

**PORTER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, AUGUST 2ND, 2022
10:00 A.M.**

(The entire meeting is available to watch on the Porter County website.)

The Regular meeting of the Porter County Board of Commissioners convened at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, August 2nd, 2022 in the Commissioners' Chambers of the Administration Center.

Those present were: Commissioners Laura Blaney, Jeff Good, Jim Biggs, County Attorney Scott McClure; Executive Administrative Asst. Melanie Massey and Recording Secretary Kathy Merle.

Com. Good, Good Morning this is the Porter County Board of Commissioners' meeting Tuesday, August 2nd, 2022.

Call to Order/Pledge

CONSENT AGENDA

Approval of Payroll – July 22nd, 2022.

Approval of Claims – July 14th, July 21st, July 28th, 2022.

Approval of Minutes for July 12th, 2022.

MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE – SCOT MACDONALD, DIRECTOR

ARTISTIC SERVICES AGREEMENT

VENUE RENTAL AGREEMENT

Com. Blaney, moved to approve the Consent Agenda, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NEW BUSINESS

COMMISSIONERS

A Recognition of the ARPA Subcommittee Members.

Ms. Urbanik, Thank you County Commissioners and especially thank you to Commissioner President Jeff Good for putting this presentation on this particular meeting agenda. Later on in the meeting, you will be asked to give second reading and final approval to the next phase of our County's American Rescue Plan Expenditure Plan. Today we would like to publicly thank and commend all of the people who helped us get to this point. As a refresher, you will remember that you the Commissioners accepted a proposal by Com. Blaney to form a Steering Committee to oversee this process as well as the establishment of four subcommittees. The job of these subcommittees was to evaluate all of the proposals that were submitted from outside groups and County organizations seeking a share of our County's APRA's allocation. This was not an easy task. At the very beginning, we had more than 60 applications and the amount of the funding that was requested far exceeded the available amount but the subcommittee members rose to the challenge. They got to work. They met in a total of 23 public meetings over the course of about 10 weeks. They listened to the presentations. They asked questions they ranked and scored the proposals. More than 80 hours of meeting minutes were recorded and that does not include all of the individual work that the committee members did. I know that there were committee members who spent a fair amount of time outside of the meetings because many of them called me and asked to clarify things or to talk about the U.S. Treasury's final rule. I think that the subcommittee members really took their tasks seriously and the result I think most people will agree is a spending plan that most people can be very proud of. There is a wide diversity of programs and services that are going to be improving the lives of Porter County residents. With that, I would like to now recognize these subcommittee members. What I would like to do is go

committee by committee and when I call your name come on up here. Then we will have a group photo. We are going to begin with the Behavioral Health and Social Services Committee. This committee was charged with looking at applications that dealt with behavioral health substance abuse, housing, homelessness and other social service programs. As a result of their efforts \$3.48 million plus will be going to eight non-profits for programs such as new affordable housing, emergency shelter, a new 24/7 crisis center expansion of our recovery center and other behavioral health services. Please join me in recognizing the subcommittee members representing the County Commissioners is the chair of the subcommittee Com. Jim Biggs. Representing the County Council are members Mike Brickner and Greg Simms. Citizen appointees Robin Lane and Mitch Peters. My voting technical advisors Township Trustees Brandon Clancy from Portage Township, Jesse Harper from Center Township, George Topple from Union Township and Ed Morales from Porter Township. Thank you everyone. We will now recognize the Non-profits and Employer Subcommittee. This subcommittee was tasked with looking at applications from non-profit groups that suffered financially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If anyone followed this process, you know that the subcommittee had the single greatest number of applications and the single greatest number of funding requests. It was a big task for them to get through but they did it. As a result of their efforts, more than \$5.5 million will be available to 10 different non-for-profit organizations for projects such as expansion of childcare, workforce development, public safety training, expansion of meals on wheels and outdoor recreation projects. Please join me in recognizing the members of this subcommittee representing the County Commissioners Chair Jim Biggs who chaired two subcommittees. Representing the County Council is Mike Brickner and Eric Wagner. The Citizen appointees are Ruth Vance and Rebecca Tomlinson. Next, up we would like to recognize the Infrastructure and Facilities Subcommittee. This subcommittee had the job of looking at proposals that fit within the U.S. Treasury's category called Investments in Infrastructure along with other county building projects and other projects that were proposed. As a result of their endeavors, more than \$7.17 million will be available for various projects including storm water projects, wetland restoration projects, improvements to our Expo Center and improvements to the Pleasant Township pool. Please join us in recognizing these subcommittee members. Representing the Porter County Commissioners is the chair of the subcommittee Jeff Good. County Council members Sylvia Graham and Mike Jessen and citizen appointees Curtis Streidelmeyer and James Hazard. We also have a technical non-voting member Mike Novotney. Last but not least, we have recognition of our County Covid-19 Response subcommittee. This subcommittee dealt with projects that in some form or fashion with mitigation and prevention measures for COVID-19, possible future variants and possible outbreaks of other types of public health hazards. As a result of their efforts, more than \$2.9 million will be available for various projects including expansion and renovation of our very cramped Health Department. Improvement of AV Systems that will allow citizens to watch these meetings without having to come to this building and a Porter County Public Library project for establishing outdoor learning gardens that will also have the added component of Wi-Fi access. Please join me in recognizing members of this subcommittee Chair Com. Laura Blaney. Representing the County Council member Mike Jessen, technical non-voting advisory members H.R Director Rhonda Young and Connie Rudd from our Health Department. Lastly, I would like to recognize some other individuals, the members of our Steering Committee Laura Blaney, Jeremy Rivas and Andy Bozek. Staff support Curt Ellis from the Commissioner's office, Joy Blakely from the Council office, Deb Kerr Cook who took our meeting minutes and Scott McClure, County Attorney. With that, I just want to say thank you to everyone for serving.

Com. Blaney, Yourself.

Com. Good, Yes.

Ms. Urbanik, We did have a citizen member come in Mitch Peters who served on the Behavioral Health and Social Services Committee.

Com. Biggs, I would like to add one more thing. I think throughout the process we have mentioned it certainly but you know your willingness to volunteer to get this all up and running and finished out. I mean we have seen if you were paying attention one local government in Porter County that paid as much as \$40,000.00 for consulting fees. We did not spend a dime on consulting fees. Thank you and that is because of you.

Appointment of a Citizen to the Airport Authority Board.

Com. Blaney, moved to reappoint Howard Struble to the Airport Authority Board, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

An Ordinance Repealing Chapter 10.24 and Adopting New Chapter 10.24 Vehicle Weight Restrictions “Frost Law” – 2nd Reading.

Com. Blaney, moved to approve the Frost Law Ordinance on 2nd Reading, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

Pulse Technology – an Annual Maintenance Agreement in the amount of \$1,123.60 for the mail machine and scale at the Valpo Courthouse.

Com. Blaney, moved to approve the Pulse Technology Agreement, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

Quadient – Postage Meter Rental Renewal Agreement in the amount of \$148.14 per month.

Com. Blaney, moved to approve Quadient Postage Meter Rental Renewal Agreement, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

E911 – DEBBY GUNN, DIRECTOR

Rave Mobile Safety – A Renewal Quote, which consists of Smart911 profiles, Emergency Alerting and Informational Alerting.

Ms. Gunn, I know we have a couple of options on the table for the contract renewal. At this point, I would recommend we go with 1 year simply because the communication I have had with Rave has been regarding additional fees that we will incur based on text notifications to the County. Most of us are familiar with road closures and construction projects. Things of that nature. There now going to be a fee associated with those and unfortunately Rave is still trying to navigate how that will really look on our end. The service is vital to our community. However, based on the ambiguity of those fees that will be associated I do just recommend a year so we can compile that data and revisit this next year. We may want to go a different route with software in the future so that is my recommendation.

Com. Blaney, Is there any way to lock into the current program and the fees would come at the end of the contract in three years.

Ms. Gunn, I had requested that. I thought maybe being grandfathered in we were actually just one of the counties that utilized Rave and I asked if we could get a special favor.

Com. Blaney, It seems that there should be some concrete terms for a contract.

Ms. Gunn, I completely agree with you and that is why we are up against a deadline because our contract technically expired in July. I was not made aware of it until July 7th. They were gracious enough to give us a grace period of an additional two months. Based on my presentation options to you I had to do this today and have maintained communication with my representative. There are concrete number provided in what I sent you regarding the number of operational messages sent. We can buy packages but again I will reiterate what I stated earlier. Last year we sent out nearly 9,000 operational texts. In the package that we currently have with the 911 Center we have operational texts that will now incur a charge based on the information I was provided. The carriers are passing that cost on to Rave, which in turn trickles down to us. Emergency texts will not. We had 900,000 operational texts and with the increased involvement in the program as we have seen it is consistently grow that number could well exceed one million next year. If we continue down this path a million texts in our package is close to \$7500.00. If it goes beyond that, we are looking at close to \$10,000.00. That is substantial for a year's contract. I completely agree with you Com. Blaney that we need a more definitive answer.

Com. Blaney, So we do not know how many text we are going to have. It is not that we don't know the pricing.

Ms. Gunn, We do know pricing. We don't know when it is going to begin that is what they are vague with me about. I really need to sit down with Jim. I talked to him briefly last week and discuss maybe some options that we may consider moving forward regarding the notification process. Ellen Reed has been integral in this as well doing a little research prior to my taking this chair and it's just kind of a compilation. We are going to have to collaborate on the best route. We could feasibly avoid some of these additional costs however, I'm not sure that will be agreed upon as the best route moving forward. So it's just a discussion we need to have and unfortunately, where we are now because of the fact that the contract did lapse we're faced with do we not renew or do we renew for a year until we can compile our data.

Com. Blaney, Do we pay monthly or do we pay this yearly?

Ms. Gunn, It's yearly.

Com. Blaney, Those last two months were free.

Ms. Gunn, Essentially I'm thinking they extended it, gave us a grace period until the end of August.

Com. Blaney, Okay.

Com. Biggs, Let me understand this. They gave us a grace period until the end of August but they haven't provided what the cost would be for these additional services that we must accept.

Ms. Gunn, Yes.

Com. Biggs, Well don't let the tail wag the dog. We are the client. You tell them this is what we will go on for another year or grandfather the existing contract in for an additional year or we will look elsewhere. There's other companies who provide this service. That's what I would do.

Ms. Gunn, I am looking into other companies.

Com. Good, It puts us out of contract though. I know we don't have our attorney here today because he is under the weather but that would be my concern.

Ms. Gunn, There are many facets of Rave provided to this County. We actually have software that Rave is a portal to as well. I think I provided statistics regarding Rapid SOS which we had a few months ago. We had someone that was drowning in Lake Michigan and we were able to use Rapid SOS, which is software affiliated with Rave and find her exact location. I am concerned because Smart 911 falls under this umbrella, as does all of our operational and emergency notifications as well. I will state here publicly that I feel as though the vagueness with, which I haven't presented the facts concerns me moving forward with a longer contract than a year.

Com. Biggs, As it should and quite honestly even if we had been prepared or had wanted to back in June to renew this we couldn't because they're not prepared to provide their information on additional changes.

Com. Blaney, What does the contract say about additional charges?

Ms. Gunn, It breaks down into how many are used. Operational would be road closures, which we're very familiar with and benefit our travelers in and around Porter County. They sell them in packages now. We utilized nearly 900,000. That puts us in a higher bracket regarding costs. I would assume that exposure to this software expands in the County that the number will just exponentially go up anyway. So we're looking at higher fees. We have a set number prices associated with our package that we're allotted. The options that I've been given from Rave are we can discontinue those. She's still looking into this avenue of splitting the contract or she provided an alternative that people can be notified via email only and not text. That is something that really needs to be agreed upon with the primary user of these, which I need to discuss further with Mr. Polarek.

Com. Blaney, If we do one year what are we agreeing to?

Ms. Gunn, That is a good question Com. Blaney.

Com. Blaney, I don't want to lose what we have.

Ms. Gunn, I certainly don't either. Where the question lies right now and the ambiguity is when they are going to begin assessing or charging these fees. The only information and this is extremely vague is before the end of the year. Sarah sent an email stating she was pushed in another direction to learn about how billing will work. Stay tuned. I've maintained contact with this company. I don't think she is being disingenuous. I don't think she really understands as well because this is something that is new on her end as well.

Com. Good, It seems to be with all of the tentacles that this agreement has within our system you may want to have a discussion with the Council and let them know there may be fees next year. So they can anticipate anything that is coming up from that perspective. I think that is about all we can do to keep it moving.

Com. Biggs, moved to approve the Rave Contract for one year, Com. Good, second, motion carried.

Mr. Ellis, The alert module on our website may serve that purpose. We are not billed by the number of texts that go out. It is based on the number of subscribers.

Com. Good, It sounds like you need to be in the discussions in the work process next year as we move forward. There is a lot of technology out there. Everyone's pieces of equipment does different things.

AUDITOR VICKI URBANIK

An Ordinance Ratifying Porter County's "Third Proposed Investment American Rescue Act Funds" Plan for the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 ("THE ACT") – 2nd Reading.

Ms. Urbanik, This should be the same ordinance that you approved at your last meeting on 1st Reading.

Com. Blaney, moved to approve American Rescue Plan Ordinance on 2nd Reading, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

Com. Biggs, Vicki when can the applicants who were selected expect payout?

Ms. Urbanik, The next step will have to be approval of the appropriations by the Porter County Council. We won't be able to expend any of the money without an appropriation. Then we will be required to have a written agreement with each our sub-recipients and beneficiaries. We have the boilerplate agreement already written in so I think that process will happen very quickly. Once we get some details about each of the projects, we will plug into the agreement and it will be before you signing purposes.

Com. Blaney, Next up is the Council meeting?

Ms. Urbanik, Yes.

Portage Township ARPA Agreement.

Ms. Urbanik, This is your next written agreement. This is the one with Portage Township. It is the same agreement we had with Morgan Township except we updated it with Portage Township's plan.

Com. Blaney, moved to approve the Portage Township ARPA Agreement, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

Ms. Urbanik, Now that Portage Township Agreement is approved they are ready to move forward. They are going to get reimbursement. That was the agreement. They will have to give us proof that they spent this money for the purposes that are in the agreement. Then we will send them a check for reimbursement.

ANIMAL SHELTER – DARRIN BIGGS, DIRECTOR

A Request to Transfer Funds – Fund #1000 – Acct. #2330 Household and Bedding in the amount of \$6,000.00 to Acct. #1120 Hourly Payroll. To cover hourly payroll thru end of the year.

A Request to Transfer Funds – Fund #1000 – Acct. #2350 Building and Maintenance Supplies in the amount of \$1,500.00 to Acct. #1120 Hourly Payroll. To cover hourly payroll thru end of the year.

A Request to Transfer Funds – Fund #1000 – Acct. #3610 Maintenance Agreements in the amount of \$500.00 to Acct. #1120 Hourly Payroll. To cover hourly payroll thru end of the year.

A Request to Transfer Funds – Fund #1000 – Acct. #3630 Equipment other than Vehicles in the amount of \$2,000.00 to Acct. #1120 Hourly Payroll. To cover hourly payroll thru end of the year.

A Request to Transfer Funds – Fund #1000 – Acct. #3950 Contractual Services in the amount of \$125.00 to Acct. #3930 Dues and Subscriptions. To cover the cost of hosting and support for the Shelter’s website.

A Request to Transfer Funds – Fund #4007 – Acct. #3130 Training and Education in the amount of \$1,500.00 to Acct. #1120 Hourly Payroll. To cover hourly payroll thru end of the year.

A Request to Transfer Funds – Fund #4007 – Acct. #3340 Advertising in the amount of \$1,500.00 to Acct. #1120 Hourly Payroll. To cover hourly payroll thru end of the year.

A Request to Transfer Funds – Fund #4008 – Acct. #3160 Vet Services in the amount of \$15,000.00 to Acct. #1120 Hourly Payroll. To cover hourly payroll thru end of the year.

Com. Blaney, moved to approve all of the requested Transfers, Com. Good, second, motion carried.

Com. Blaney, How long have you been at the Shelter?

Mr. Biggs, I started in 2012.

Com. Blaney, Darrin Biggs is our new Animal Shelter Director. Coming up through the ranks and I know the work you do is extensive and not always easy. We are glad to have you in this position.

Mr. Biggs, It is very rewarding though.

Com. Biggs, We’re always here to answer a question.

MEMORIAL OPERA HOUSE – SCOT MACDONALD

Cabello Associates - A Request to Approve a Contract regarding a Free Film Event to Raise Awareness titled “Addict’s Wake”.

Com. Blaney, moved to approve Cabello Associates, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

DEVELOPMENT & STORM WATER MNGMNT. – BOB THOMPSON, DIRECTOR

An Ordinance Creating Flood Damage Prevention – 2nd Reading.

Com. Biggs, moved to approve the Flood Damage Ordinance on 2nd Reading, Com. Blaney, second, motion carried.

Consultant selection for Engineering Design of Bridge 56 (1050 South over Pleasant Township Ditch).

Mr. Novotney, The department properly advertised for a receipt of letters of interest for design services for this bridge. This is Bridge 56, which carries 1050 South over Pleasant Township Ditch. Earlier this year back in May during our biannual bridge inspection and inventory process it was discovered that this bridge had failed. It is now closed. Two of the box beams had actually broken. So any further traffic over it would have been at risk of severe damage or injury. We properly advertised for design services. We received letter of interest from four consultants. The selection committee, which consists of myself, Director Thompson and our Highway Engineering Project Manager Chris D’Antonio, reviewed and scored all of the proposals. We are recommending that we enter into contract negotiations with the highest scoring consultant of that group, which was Lochmueller Group.

Com. Good, Do you think there will be some right-of-way acquisitions?

Mr. Novotney, We will need to re-acquire the existing right-of-way.

Com. Good, How big of a bridge is that Mike and is this an accelerated contract?

Mr. Novotney, It is an accelerated contract. We’re going to try and get this thing opened as soon as possible being that it is closed now. We are shooting for construction of the third

quarter of next year. We are a year away from that at least. We have to go through permitting, right of historical, archaeological investigation and wetland permitting. All of those things and then the design process. Then getting the contractor going. The bridge will need to be lengthened; it is an old single span adjacent box beam bridge. We're looking at a single span cast in place reinforced concrete bridge. The span will need to be longer to accommodate the 100-year flood event. We are looking to minimize impacts to the road profile and minimize right-of-way acquisition and the like. That is just INDOT's process. We only have a couple of landowners that we will have to deal with. All of the factors that typically make a bridge project more complex this is a little simpler one. A lower amount of landowners and a fairly compact bridge footprint. Lochmueller did a really nice job in their proposal doing some work during the process of putting that proposal together. I think we will hit the ground running with it.

Com. Blaney, How long would a project like this take if it was not expedited.

Mr. Novotney, If we were using federal funds this is going to be 100% local funded. If we had more complexity to it more likely two and a half years and that depends on permits and right-of-way acquisition.

Com. Blaney, moved to approve Lochmueller Group for Bridge 56, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

Mr. Novotney, I wanted to talk about Bridge 168 which carries Brummett Rd. over the Little Calumet River will be closed starting next week likely through next May. It was scheduled for closure beginning in June with our construction efforts to completely replace that bridge. It is in a severely deteriorated condition. We were likely going to have to close it to most traffic if not all traffic this year anyway if we weren't moving towards reconstructing the thing in short order. The latest inspection and inventory our results said that we would need to close it likely if we weren't moving to construction. The reason that we've had a contractor under contract since the second quarter this year Dunnet Bay Construction. They were slated to get underway in early June with demolition of the existing bridge and the replacement of the bridge. This is August 2nd and we've been delayed now two full months. It will likely be another full month delay the failure of the utilities to move their existing facilities out of the way of the existing construction. That includes NIPSCO, Frontier and Comcast. Really, in my eyes there is no excuse for them not having been moved and out of the way in accordance with INDOT's time. This is an INDOT job so this is all overseen yes by us but also by INDOT and their personnel. There is no reason that these utilities weren't out of the way in accordance with our schedule. Unfortunately, if we started in June we would have likely been able to reopen the bridge by Thanksgiving time by the time asphalt plants closed. Given that delay. Given that road widening that we are doing we have got some embankment to add to make this bridge more safe and meet the current Federal Highway Administration Guidelines for bridge design. We've got some poor soils out there. If you are familiar with the area. You've got wetlands on both sides of the road in order to build the new embankment there is an extended period of overburdening those soils. Basically loading them up with the new embankment and tracking settlement per the geotechnical engineering report. I assume we are probably going to need a couple more months than that. I mean that's just my gut feeling on it. With that embankment construction at this point we would be unable to complete the road before asphalt plants close in the fall. That is why we are looking at extending the closure starting this month. And extending through to next May until asphalt plants open back up. We realize this will have an impact on local residents, the school district and emergency responders. We are coordinating with all parties. They are aware of the closure. We want to make sure that folks that receive fire and emergency services are still served in a timely manner. We're doing all that we can to push this forward. Of course, the delays are going to result in contract price increases from our contractor. We are going to push those all back onto the utilities. I think we're fully justified in seeking those damages.

Com. Biggs, As you mentioned we are in contact with them. We reached out to the railroad to let them know what is going on correct?

Mr. Novotney, And that is Norfolk Southern.

Com. Biggs, We can't accept that. They are going to have to stop somewhere else. On the bright side, that bridge is going to be beautiful. It will be a much nicer and safer bridge.

Mr. Novotney, It will be as you said a functional, aesthetically beautiful bridge and river crossing.

Com. Good, Usually when we get started on a project like that there are massive mailers that go out to everyone involved.

Mr. Novotney, Yes of course. Our consultant USI the designer of this bridge did all of that in accordance with the State statute. We have documentation that they did coordinate properly with the utilities, notify them of when they needed to be completed.

Seeking Sealed Bids for upcoming Paving Projects.

Com. Good, All three of us have looked at the list and are okay with sending that out. We received some decent paving numbers for our Community Crossing Grants number this is why we have decided to go out and do an additional.

Com. Biggs, moved to approve the Seeking of Sealed Bids for upcoming Paving Projects, Com. Blaney, second, motion carried.

MORGAN TWP. VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPT. – ELIAS ZIKKOS

Request for approval by Elias Zikkos of the Morgan Twp. Volunteer Fire Dept. to use county roads to detour traffic from S.R. 49 between C.R. 300 South and 400 South for the 19th Annual Malden Labor Day Parade, to be held on Monday, September 5th, 2022 from noon until 12:30. The Porter County Sheriff's Department will be handling the traffic control for detours.

Com. Blaney, moved to approve Malden Labor Day Parade, Com. Biggs, second, motion carried.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Ms. Miller, Couple questions. Okay with the Memorial Opera House right now just a couple questions like I said uh with money and people feeling more financially burdened by inflation as you know it's well over 9.1 percent uh higher prices for food, for gas, for rent. I ask the question again why now the Memorial Opera House and almost \$7 million bond. It seems like still an unnecessary luxury spending. We know no services are provided. You know that this inflation is hurting us right? This is not a good time to be trying to reach and grab that immense amount of money. I mean I guess.

Com. Blaney, I do support this project right now estimated at \$6.5 million not \$7. It is still a lot of money. I do think during times of economic distress that community gatherings and the arts are very important. The proposal for this money should not reach into people's pockets. It should come out of the foundation interest. That's my plan. It's not approved. That is what I would like to see happen.

Ms. Nelson, Karen Nelson. I'm just up here to commend and thank all the Porter County ARPA Committee member for their diligence in distributing the funds in an equitable way. As a subcommittee member I know this was a very arduous and honorable task. And let's face it we had a lot more public comment than we did volunteers. I would like to thank the member of the Steering Committee especially Com. Blaney and Vicki Urbanik who made great efforts to ensure that this endeavor was fair. It was valid and properly researched. I sincerely appreciate their continued and unwavering dedication to all Porter County residents. COVID is not over but with you all at the helm I know that we can tackle the future whatever it throws at us so thank you.

Mr. Pelusa, John Pelusa. I am a Valparaiso resident. I wanted to come before you and thank the Commissioners for the support so far for the Memorial Opera House project. I have been involved with the Opera House for the better part of 15/16 years now. I've had conversation with all of you at various point in time. About 14 years ago, I met with Mr. Biggs. I understand the commitment at that point in time to making sure that we are good stewards of the money that the County is putting into the building itself. Making sure that the facility is available for the constituents in the community to use. I do think it is important to touch on the fact that again this is not about the County putting on productions. This is about the County preserving the asset that it has, which allows the local community to gather together to exchange ideas, to put on performances that entertain but also inform. There's also a significant economic benefit to this in that the Opera House draws thousands of people every year from all around the region to come into Porter County. When they do that, they also patronize local businesses. So while it will not necessarily shows up on the Opera House books or on the County books immediately as related to the Opera House. When those people come and patronize local businesses, you get more tax revenue from it. That is an important factor that's not necessarily been brought out but it is something for the local businesses to take into consideration when deciding whether or not to support or scold you for whatever you're doing. The most important feature to me though is this is a

facility that was dedicated with a promise to veterans. The people that fought to make this country what it was during the civil war and to preserve some sense of community that's what they fought for and it was promised to them that this building would stand as an available opportunity for the community to continue gather together. That's what the civil war was fought for is the ability to maintain a community. That's what it still does. That's what we want to be able to do. We have many other venues for many other functions. We have the Expo Center, which we improved appropriately because it brings the community together in various ways. The opera house is one more aspect of that. It's a different place for different types of gatherings. We've improved the downtown tremendously over the last 10 years. This is part of that. We want the community to have space to come together in the different ways that they need. The opera house stands for that. It's already an asset. Not doing anything now doesn't save you money it just costs you money because then the asset continues to fall apart and it's more expensive to replace. Addressing the concerns over inflation, everyone knows that inflation exists. No one is going to dispute that but it doesn't get less expensive over time. To address this if it's gone up nine percent now and it goes up another three percent after inflation comes back down you're still paying more if you delay it further. So you can let the facilities that you're responsible for crumble and pay more later and have an embarrassment on our hands when the County fails to be good stewards for the asset we have. Or we can take responsibility now to finish your responsibility to our community and to our veterans to make sure the asset we have stays available for future community members to take advantage of, come together and continue forming a community which brings people in instead of shuts people out. Thank you for your support. I hope to see that continue. Thank you very much.

Ms. Miller, Thank you for that and just wanted to come back and say that the building has been being um kept up. 2013 the roof and the structural up grades were done \$315,000. So in 2017 they received a humongous grant \$35,000. I mean I can go on and on and on. Oh, these are actual numbers I've looked them up. Um I know these are legit numbers. Um people in the community are hurting. Okay it's choose gas; it's choose food trust me I've been there. Just think that right now is not the time to putting that kind of money in and it's not even an upgrade.

Com. Biggs, Dawn please address this Board.

Ms. Miller, The building is not falling apart. I walked around the building. I videoed the entire building. There's not bricks laying everywhere. It is a historical building. I respect that. It was built for the veterans but I don't respect what is being proposed to be done with it. It has nothing to do with veterans. It has nothing to do with COVID. That's what we originally started with was \$5.5 million for COVID money. Just wanted to put that back out there.

Com. Biggs, I will hold my comments until we get to the portion of either this Board or the Foundation Board to address the proposal. I think it's highly premature to be making statements about what that \$6.5 or whatever that amount is today is going to address over there.

Com. Good, I would again just say that I said at the last meeting is because of the financial condition of this County we were able to give out over \$15 to \$20 million to non for profits and other things. A lot of this money that we're giving out is for construction projects. So how can we say on one hand that we can't do this over here yet on the other hand, we can say it over here. It is an election year, we all know what's going on here, and it is going to play out at some point. It just seems disingenuous and it just doesn't seem correct to sit there and say we pat ourselves on the back. That we give some money out for all these people. Like I said these are building projects and they're going to run into the same problems. In the private sector, I'm building a hotel in Crown Point and we will take it out to market. We know the risk. We will keep moving forward and that is what we are doing here. That is my only comment. I said it at the last meeting.

Ms. Frataccia-Siebert, I did speak last time. Again, I want to thank you for all you have done not only for the Opera House but the Expo Center, the Animal Shelter, the Library and all County assets that fall under your responsibility. I thank you for taking care of those and this is just the next one up to the plate. I feel I understand inflation. I

understand taxes. I understand that people are hurting and gas prices are crazy. Maybe you can clarify for me. I do want to make sure I do this correctly that this is not an either or project. That these funds come from interest that is raised that would not be put back into other projects. I mean if we don't have this, we lose the Opera House. We lose the income that we are raising from the Opera House and those funds don't necessarily address the other concerns that the former speaker mentioned. I might be wrong on that. I'd like you to clarify.

Com. Blaney, The operating expenses of the Opera House are covered by their ticket sales, the grants and the Opera House Foundation along with all of their hard work and contributions. The operating expenses are covered and Kaye is correct that those dollars not necessarily the hospital interest dollars that we're talking about funding this project but that the operational dollars the budget of the Opera House. If the Opera House were to go away so would those dollars. They wouldn't be there to go to something else. I just want to say one last thing. To say this has nothing to do with the veteran it is just not accurate. Our Memorial Opera House Director Scot MacDonald has met with the groups there. They have met there for years. They continue to meet there. They are very on board and involved in this process.

Com. Biggs, Here is what I know. We're at least \$2 million underwater in our ability to address storm water issues that should be addressed as soon as possible. I know that we do have not identified a permanent funding source for our ambulance services here in Porter County. I know that when that hospital was sold in 2007 there was talk and many of these people who are sitting on the County Council; I don't believe Jeff was around at that time, but the talk was to use the proceeds at the hospital on health related issues.

Com. Blaney, No it was not. The Hospital Foundation money?

Com. Biggs, The Hospital Foundation money.

Com. Blaney, Absolutely not.

Com. Biggs, The record is written.

Com. Blaney, (Inaudible) to the State legislature about that.

Com. Biggs, I am not in any way taking \$6.5 million of hospital interest or bond for that amount. And using hospital interest money to pay it back under these conditions. I think it is irresponsible at best to even consider it. I don't understand while we're doing it. No one is advocating that we don't take care of the Opera House. The Opera House is being taken care of. No one has put in front of me a plan to fix what is broken in the Opera House. What has been put in front of me is a renovation and an increase in square footage over there in its operations. In an operation that we already subsidize. We have a wage study that we haven't even gotten the results back yet in county government. We don't even know what that is going to mean to us moving forward in our ability to pay employees more where we should be paying more. Nobody talking about this dislikes the Opera House. My record as a Commissioner clearly shows that. My issue is not fixing what is broken over there, as we should fix what is broken over there. My issue is spending millions of dollars to increase the operations of the theater part of it. I would like to know when county government voted to be in the theater business. When did we vote to be in the entertainment business? We can't be all things to everybody. If you want good roads to run your school buses on and run your cars on to go to work. If you want flooding to be addressed in county government. If you want responsible people working inside the institution of county government that has to be invested as well. You don't know broke until we start having people leave here for better jobs because they're not being paid enough and that is an unmitigated fact. The cost of living continues to rise and we have to address that whether we like it or not. We all love the Opera House. My records show that I've attended events there and I've supported it up here but you're asking me to support the spending of millions of dollars that is owed to the public. The public owns that money. At a time when people are struggling to put gas in their cars, put food on their tables and jobs. As inflation keeps rising people are going to lose their jobs.

It is the wrong project at the wrong time using the wrong amount of wrong monies. There I wasn't going to say anything.

Mr. Pelusa, I do live in Valpo. I just wanted to address very quickly when we ask about what the Opera House it's not just a theater. I think that is a common misconception but if you pose it as a when did the County get into the theater business it doesn't. The County has venues. When did they kind of get into the entertainment business? We built an amphitheater downtown so that you can have public gathering places. The Expo Center, the entertainment events. Why because that's part of what the County is doing is not providing the entertainment necessarily but providing venues where the public can gather together and that was the foundational purpose of the Opera House. It was built in order to provide a public forum for people to come together.

Com. Biggs, John let me just make you aware of something. The County is responsible for that building, the structure of that building. To say the County is not in the theater business simply isn't true. We have made huge expenditures out there for sound systems, for drapes, for the stage and other expenditures that have nothing to do with the structure of that building.

Mr. Pelusa, But when you're talking about being in a theater business being in an entertainment business you're talking about providing infrastructure that allows a lot of different types....

Com. Biggs, Who do you think is paying the benefits to those employees out there? The taxpayers of Porter County.

Mr. Pelusa, Of course they are.

Com. Biggs, Because we're in the theater business.

Mr. Pelusa, No you're not. You're in a business of providing a venue just like all of the other venues. The Animal Shelter, why are we in the Animal Shelter business because there is a need in the community for that. Why do we have an amphitheater, because it provides a public space for people to gather together and perform a mission that the Council and the Commissioners have already vowed to support? I understand that you don't support it and I'm not asking you to.

Com. Biggs, Support what?

Mr. Pelusa, Any of the future proposals for the Opera House. I understand that you have your opinion that for some reason certain expenditures are appropriate and some not, However, when we're trying to draw a distinction of what money to spend when there is a difference between saying we are not going to support this money now and we are not going to support expansion because that would allow for an increase in a change in operations. We do that all of the time. The downtown in Valparaiso and in Chesterton where they are doing development it does draw people in. As the community changes the needs change. So this is offering additional opportunities for more people to get involved and come together and interact with each other in a positive way and in a way that invites people in from around, the community, from around the region and that is why it exists.

Com. Biggs, I respect that.

Mr. Pelusa, I understand the concern about spending money but to say that it's not needed at this time overlooks the fact that this is the very time when people need things to gather together over. It is an election season. I understand that that is going to shade the way that certain things are presented, but for instance, you can have political related events at the Opera House as well. That has been done before. It is not just about theater. It is about places for different community events to take place. There are weddings, there are concerts, and there are debates that happen there. There are all sorts of different event that occur and I am glad that you attended performances there. I think that is wonderful and I hope you will continue to do that but I want more people to have more opportunities to come together and not less.

Com. Biggs, And I don't disagree with you. Well let's talk about a public private partnership to where those who are supporting it those who think that this is a golden goose out there. There are thousands and thousands of people who support this operation out there. Let's put it out there to where we're leasing that building out to a private contractor who can put on plays. Who can make the facility available for all of these events that you speak of?

Mr. Pelusa, You are free to draft whatever you want. You are a part of the Commissioners so if that is something that you would like to pursue you could do that.

Com. Biggs, I apologize for raising my voice but this whole conversation has spun out of control.

Mr. Pelusa, In what way?

Com. Biggs, It has gone from \$3.5 million to \$6.5 million. Let's start there. We were going to pay for it with ARP funds and that was dwarfed.

Com. Good, Which it did qualify for.

Mr. Pelusa, So it could have been through ARP funds which you didn't want to happen but instead.....

Com. Biggs, Of course, I didn't want it to happen.

Mr. Pelusa, That is what I'm not sure I understand the purpose of saying we don't want....you can say that you want the community to have a place to come together. You just don't want to pay for it. That doesn't make a lot of sense to me. This building already exists. The improvements that have been made in the past you referenced a few of them over time patched some of the problems but not all of the problems. You are not going to save money by letting it go. (Inaudible)

Com. Biggs, I got the table. You're trying to pass that off as making that available to the people. You can't walk in there without paying a fee okay. Let's get that straight.

Please refer to audio on website. Inaudible. Speaking over each other.

Mr. Pelusa, Then vote against.

Com. Biggs, Well I will.

Mr. Pelusa, Then we don't need to have that conversation all of the time when you are misrepresenting what is happening at the Opera House.

Com. Biggs, I am not representing at all what is happening at the Opera House.

Mr. Pelusa, I want to make sure that people have accurate information. For example, you are trying to figure out what information is out there.

Ms. Miller, Interrupted. (Inaudible).

Mr. Pelusa, I understand that you know that they are worth \$35,000.00 but what that was used for is different. When you come in here, you try, and say that we are misusing public funds that we are just expanding. What plan is in front of you? The plan that is there tells you that a significant portion of that is for replacing the plumbing and electrical. Replacing all of the different things that desperately need upgrade there. That has to get taken care of. Just like, you take care of any other County building. You don't have to agree with this particular function but it is still your responsibility that this is still part of the government. This is still something that Porter County is responsible....

Com. Biggs, And nobody has said that.

Mr. Pelusa, You can be responsible for it or you cannot be responsible for it. I think that we should continue to fund the things that bring the community together and that give people a chance to be involved so that they are available for everybody.

Com. Biggs, Well I just want to make sure that the people who live in this County can afford.

Mr. Pelusa, And they can.

Com. Biggs, We're spending upwards of \$7 million of the taxpayers money on a building that we serve none of our services out of. None.

Mr. Pelusa, Nothing happens there?

Com. Biggs, During a recession no less.

Mr. Pelusa, We are not actually in a recession. We want to make sure we have chances to converse going forward. I would like that, but I want to make sure that this is not being misrepresented. Trying to say that gas prices mean that you can't take care of county buildings going to the future is preposterous. It is a red herring. That is two things that is fundamentally different. Not doing this project doesn't make gas prices any more affordable. Doing this project doesn't make gas prices any more expensive.

Com. Biggs, No but it does give us additional revenue to consider to pay for an ambulance contract to do more road work, to maybe address some more storm water.

Mr. Pelusa, There are many things we have to do. We have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. This is one of the things that is being proposed that serves a function for society. You don't have to...

Com. Biggs, You realize if we fund that through the interest of the foundation that that brings us right up to the line. There is no more money to fund anything.

Mr. Pelusa, What line?

Com. Biggs, What's available in the interest account. That's going to bring us right up to the line of what we're able to fund anything moving forward with it. That's my point here. Nobody is arguing. You know if things were drastically different up here I think would we would have be having a different conversation but things aren't things aren't good right now.

Mr. Pelusa, But we've had this conversation for 10 years it's not happening.

Com. Biggs, Sir you don't sit on the County Council or the Board of Commissioners and you have no idea what our responsibilities are and the amount of shortages that we had to address.

Mr. Pelusa, I do I understand that there are limits to financial capabilities. I don't think that we've actually hit that yet and I don't think that you get around financial responsibility not living up to it.

Com. Biggs, How do you know that?

Mr. Pelusa, How do I know what?

Com. Biggs, How do you know what our financial ability is at this point to fund anything?

Mr. Pelusa, We were just going through the past meeting going through and passing additional expenditures that were needed and you agreed with that.

Com. Biggs, Yes I did.

Mr. Pelusa, Those amounts were appropriate.

Com. Biggs, Those weren't those were ARP funds. Those funds were coming out of the general fund and they weren't coming out of hospital proceeds.

Mr. Pelusa, These aren't coming out of ARP. I'm happy to continue the conversation. I don't want to keep everybody else here, but I think that this is something for the public to understand.

There are different ways to pay for things. If there's a different proposal for how to maintain the building with the functionality that it needs I'm sure everybody would be interested in it but that's a conversation on that instead of simply saying we shouldn't do anything right now we we're going to prioritize everything else but not get to this building because you don't personally like the function that it has. Okay that's fine.

Com. Biggs, I've never said that, but we agree on this and I'm going to finish out here. We agree on this. There's different ways of paying for it and I think that public tax dollars should not be used to increase the operations of the of the Opera House over there. That's what I think. We're going to disagree.

Mr. Pelusa, I'm just trying to understand at this point did you vote to approve the expansion over the Expo Center.

Com. Biggs, Yes.

Mr. Pelusa, It could bring in different programming.

Com. Biggs, Sure do.

Mr. Pelusa, So you're in favor of the County expending tax money in order to ensure that they have programming at different places. Did you approve the amphitheater?

Com. Biggs, We didn't expand the size of the Expo Center.

Mr. Pelusa, You expanded the capabilities specifically so that you could bring in more events and revenue.

Com. Biggs, Well through renovation sure sure.

Mr. Pelusa, There's never been a new building built over there.

Com. Biggs, Not by us. Not in my recent memory no.

Mr. Pelusa, The buildings didn't go up by themselves.

Com. Biggs, The Fair Board built something over.

Mr. Pelusa, As your population expands you need to expand the capabilities in order to meet that need. That is all this is about and I look forward to another conversation.

Com. Biggs, You are saying to meet that need.

Mr. Pelusa, Yes.

Com. Biggs, I see no proof where that need is required. Although, I have plenty of proof we need more revenue in here to operate.

Mr. Pelusa, Sure so then bring in more people into the region, which then spend more money and increase your tax base. That's what this does.

Com. Biggs, I respect your opinion but I'm not going to agree with you. Thank you. Have a nice day.

Ms. Graham, Sylvia Graham. Porter County Council. 178 West 150 North, Valparaiso. I came in a little bit late. I just want to make a few remarks. I agree a lot with what John said. Jim you and I have not had the opportunity to talk about this but the Council did ask for a specific study on this. We have addressed in the recent past years of how we can improve our County buildings and we have done this. We've done it in in good fashion and I'm concerned that we are not actually the Memorial Opera House, the Sheriff's Museum and the garage for the Sheriff's where we fix the cars. There's several things that need to be cleaned up and fixed. These are the last things in a general maintenance deal that we've been doing with the County buildings. I am uncertain as to why this is drawing such ire. If you look at it we spent quite a bit of money just getting back the old Sheriff's building that was sold earlier. It was sold but we needed it back into the County government so we could increase the amount of government. Government grows just like our population grows whether we like it or not and that was maybe a mistake but it had to be done. We spent money brought it into the fold. We remodeled it. We need to make in my opinion the Sheriff's Museum as well as the Memorial Opera House to have them grow. To make them have more room to have people enjoy and to bring venues, to whatever. I just feel like it's

part of our responsibility to make sure that this gets done and the longer we put it off the more it is going to cost. That's just the way it is. I can understand we can agree to disagree. It's just part of I believe good County government is taking care of our buildings. That's part of our charge of being in charge of taking care of County business. That's my opinion.

Com. Biggs, I agree that we should be taking care of County buildings.

Ms. Graham, And that will that will be done it will be done. I don't see the great...well I'm going to let it go with that.

Com. Good, Thank you Sylvia.

Ms. Clark, Hi my name is Heather Clark and I live here in Valparaiso. I moved here 10 years ago from Lake County where I lived for 38 years and in part, the reason I moved here was for the Opera House. We were coming here a lot. My husband and I met doing theater. We love Valparaiso. We loved Porter County and we were coming here and when we were looking to move 10 years ago this seemed like a great place. We knew about it because of the Opera House. Now I'm a mom. I've got two kids, high school and middle school and they are involved at the Opera House. My daughter is autistic. She is a part of their penguin program. It just is really a community asset and I'm really grateful for it. I'm not on the Board. I just really like it. I really like the people there and I'm grateful for the support. Thank you.

Ms. Kuzmic, My name is Penny Kuzmic. 258 High Street, Valparaiso, Indiana. I see that it's a kind of a sticky wicket. There's a lot of people that love the Opera House. I've always liked it. The idea that we should take the money to completely rehab the whole thing into a whole other entity from what it is right now and any the price tag is the thing. I think people are concerned about. I used to do the backup for someone who did masonry restoration. So I'm quite aware of what it costs to do those kind of repairs. It's nowhere near \$6.5 million. In fact, you could do a lot of what needs to be done as far as the maintenance of that building for under \$500,000. If you added plumbing and other things, I'm aware of a lot of costs for the things like that in old buildings. There is just the repairs that need to be done on those buildings. It could be done way less right now and anybody that has a family or pays bills understands having a budget. There's times you do things and there's times you don't do things. Sometimes you don't like it you know. Maybe you want all new furniture but you know right now you don't want to go into debt for it. As far as our economy is concerned and people talking about gas prices, well I'm old enough to remember when we had almost identical circumstances 50 years ago. I was clueless then and nobody really knew what was going on. The gas prices went up and I'll tell you what happened the gas prices went up next thing you know the food prices went up. Next thing you know nobody was buying anything other than food, gas, utilities and their mortgage so they didn't need a lot of other things. People started losing their jobs. My husband was a mechanical engineer and had a good job. You wouldn't think he would lose his job but he did. So if this continues I'm telling people it's not just a hiccup people are going to lose their jobs. There's going to be a problem and people need to wake up to that. It's a lot of money on the Opera House. I think it is irresponsible and also I've talked to a lot of people from other parts of the County who do not live in Valparaiso who don't understand why the money is being spent in Valparaiso. They're kind of a little miffed that all the money goes to Valpo. I said something like well why don't you show up at the Commissioners meeting and say so because these are important people that mention this to me. It's not pro or anti Opera House. It's about the fact that we really are in the beginnings of a recession. The revenue coming into the County. There won't be the revenue coming into the federal government, there won't be the revenue coming in, and the money is going to be spent on the Opera House. I can see where people are having a problem with that. It's got nothing to do with the theater or anything else. The logic are coming into cross hairs with one another here. Thank you.

Ms. Rodenberger, Linda Rodenberger, Valparaiso, Indiana. Sylvia thank you for your words. I guess I just want to say is there ever a good time for anything. Was there a good time to have kids? Was there a good time to buy a house? I say with a heartfelt plea let's vote for this and let's get it done. It's quite an historic building in our town and I'd hate to see anything happen to it. I want it to stay forever and you know so many places, oh let's tear that down and let's start over. Look at next to the Roosevelt Hospital. We'll start that building. Let's tear it down. Let's get it done. Let's support our community. This offers a great venue to a different clientele than some of the other things in our town. I'm hopeful wholeheartedly in favor of this.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 p.m.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PORTER COUNTY, INDIANA

Jeffrey J. Good

Laura M. Blaney

Jim Biggs

Attest: _____
Vicki Urbanik, Auditor