



La Porte County
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Steve Holifield
President

Connie Gramarossa
Vice President

Joe Haney
Member

La Porte County Commissioners' Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 2, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. County Complex Room 3

President Steve Holifield called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by John Watson.

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

Considered the agenda. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 2-0.

Considered approval of the August 17, 2026 minutes. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 2-0.

Auditor Mike Rosenbaum read the Claims with Payroll ending 8/21/2026 - \$1,563,864.03. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve payroll. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 2-0.

Auditor Mike Rosenbaum read the Operating Expense Claims - \$4,761,663.53. **Auditor Rosenbaum**, \$2.7 million was for paving. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve operating claims. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 2-0.

President Steve Holifield reminded the public to state your name, address and limited to three (3) minutes, thank you.

Public Comment

Bob Gerralts, 3001 S. US 35, La Porte, came to 'welcome back' Commissioner Gramarossa but she is not here. Three months she has not attended the meetings, puts a burden on the other two Commissioners. One item tabled at the last meeting because President Holifield felt all three Commissioners needed to vote on the subject. She should either return to work or resign. She is stealing from the County. **President Holifield**, I'd be careful with saying that please. **Bob Gerralts**, she's taking money and not earning it. **President Holifield**, it's a Constitutional office also. **Bob Gerralts**, secondly, regarding the agenda, I need to thank Diane over here for adding me to the agenda list because yesterday he was questioning why the agenda was not posted on the Commissioners' website. He doesn't read newspapers and appreciates it posted on our website. Working together to be the best, we need to get that third chair filled.

Paige Marshall, 7495 W. 100 S., La Porte, publicly recognized and thanked the Highway Department for their great work after the August 11th storm. Lives on five (5) 1/2 acres, had damage to her house, lost about 15 trees and hired a tree service company to clean up the debris. All of it was put on the easements, they have two because they live on a corner. The Highway Department worked hard on picking everything up and she wanted to publicly thank them all.

Department Head Comments

Rob Sabie, Emergency Management, reported in Michigan City tomorrow, Thursday, both IDHS (Indiana Department of Homeland Security) and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) will be onsite to assist with paperwork at Krueger Memorial Hall, 801 Liberty Trail, Michigan City, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and then at the La Porte County Fairgrounds Community Building on Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. This is for property damage from the August 11th storm. Residents can apply online at disasterassistance.gov or call 1-800-621-3362 during the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. This is for those without insurance, if you have insurance, file with them first prior to filing with FEMA/IDHS. Information needed is contact information, social security number, list of damages/losses, annual household income, banking information for direct deposit, policy number if you do have insurance. Another community meeting will take place, sort of a one-stop-shop. Currently working on debris removal in the recovery phase now.

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State will provide assistance with debris on the road side and transporting it to Solid Waste. This was countywide, just about every road had trees or limbs down, blocking access, lots of wires tangled within the trees and debris. This was NIPSCO's largest power outage in their history, other power companies, too. Lots of contractors are in our County working. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief were here helping residents as well. Through 2-1-1 and our County website, we received over 400 damage reports. FEMA representatives drove throughout our County, saw more damage than what was reported. Small Business Association will bring a trailer for small businesses in our County to file damages to their businesses. VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters), will help with long-term damages. The State has been hit hard with this storm, we were one of 26 Counties that were declared a national disaster, about 50 Counties out of 92 counties in Indiana had some type of damage, a few of those are still being looked at to determine if they join the national disaster list or not. State resources are really thin right now, they're busy with all the damage. We are still taking donations to help others. Meals are being provided by Salvation Army. Believes Indiana has had about 86 confirmed tornadoes touch down already this year, two years ago the record was like 22 or 24, that's how much we've increased in two years. **President Holifield**, you and your staff have done a wonderful job. **Commissioner Haney**, thanked everyone for their hard work. 2-1-1 will help those that need anything.

Commissioner Joe Haney, did a final walk through for the glycerin trader site for the cleanup that was done. EPA came in, coordinated with the Sheriff's Department, HAZMAT, EMA, Building Commission, E-911, Commissioners' office, IDEM and the Indiana State Chemist office. Great collaboration of County, Municipal, State and Federal response, about two (2) years ago he called for an investigation out there, the feds came out and removed about 313,000 gallons of liquid waste that was stored in over 700 containers in various sizes, from 55-gallon drums to large tote boxes. About two-tons of hazardous solid waste was cleaned up.

Requests

Considered travel to Traverse City, Michigan, for National Beach Summit, October 28-30, 2026 for training. **Amanda Lahners**, Health Department Director, important training for testing our beaches, this is an International Beach Summit. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 2-0.**

Considered permission to approach the Council for support for 2027 Ambulance Remounts. **Brian Beach**, Assistant EMS Director, **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 2-0.** **Considered** annual computer replacement for seven (7) FTO computers that were bought in 2018. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 2-0.** **Considered** addition to the Fair Building to include Health Department. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 2-0.**

Old Business

None

New Business

Considered Cardiac Response Plan for La Porte County buildings. **Amanda Lahners**, 27-28 AED units were purchased to outfit all County-owned buildings, next step is to move to a cardiac plan to have people working in the buildings trained to use them in case of an emergency. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 2-0.**

Considered Plan Commission's recommendation for Amendment to the La Porte County Joint Zoning Ordinance. **Attorney DiMartino**, on September 25th the Plan Commission held a Public Hearing then approved an Ordinance amending the Joint Zoning Ordinance with 8 ayes - 0 nays vote for a request from the Commissioners for their approval. Commission can either accept, reject or send back to the Plan Commission. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to read by title only. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. **Motion carried 2-0.** **Attorney DiMartino**, 'Commissioners' Ordinance 2026-7, an Ordinance of La Porte County, Indiana, concerning amendment to the La Porte Joint Zoning Ordinance,' it's a text amendment with the overlay district for the M2 area only in Kingsbury Industrial Park (KIP). **Commissioner Haney**, touched on the importance of trying to get ahead by adding to our JZO, adding to our current Data Center Ordinance, for example, and this covers more than that, it's for the zoned M2 industrial area so no zoning changes, just an overlay with stricter, more tailored guidelines should anybody want to apply, they would know the rules. 'The Plan Commission and the County Leadership will maintain complete regulatory oversight through development plan reviews, mandatory development agreements, annual performance audits and Commission approved Decommissioning plans.' This is only going to be for the currently zoned M2 area in KIP. 'There's going to be a required development plan, detailed plan contents, administrative review.' Plan Director is going to have to review everything and only things that comply 100% with this would need an approval standard, Plan Commission would have the ability to see reviews and appeals. The mandatory development agreement he mentioned earlier would be a formal binding development agreement with the La Porte County Commissioners. There are several sets of eyes that approve all of this, not just the Commissioners. You've got the JZO, the Data Center Ordinance and then this on top of it as well, if you want to do something in La Porte County, follow the rules and it's got to be right here, if you're not happy with that, too bad, you can pack sand, excuse me, anyway, additional things here are setbacks, residential buffers, maximum lock coverage to be sure there is enough permeated base, landscaping/buffer noises, strict noise limits, the developer would have to immediately coordinate/implement an approved noise mitigation plan should something change down the road, we all know you can set an original thing and this way it gives us teeth if something changes after the fact, we've got the ability to shut it down, stop it.

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Shielded lighting, that's been a huge concern of his, for example the prison expansion in Westville, from his own property he can see a 'glow' in the sky in that area of Westville at the prison. There's also decommissioning guarantees, 'any plan would have to be backed by a full financial assurance mechanism' that will be approved by the Plan Commission and Board of Commissioners, again, multiple layers with multiple sets of eyes, multiple boards, making sure if something is going to happen, it is done exactly according to the letter of the ordinance and what the residents of La Porte County are going to want, if anything at all. Pre-development baseline study, 'development plan will not be allowed to be approved without a comprehensive pre-development baseline study.' Net positive hydrology, mandatory low impact development standards, water consumption disclosures, cooling limits, annual performance audits, O&M agreements - operation and maintenance agreements which would be filed in the Recorder's office and would be a permanent covenant binding all future property owners so if a company were to sell, go bankrupt, transfer, whatever the case may be, it's binding to the property itself. This will be the strongest in the state should it be passed here today. It's putting every guardrail we can in place preemptively to make sure that whatever might happen would happen with the approval us, other boards as well as making sure the public has full input and knowing if it's not right then that's on them, they can go somewhere else. **Attorney DiMartino**, a few important items to point out, we've heard a lot about water and data centers, in this Zoning Ordinance the data centers may only operate a closed-loop cooling system, meaning they will not be drawing water in order to cool. We've heard from the public that the Plan Commission considered and the Commission has heard the concern is annexation. If these businesses have a place to go then they're not going to be annexing our farmland. **Commissioner Haney**, that's important to point out, we've heard rumors of land contracts and agreements being in various places, be it south of 250, going down 300, 400, these are rumors, people talk, if you've got property owners entering into NDAs, we're not going to know for sure and there's folks looking around, if something wants to come in to the county, it's got to go into M2 heavy industrial in the middle of a park as opposed to getting placed against people's backyards, taking up farmland. No zoning is changing, it's the same for the last roughly 80 years. **President Steve Holifield**, most of his 60 years that he has lived outside of KIP, he worked in KIP for one of the finest men he has ever met in his life, he was a mentor to him, he baled a lot of hay out there, stored at a lot of buildings, worked cattle and he always wondered why Kingsbury Industrial Park sits empty. Hopes this brings business to KIP and packs it, no one wants to see a wheel tax but we need to bring in a tax base to this Country or you're going to start cutting services one way or another plus this will provide jobs for our local unions. This needs to be done out there, it's an industrial park for a reason. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve Ordinance 2026-7. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 2-0. ***Ordinance 2026-7

Considered contract for Construction Inspection per Bluestem Solar Farm, LLC, Phases I, II, and III Roadway Contract Agreement. **County Engineer Mike Yacullo**, we were asked by the developer to secure a firm to provide inspection services mainly to ensure that the county roads are not compromised while bringing in equipment across our roadways, we ended up getting four proposals, after reviewing those four, two seemed most economical: HW Lochner is now part of Egis Corporation came in with the lowest bid and was about \$3,000 difference compared to A&Z but when we looked at the A&Z proposal they are providing extra services, extra personnel with making additional hours of inspection available so it really keeps them at an equal level, a tie. Deferred to the Commission. **President Steve Holifield** asked if Egis was a local business. **Mike Yacullo**, yes, on Johnson Road here in La Porte. **Commissioner Haney**, A&Z is in Valparaiso, next County over, when it comes to these two contracts/proposals, it's almost a flip of the coin because the one from Lochner is about \$3,700 less, \$115,295 versus A&Z at \$118,910; Lochner's 800 hours, not to exceed then seven (7) to 10 hours per week ; A&Z has 800 hours for the RPR but it does include another 126 hours for Project Manager, Senior Construction Supervisor and the Admin Personnel so for \$3,700 more you're getting 126 more hours potentially, again, they're both NTE, they're not going to but we were talking about this and if something happens in this project, it goes more than 18 months, having the extra 126 hours would be nice so we don't have to come back for another agreement, I'm on the fence here because the two seem to be fine. **President Holifield**, Egis or Lochner, they've done work for us in the past, correct? **Mike Yacullo**, yes, they have a significant history inspecting some of our Federal Aid Projects they have a good work background. **President Holifield** prefers the local office with a 10-minute drive if we need somebody. **Commissioner Haney**, that is good and with the NTE being 115 versus the 118, it is the \$3,700 less even though there are more hours so it's almost a coin flip, my practice has always been going with the lowest amount, the lowest responsive bidder, in this case I'm sure both would do a good job. Prior to making a motion, he pointed out, 'I've got no relationship with Lochner, the new parent company Egis, I've had some consulting conversations with them so there's no pecuniary interest in this for me, whether it passes or not would not affect any of my financial income whatsoever but I just wanted to put out on the record that we've been in conversations with the parent company regarding some other consulting work. So, this is the first time Egis has done anything here in La Porte County, as a group, they finally put something in there and I wanted to put that out there on record, there is zero financial benefit to me or anything in that regard or any pecuniary interest whatsoever, should this pass or not pass, I just want to put this out on record. **Attorney DiMartino**, based on the scope and the road use agreement and the difference in the hours, where do you (Engineer Mike Yacullo) think, I mean do you think 800 is a viable or do we need that 943 of the hour difference, what is your thought, I know you don't know what's going to come up, right? **Mike Yacullo**, based on the anticipated schedule of the 74 weeks, if they stay within the bounds of that contract time frame, the 800 hours would be sufficient, there is a safety net if it did go beyond, it is kind of nice that one contract has the extra time built in but I would anticipate the 800 would be sufficient. **Commissioner Haney**, if this were to go past the listed 74 weeks, do we have the ability in our Road Use Agreement to be able to go back and say, 'hey, we need additional hours, we're going to have to approve this and you're going to have to cover it.' **Attorney Guy DiMartino**, we would want to do that in advance before the 74 weeks are up. **Commissioner Haney**, we've got that mechanism to do that? **Attorney DiMartino**, yes, that would not be on us that they did not get their project

done on their timeline. You never know what's going to happen, frost, weather. **Commissioner Haney** motioned to approve the \$115,295 contract with Lochner (Egis). **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 2-0.

President Holifield, thank you to E-911 Department, Sheriff's Department, EMS, Highway Department and every department that worked together during this storm which we're still not done. Matt Deckard, E-911 Director, sent a graph that they did somewhere around 450 calls a day, August 11th they hit almost 1,400 calls that day, his staff handled it wonderfully, it took about three (3) days to get back to normal, the entire County did a wonderful job working together. Communicated daily with me. **Congratulations** to Anita Ross, newly appointed Juvenile Services Director, she'll do a great job.

Commissioner Haney motioned to adjourn at 10:46 a.m. **Commissioner Holifield** seconded. Motion carried 2-0.



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

DATE 9-16-2026

ATTEST: _____

Auditor

LA PORTE COUNTY, INDIANA

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