to be was the request came to Commissioners, Commissioners gives it to the County Attorney for review then a decision is made if it is acceptable and needed to be displaced, and goes back to the appropriate department, correct? Attorney Guy DiMartino, I've never seen the protocol, some departments I never see any information for me to review an APRA request. I can tell you that probably the department that gets the most APRA requests is E-911, just because of the nature of accidents and calls. They pull the documentation, the CAD and audio then the lawyer reviews the CAD, writings and audio to make sure it's disclosed. President Gramarossa, which lawyer? Attorney DiMartino, myself for E-911. I can't say about the Health Department because they have their own lawyer or the Assessor's office because they have Brad Adamsky. Occasionally, I receive specific requests from people to take a look at information but most of that that I see is for commercial purposes because people don't know what to do with that so I don't know that there's been a protocol or policy, I have not seen anything regarding that so. President Gramarossa, typically what used to happen was requests would come through the Commissioners' office, our assistant would log them. The attorney would contact the person/department that was asking the request. The Commissioners never really saw anything, the assistant would log the request then send it to the attorney. Attorney DiMartino, that seems like a very valid method, if you want to put something in place following that protocol, we can do that for your review. Commissioner Holifield, that would be a good start, in today's litigious society everybody wants to sue everyone and without a review of a lawyer, there might be information that gets out there that was not for public to see, in case of a lawsuit, a trial by jury or a civil criminal case, I think it's best we have a lawyer review them before they all go out. Attorney DiMartino, I'll put something together for your review or edits, just so you know if someone brings something in you have to respond that you accept it in a timely manner to either Diane or myself because otherwise, we can get 'in trouble.' Commissioner Holifield, I have full faith in Diane to get it in a timely manner. Attorney DiMartino, I'm talking about if it comes in to another department, it can't sit there three, four, five, six days before it gets transmitted. I'll put something together.

ORIGINAL

Considered appointment to the Johnson Township Board. **Commissioner Holifield**, this started back in January or February, Johnson Township Board had a person that was appointed last time because no one ran for the seat in that office, that person has since resigned and there is an interested person that would like to be appointed as a Board member, Gregory Williams. Jerome 'Jerry' Kipper has resigned and unfortunately this has gone to show that township government is another one of them things that in my opinion can be eliminated, there are not enough people interested in it, and we have a person here that wants to be in that seat. I spoke yesterday with the current Township Board members and the Trustee; they'd like to have this person appointed for business to be conducted with a quorum and I think the people need that so **I'd motion to appoint Gregory J. Williams to that Township Board open seat.** **Attorney DiMartino**, you know that there is a difference of opinion between folks because of the way the statute is written and because the person before that was appointed by the Commission and the statute says if somebody ran before and no one files for that seat then it has to be appointed by whatever side of the County Chairs, Democrat or Republican, but this is a different case. **Commissioner Holifield**, this Trustee has reached out to the Clerk and both County Chairs but no response yet and he would like someone appointed. **Attorney DiMartino**, recommended at this time he will speak to the Clerk and both County Chairs and bring it back up at the next meeting. I don't want to take action that may later cause a problem. **Commissioner Holifield motioned to allow Attorney Guy DiMartino to work with the Clerk, Democrat Chair Julie Sinclair, Republican Chair Allen Stevens and return at the next meeting with a decision.** **Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.**

President Gramarossa asked Attorney DiMartino to address the issue with the block access to the parcel on East Lake Side Drive in New Carlisle. **Attorney DiMartino**, last week I received information from an attorney representing one of the parties, he sent the information over to me, I took a look through the information and I reached out to the Highway Department asking them to send someone out to look at the blocked access and there is a call scheduled tomorrow with them so it is on my desk, we're looking at it and it is not being cast aside, we will find out what needs to be done. **President Gramarossa**, thank you.

Commissioner Holifield motioned to adjourn at 6:31 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

8-6-2025

[Signature]

ATTEST:

Auditor

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

ORIGINAL