



LA PORTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Connie Gramarossa
President

Steve Holifield
Vice President

Joe Haney
Member

La Porte County Commissioners' Meeting Minutes Wednesday, August 20, 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 led by Coral Laun.

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 under New Business: Consider 8th Street building in Michigan City. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered approval of the August 6, 2025 minutes. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve with one correction on page 3, Auditor **Mike Rosenbaum's** comments, time states 9:30 a.m., it should be 10:30 a.m. (Let the record show that the minutes were correct due to Auditor **Mike Rosenbaum** stating 9:30 a.m. during the meeting when he meant to say 10:30 a.m.) **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor **Mike Rosenbaum** read the Claims with Payroll ending 8/8/2025 - \$1,484,590.95. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Auditor **Mike Rosenbaum** read the Operating Expense Claims - \$2,144,319.93. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve operating claims. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Public Comment

George White, 155 Garden Street, La Porte, commented on Judson Road off Johnson Road in Center Township, recently abandoned by the County. Owns Beacon Hills property on Legacy Hills Golf Course, the abandonment of the roadway puts his parcel in landlock and he no longer has legal entry to his property. A legal entry is required for purposes of title, if he sells the property the potential buyer would not be able to get a loan or title search would show the parcel does not have a legal entrance. Portion of the area he is concerned about is from Holton Road, to the west, and the road was designated as Judson Road until a week ago when the County came out and took the signage down, the stop sign, street sign on the roadway, all removed. His understanding is after talking to County Highway about the situation due to paving being done in that area. Wondering whether that portion of the lane, Judson Road, would be paved however it is currently not on the schedule. Now it's been abandoned by the County. The old Johnson Road easement was where the Judson Road 'lane' was platted so basically it was a long-standing roadway in the County. Two residential and two business properties are situated on this roadway. Not sure if they have access from Johnson Road, he doesn't have access from Johnson Road, landlocked by the abandonment of the roadway. Concerned about his 3.14 acres situated in an area that needs to be serviced by a County Road, it would be his benefit obviously for that to continue. Pays county taxes. In 1993 there was an attempt to close that portion of Judson Road, came in front of the Commission at that time and they upheld the right-of-way of the roadway, the obstructions created at that time were removed. It is probably about 400-450 feet of roadway that feeds to the entrance of his property from Holton Road. There is another roadway, Judson Road, on the east side of Holton that's currently abandoned by the County also, doesn't have any interest in that property but his neighbor has a concern with that, the part that loops around off Holton Road from the south, around and then back to Holton Road, this is part of his roadway that has been abandoned. It has created a 'dead-end' in that area and will cause a traffic issue, drainage is also an issue. Holton Road is elevated, Judson Road coming to the west down to his property, causes a tremendous amount of runoff in that area that is accommodated by the catch basin, the old Kabelin Drain is no longer a maintenance issue for the County, no longer a budget item. Johnson Road is low at the base of our parking area and it floods regularly. **President Gramarossa** requested **George** give his phone number to Executive Assistant **Diane Gonzales** and Attorney **Guy DiMartino** will contact him once the information is gathered.

ORIGINAL

Department Reports/Comments

Jeremy Sobecki, Parks Director, updated on the recent four electric vehicles received about three and a half months ago, two for the Parks Department, one for MS4 Department and one for Building Department. All four are Ford F150 Lightnings, fully electric vehicles. His trucks currently have 3,000 to 4,000 miles on them. Chargers were upgraded in order to track the usage, cost to use them versus fuel to see if it is worth using an electric vehicle. Enter charged NIPSCO rates to estimate the electric costs which were about .10 cents per mile whereas \$3 a gallon used in a regular F150 would be about .15 cents a mile in fuel, savings of .5 cents per mile. In three and a half months we're saving approximately \$375 in fuel. Very little routine maintenance, no oil changes, compared to internal combustion, no trips to get gas. Trucks have been very useful in the parks due to plugging tools right in to the trucks, charging batteries for cordless tools. He would **not** recommend the trucks though for a full-scale replacement of the other trucks, although he does think they are okay in our county government fleet but each vehicle would have to be evaluated very carefully as to whether they would work in that situation. Travels too much to buy one personally, the electric vehicles have about a 250-mile range before requiring a charge. Trucks were just under \$50,000 each, the county put in \$20,000 and the grant was for \$28,000. Public charger was installed at Creek Ridge Park with the grant amount of \$12,000 plus county funds of \$9,000, Park's non-reverting fund was about \$2,400. Paid approximately \$6,000 for two charges and installation for their trucks. Thanked Commissioners and Council for their contribution of \$90,000 for all four F150s and one charger. That's a good deal for four full-size trucks let alone the public charger, basically putting in \$22,500 for each truck. If the trucks last 150,000 miles, the county will save about \$30,000 in fuel costs alone not to mention routine maintenance, oil changes, etc. A potential savings of \$3-\$4,000 per year for those four trucks. Second report was on the Park Foundation's activity, recently approved a new \$11,600 golf cart to replace a 25-year-old cart at Creek Ridge Park, new roofing and siding for the Novak Shelter at Creek Ridge in the amount of \$18,800, total of about \$30,000 worth in donations. Several projects at Luhr will be funded by the Parks Foundation, a prescribed burn in the Sedge Meadow on the south 15 acres of property, was \$2,600. New bridges and new trails into those 15 acres for about \$13-\$14,000 spent so far then invasive species removal. A \$25,000 viewing tower for the wetlands has been approved as well. Last year at Bluhm County Park, \$16,000 was spent on new roofing and siding for the Morgan Shelter. Concrete work done, invasive removal and replaced another boardwalk that was in bad shape, bringing the dollar amount to \$40,000 worth of work. The Parks Foundation consists of donations and money earned through investments. **Commissioner Holifield**, saves taxpayers money having the Foundation. **Jeremy Sobecki**, there have been large donations over the years, especially for Luhr and Bluhm, which has allowed those parks considerable improvements that the county tax payers are not having to fund. **President Gramarossa** thanked Jeremy for the report.

Requests

Considered permission to approach the Council for additional appropriation for a new copier, **Dion Campbell**, Director JSC. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered permission for travel to Nashville, Tennessee, September 9-11, for Beacon Schneider Geospatial Conference, **Daniel Barnes**, GIS. Opportunity for Daniel to learn the benefits of Beacon and hands-on training. This is especially important for our County to have current/accurate information in Beacon for our emergency services. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Considered demolition of building on Red Mill Park property, **Jeremy Sobecki**, Parks Director, a house is on the Red Mill Park property and has been there prior to the development of the park, there had always been a resident living in the house who served as a caretaker for the park, plowing, cleaning etc. The house is in bad shape, the cost to maintain exceeds the need to have the caretaker on the premises doing the work. We are not in the 'landlord' business. The caretaker has since moved out and the house remains empty. Photos were provided to the Commission showing the current conditions and the request to demolition is understandable. The plan is to tear it down, build a new pole barn for a shop and maintenance area all together. Currently down by the lake, by the pond, is an old pole barn that has the gazebo that was originally at the Michigan City Courthouse prior to the renovations. He would like the old barn to be out of the public area and closer to the maintenance area. County Highway could help us with the demolition; there was an old homestead from the 1800's on the property previously and they assisted in removing that building. Thanks always to the County Highway for their wonderful help and work, no matter what they are doing for us. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

Old Business

None

New Business

Considered Settlement in Sirinek v. Stabosz/La Porte County Commissioners. **Attorney DiMartino**, after the hearing last week and providing a detailed memorandum to the Commission, an agreement was made then a form created showing a settlement amount of \$2,828.69. Recommended authority to complete this matter. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

ORIGINAL

Considered Sandoz Opioid Settlement. Commission is represented by Cohen and Malad, there's a global MDL settlement and they recommend the county enter this agreement. **Attorney DiMartino** agrees with the recommendation. **Commissioner Holifield**, do we have a dollar amount on this yet? **Attorney DiMartino**, we do not, it is all gridded. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered Purdue Pharma Opioid Settlement. **Attorney DiMartino**, this one is in bankruptcy court with the Sackler family, last year...see this one is in Chapter 11, there's money, they have a plan they provided about 18 months ago to the bankruptcy court and trustees, the claimants to the plan, 90% of them denied, now they've come back with a new plan which is much fairer to the class or the different municipalities and counsel handling that has recommended that this is probably the best it's going to be because it's in bankruptcy court, you'll get pennies on the dollar as it is and I do not have an amount. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered GAAP Compilation Contract with Baker Tilly. **Mike Rosenbaum**, Auditor, due to our county size, we are required to file our financial statements on a GAAP basis, for the last four years we were allowed to file or maybe more, on what they call a regulatory basis which is a cash basis, whatever we receive and whatever we pay out. That was done because we fell behind and in order to get the audits done, SBOA is wrapping up the '24 audit now and should be done by the end of September, this is needed to get a new start at the beginning of the '25s they look at the 12-31-2024 numbers and we need assistance, there are over 100 items in there that we need help on, we have to redo all new footnotes, and then we'll have to do the same thing at the end of this year and this contract will help us to do that work. **Commissioner Holifield** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Haney** seconded. For the record can we get a cost amount for this contract? **Auditor Rosenbaum**, approximately \$60,000 +. **Commissioner Haney**, Mr. DiMartino, you brought up a point about potential liability if there's an issue, could you expound on that? **Attorney DiMartino**, sure, so apparently the CPA...the insurance companies are making all accounting firms put a limitation of liability in their contract saying if something happens say where you have a claim against Baker Tilly for some type of negligence, that it's the limit of your damages which would be the extent of the contract amount. I just pointed it out that its out there and seems to be, according to Michael, something that is getting to be common in professional services for accounting firms. **Commissioner Holifield**, is there more potential for the County to be open to more liability than the \$60,000? **Attorney DiMartino**, always the potential but you hope that they're doing a good job, so if it's a regulatory agency for instance, so if you're doing GAAP accounting and say SBOA comes in and has findings, they helped you with that, put that together then I think you have a very strong defense to any type of finding that you relied on the professional, don't know if there will be any fees or fines, administrative fees should they have done something wrong would be capped up to the amount of the contract. **Commissioner Holifield**, this is a long-standing company, I don't think there is much for potential. **President Gramarossa** asked Auditor Rosenbaum if he would be willing to go to the Council with her requesting additional appropriations to pay for this service due to the Commissioners' Professional Services account is low. **Auditor Mike Rosenbaum**, his plans were to approach the Council for funding for this contract. **Commissioner Haney**, since we don't have the funding, should we make the motion contingent on funding from the Council? **Attorney DiMartino**, yes, you can do that. **Commissioner Haney** amended his motion to say 'pending funding from the Council.' **Commissioner Holifield** seconded the amendment. **Motion carried 3-0.**

Considered County owned property on 8th Street in Michigan City. **Commissioner Holifield** met Clerk Heather Stevens at the 8th Street County-owned building to see what all she has stored there for the Elections. He believes the Government should not own more property than they have to and it is quite extensive what all is still in that building. Clerk's items are to be secured, climate controlled, and he thinks it can be done for cheaper than keeping the building, possibly putting the building up for sale. The County will no longer have to maintain it. Maybe a small shed could be built for the Clerk's election equipment on the Fairgrounds or other County-owned property. Maybe even renting a place would be cheaper than owning and maintaining the current building. **Commissioner Haney**, we've been trying to dispose of that property for a few years now, of course when the complex flood happened, we moved offices in that building temporarily and now election equipment is being stored there, it has been useful but he agrees with **Commissioner Holifield** that the items could be stored elsewhere. The 8th Street property is 'prime' right next to the Outlet Mall in Michigan City, we now have the 'double-tracking' and if they are right, that area will be booming again, we can put that to good use and it could be used for better purposes. **Commissioner Holifield**, if we do not have excess storage space then maybe departments would not hold on to things they don't need, we found items in the Courthouse basement that we got rid of and in the Hiler Building basement as well. If we sell the property for say, just throwing a number out there, \$250,000, which is less than what we paid for it but in my job, my business, you cut your loss and move on. Build something for 50 and put the other 200 in the General Fund because we'll be needing something for the future to help this County. **President Gramarossa**, in all fairness, the public needs to know we paid a little under \$650,000, maybe \$648,000 for the building. The Clerk is not the only department storing items in that building, not sure if you have spoken to all of them yet. **Commissioner Holifield**, who else is there speak to? **President Gramarossa**, the courts. **Commissioner Holifield**, okay, I'll speak to them. **President Gramarossa**, I don't know...I know we're having a discussion right now but I think when we did have the flood, that building does not cost us anything and to have a building in reserve like in 2022 when we had to move offices quickly due to the flood in the Complex is comforting knowing it isn't costing us anything. I will entertain whatever the full Commission decides. **Commissioner Holifield**, the building does cost something because we are insuring it, pay utilities so every asset you own has a cost, I looked at the building and I think it's in rough shape, in my opinion, and that's why I wanted to discuss it. **Commissioner Haney**, I'm not sure what value to place on the building but the property itself is some pretty

Commissioner Holifield motioned to adjourn at 6:36 p.m. Commissioner Haney seconded. Motion carried 3-0.

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

1