CITY OF EAST CHICAGO BOARD OF PUBLIC SAFETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD MEMBERS

Milton Reed, President
Richard Trembczynski, Vice-President
Frank Smith, Member

Regular Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 23, 2026, at 5:00 p.m

Reported by Fissinger & Associates, Ltd.
By: Peggy S. LaLonde

Call to Order: 5:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call: Present: Milton Reed
Frank Smith
Richard Trembczynski

Staff Present: Olga Cosme, Secretary
Shana Levinson, Counsel for Board
Kevin Smith, Attorney
Lee Watson, Building Consultant

MR. REED: Call to order the regular meeting of the Board of Public Safety, February 23rd, 2026.

May we have a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of February 9th, 2026 as written?

MR. TREMBCZYNSKI: I'll make a motion.

MR. SMITH: Second.

MR. REED: Motion has been properly moved and second. Any questions? (None)

Hearing no questions, we'll take a vote. All in favor?

(All signify aye.)

MR. REED: Motion carries.

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In our correspondence we would like to acknowledge the integrity and dedication demonstrated by the following personnel on an OB/GYN response from our Fire Department: Captain Nick Melendez, Acting Chauffeur Nigel Magee, Acting Captain Joe Diaz, Acting Chauffeur Lucian Segura, Firefighter Tyler Campos. Also Superior Ambulance Personnel: Paramedic Eric Levy and EMT Adam Boutcher.

We want to acknowledge them for their acts of bravery in a period of stress. This will be in their permanent file and we would like to acknowledge them in this meeting. Thank you to all of them for what they did in helping out somebody in distress.

As far as New Business, we'll read into the record the 2026 Election for Merit Commission results. In a letter from the Police Department dated February 19, 2026, February 18, 2026 from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., the East Chicago PD held elections in the Public Safety Building for the 2026 Election for Merit Commissioner. The candidate on the ballot was Diane Perez.

After the Election the ballot box was placed in a secure office. February 19th the ballots were counted in the presence of Lieutenant DeVilla. Eleven ballots were counted, all in favor of Diane M. Perez. This is from the Administrative Commander.

We want to offer our congratulations to Diane M. Perez for this notice.

Moving along into our Building Department. I see here a notice of emergency order to demolish an unsafe building at 4848-50 Alexander.

Attorney Smith, would you like to talk about any of these or is there somebody who would like to speak, or you want to give an opportunity as well since we have people in the audience

MR. KEVIN SMITH: I know Mr. Portalatin isn't here this evening, but Mr. Watson is here. I am not sure if there is anyone here on 4848-50 Alexander. I didn't think so. But I think Mr. Watson mentioned -- you want to speak on this?

MR. WATSON: Lee Watson, NSB Consultant, consultant for the Building Department. I know 4848 Alexander the owner is working with the demolition company to do the demolition, also working with an architect and engineer for the redesign and rebuild of

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the building.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: The only thing I would add, that as the Board is aware, under the Unsafe Building Act, specifically 36-7-8.9 we give notice, even though it is not required, in an emergency situation. I wish I had pictures of this building to give to the Board to show them, but I don't have those with me. But I think this was just to allow the Board to know that Mr. Portalatin was giving notice to the owner that he was proceeding in an emergency fashion. That statute does require that only the portion that needs to be abated in an emergency situation be completed by the Building Department. I assume that's the direction he's going to do. I will be happy to ask Mr. Portalatin, through Mr. Watson, to update the Board tomorrow with any other updates, but this is just notification to you all he's proceeding in an emergency basis.

MR. REED: And from what I understand, we do not need to take action because of the emergency statute.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: That's correct.

MR. REED: Please continue.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: Kevin Smith on behalf of the Building Commissioner, Mr. Portalatin, through Mr. Watson this evening. We do have five properties on the agenda tonight. Just to set the record on these, these have all been determined to be unsafe buildings under the Act, Indiana Unsafe Building Act.

The notice requirement has been fulfilled by serving those with substantial property interest and that notice has been provided via regular mail, certified mail, publication, and by posting on the property. So I believe that the City has -- I'm sorry -- the Building Commissioner has enforcement authority and has provided a good faith basis for notice.

All these buildings are considered to be unsafe. I do have a binder with photographs for the Board for their review. On each and every building we will be asking for the Board to affirm the order of demolition by the Building Commissioner.

And, of course, I know, Mr. President, you can explain to folks here about the process.

If I can approach with that binder?

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MR. REED: Yes, you may. Thank you.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: If you like, I can start with folks that are here.

The first item then would be 413 Broad Street. This is just the garage. It's tab 1 in your book -- in your binder. Mrs. Ponce is here, with her granddaughter as well. That's her home. I did explain to her granddaughter, who's right here as well, that we would request the order be entered tonight. That doesn't mean they are going to knock it down right away. Mrs. Ponce would like to look into the 50/50 program potentially, as well as trying to determine whether she wants to try to save the garage.

Given it's condition, we would ask the order be affirmed. I don't know if they have anything they would like to say.

MR. REED: Would anyone like to speak on behalf of this property? If you would kindly, if you are able, make it to the microphone and give us your name. If you are not able, we can make an exception for sure. The granddaughter can approach with you to kind of help out. Take your time.

MRS. PONCE: Frances Ponce, I'm the owner of 413 Broad Street. What I wanted to do is, if possible, request just a little bit of time so that I could get the money to fix my garage. I really don't want to knock it down. We store my grandchildren's bikes and what have you there. We had an emergency. This winter my furnace broke down. That cost me $10,000, which I didn't have it all, but I had to give part of it. So I was wondering if I could have a little bit of time, 4 or 5 months, to get the money back to fix my garage.

MR. REED: Okay. First of all, thanks for coming out, and I'll kind of say this to everyone in the room, just so that you have an official record, which is that this order does not mean an automatic demolition. And the Building Department for sure will work with you within a very reasonable amount of time for you to show some type of activity and some type of action on improving the condition of the garage. So this is not the end of the line. This is the start of it, and there will be ample time.

The best thing to do is keep in touch and say, hey, I'll have somebody give me -- I

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don't want to tell you all the process, but having a qualified contractor get in touch to get your price or something. The more you call and communicate is better. You will have another opportunity to come back in front of this Board and say, look at what I have done. Generally when it's communicated what needs to take place, because the Building Department doesn't have the goal to knock it down, but the goal is really to give a little initiation to get it taken care of.

Would you like to share anything?

GRANDDAUGHTER: Nope.

MR. REED: Thank you for coming out and keep in touch. Again, it's a process.

MRS. PONCE: Thank you.

MR. REED: Mr. Watson can give you Mr. Portalatin's number and everything. Make sure you have his number.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: So, I don't know if I stated the City's position is to request to affirm the order.

The next property where someone is here, 3938 Catalpa, Mr. Shad Arafat is here. I can mention to the Board that his name, as well as Michelle Wronke, from Indianapolis is listed on the property. It was recently that the certificate was bought at a tax sale by tax auction, the Indiana LLC Tax Sale.

As you can tell by the photos, it's a boarded up one-story brick, needs tuckpointing, issues with the garage, which is also boarded up. Basement is boarded up. The porch is deteriorating. And you can see on the south side there is partially collapsed brick wall and the windows are broken. Given the condition of the property, we would request that the order be affirmed. Mr. Arafat is here, I'm not sure if he wants to be heard on that.

MR. ARAFAT: I'm here on 3938 Catalpa. On December 10th Mr. James, and they call me, three-way call, and we discussed the terms. He wouldn't allow me to pull permits. He wanted me to pay the lien for the Construction 1, the $300.00. So we called back and they told me, can't do anything until we call back to make the payments. We waited two weeks. No one called. We called back, wait till James give permission to pay the

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lien before we are allowed to pull permits. Been a long time. I sent e-mail, no one call us. I would pull the permit a long time ago. I'm a roofer, exterior contractor. I could have done it a long time ago.

But suddenly we get the notice of the demo on the property. No one called me. No one discussed with me, and I am here right now. If James was here, I could show all the e-mails and communication I sent him, and I could fix it long time ago.

MR. REED: We are familiar, you have come before us before. It's a little difficult on this because James isn't here, but I am not disputing what you are saying, but this building definitely is in bad shape from some pictures I have seen.

Lee, I don't know if you can intervene maybe to get James on a call. James always calls back, but I'm not --

MR. ARAFAT: I wanted to wait for the contractor who has lien and I can pay it right away and apply for permit, otherwise I can't touch anything.

MR. REED: Maybe we need to -- what is your recommendation, do we table it or put it on the order?

MR. KEVIN SMITH: Well, the next date for status would be March 23rd, we can set it at that time for status and that's where we can enter the order. We can set it for status, that way James can address it before the Board.

MR. WATSON: I think it's probably what James would like to do with this. There is time, it's not coming to --

MR. REED: So enter the order?

MR. ARAFAT: My question, if they enter are they going to waive this consultant $1,000 bond? This is my question.

MR. REED: I can't speak to that. I never heard of a waiver holding up a permit either or a lien myself.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: I think the lien, if I heard Mr. Arafat correctly, that's a board up lien on

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the property that he's willing to pay. He hasn't been able to get with James.

MR. ARAFAT: Mr. James, to let me apply for the permit, he told me pay the lien first.

MR. REED: Sure, I understand that. I'll tell you what, let's just table it and put it off till March 23rd. That will allow Mr. Arafat time to speak with James and with Lee. We know he's come before us before, so let's get some clarity on this.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: We wouldn't enter the order and set it for March 23rd for status. Mr. Arafat, you will be here March 23rd?

MR. ARAFAT: Yes.

MR. REED: Lee, you will discuss this with James tomorrow or the next day?

MR. WATSON: Yes.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: Mr. President, next property someone is here on is 4228 Drummond Street. It's by Miss Vela, however her son, Paul Vela is here and he resides there. He mentioned that his mother has passed away, but he still resides on the property. As you can see, the big issues that we are having by the photos are that the porch is in pretty deteriorated condition on the south side of the property. You can see that the north side a lot of the siding is missing. And overall I think it needs a facelift as you can see. Given the condition of the property, we would ask the order be affirmed. I know that the Board has always been conscious of the fact people are residing there, so I think Mr. Vela may want to address the Board and discuss that with you. Given the condition, we would ask the order be entered at this time.

MR. REED: Please state your name.

MR. VELA: Paul Vela, 4228 Drummond Street. That's my mom's house and I'm her son. Basically I took care of her --

MR. REED: Take your time.

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MR. VELA: -- until she passed away. She passed away in my arms. But to make a long story short, I always knew I needed the siding and stuff like that. Back in July of 2022 I got an estimate from Luke Brothers, but I couldn't afford it at the time because I was going through financial hardship. Right now I am on a debt relief program, I'm embarrassed to say that. I know I can get the thing done, but I need time.

Fred Flores, Attorney Fred Flores, referred me to a contractor, Hose Senior, who referred me to his son. The son is one that does all the work. I contacted him on February 10th by phone and he said, you know, he would give me a written agreement. As of today he has not. I have been waiting for that. Once I get that, he can walk around and give me a written agreement for what was ordered on the notice and that's all I am waiting for. And only thing I can ask is right now, I guess, request the notice to be withdraw.

MR. REED: Well, I appreciate your coming here. And I know it's a little tough to talk about the situation at hand, but this is the same case where this is not the end of the line. But, you know, the neighborhood side, kind of revitalizing, the City is very adamant that everyone is doing their fair share to maintain the presence and quality of life, not only them, but the ones next to them. So, again, I encourage you to go through the process. It's not as cumbersome as it may seem, but it does require some effort.

MR. VELA: Yes, I understand.

MR. REED: If you would keep in touch with the Building Department.

MR. VELA: Now where do I do that, come here or --

MR. REED: You go to -- Lee will give you the information, make sure you have the Building Department number and go into their office, call him on the phone. You can really get set up with something that is reasonable, but it's also going to have some accountability that you would need too.

MR. VELA: Do you know if there is any kind of program or grants?

MR. REED: They will tell you about all

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that in the Building Department, whatever it may be. I don't want to over speak or under speak, but go through the Building Department and that's the avenue to coming to getting this off of the order.

So, thank you for coming out and well wishes to you.

MR. VELA: Okay. You guys keep up the good work.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: Mr. President, as it relates to the other two properties on the agenda, 4010 Drummond and 4116 Drummond, I would indicate for the record that no one has appeared. We'd request that given the condition of the notice as set in the binder that we have given to the Board that supports the Building Commissioner's request, that the orders be affirmed.

MR. REED: Who do we have in the back here? Are they here for a property?

MR. KEVIN SMITH: No, they are not here for anything on the agenda.

MR. REED: Okay. Is there a motion to approve the properties for demolition, other than 2938 Catalpa, which has been tabled?

MR. TREMBCZYNSKI: I'll make a motion.

MR. SMITH: Second.

MR. REED: Motion has been properly moved and second. Any questions? (None)

Hearing no questions, we'll take a vote. All in favor?

(All signify aye.)

MR. REED: Motion carries.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: Our next item is Notice to Rescind and Release Order to demolish of 417 Spring Street. Given the rehab of this property, we would request the order be signed as presented to Rescind and Release order.

MR. REED: Is there a motion to approve the Notice to Rescind and Release Order to demolish for 417 Spring Street?

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MR. SMITH: I'll make a motion.

MR. TREMBCZYNSKI: Second.

MR. REED: Motion has been properly moved and second. Any questions? (None)
Hearing no questions, we'll take a vote. All in favor?
(All signify aye.)
MR. REED: Motion carries.

MR. SMITH: Thank you.

MR. REED: Is there anyone in the audience that would like to speak, you may do so now? (None)
Seeing no speakers, our next meeting will be Monday, March 9, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.
Is there a motion to adjourn?

MR. SMITH: I'll make that motion.

MR. TREMBCZYNSKI: Second.

MR. REED: Motion has been properly moved and second. All in favor?
(All signify aye.)
MR. REED: Motion carries.
Thank you everyone. Meeting adjourned.

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Approval of the Public Safety Minutes
of February 23rd, 2026
Approved and Signed, Monday, February 23rd, 2026.

_____
Milton Reed, President

_____
Richard Trembczynski, Vice President

_____
Frank Smith, Member

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Olga Cosme, Secretary

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Peggy S. LaLonde, a competent and duly qualified court reporter, do hereby certify that I did report in machine shorthand the foregoing proceedings and that my shorthand notes so taken at said time and place were thereafter reduced to typewriting under my personal direction.

I further certify that the foregoing typewritten transcript constitutes minutes of the said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Munster, Indiana, this 25th day of February, 2026.



Peggy S. LaLonde

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