

Van Buren County Board of Road Commissioners

May 5, 2026 - Regular Meeting

BE IT REMEMBERED: That on the 5th day of May, 2026 at 5:00 PM, E.D.T., the Board of County Road Commissioners for the County of Van Buren met in regular session at the Road Commission Administrative Office in Lawrence, Michigan.

PRESENT:

Road Commissioners Askew, Boze, Burleson, Kinney and Nelson
Managing Director Bret Witkowski
Highway Engineer Barry Anttila
Finance and Human Resources Director Linnea Rader
Operations Director Greg Brucks
Administrative Assistant-Board Secretary Jill Brien

ABSENT:

None

GUESTS PRESENT:

Ronnie Denney, CR376, Arlington Township
Larry Jarousz, CR376, Arlington Township
Ted Bobak, CR376 - Arlington Township
Vic Pantea, Representing Self
Mike Dopp, City Engineer, City of South Haven
Derek Hall, Michigan Department of Treasury
Melissa (Fetkenhier) McCandrew, Van Buren County Road Commission

Chairman Burleson called the meeting to order at 5 PM.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Boze requested the following additions to the Agenda: 5(A), Tribute Resolution for Melissa McCandrew; and 11(G), Cell Tower Lease with Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless. He also requested that Agenda Item 11(C) Cost-Sharing Agreement for Kalamazoo Street Reconstruction be moved to Agenda Item 6(A).

Motion by Boze seconded by Nelson to approve the Agenda, as amended.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Motion by Kinney seconded by Boze to approve the Minutes of the April 2, 2026 Regular Meeting as presented by the Board Secretary.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Motion by Boze, seconded by Askew to adopt the following Resolution which was read aloud by Vice-Chairman Boze:

RESOLUTION 2026 - 13

WHEREAS: On May 5, 2026, Melissa McCandrew officially resigned from her position as the Communications-Permit Clerk for the Van Buren County Road Commission after six years of dedicated service; and,

WHEREAS: Throughout her employment, Melissa efficiently answered a multi-line phone system and assisted walk-in customers, often responding to frustrated individuals in a calm, patient, and caring manner; and,

WHEREAS: In addition to these responsibilities, Melissa clearly explained and tracked complex permit processes and requirements while remaining organized, and maintaining composure in a fast-paced environment; and,

WHEREAS: Melissa exhibited personal dedication to help safeguard the motoring public by logging and tracking requests to help ensure appropriate staff follow-through; and,

WHEREAS: Melissa performed her many duties and assignments with great pride, always acting in the best interests of the Van Buren County Road Commission and the citizens of Van Buren County.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the Board of County Road Commissioners of Van Buren County hereby recognizes and commends Melissa McCandrew for her years of service and dedication, and extends best wishes to Melissa, her husband, Matthew, and daughter Elizabeth in the years ahead.

YES: 5

NO: 0

RESOLUTION ADOPTED.

Derek Hall, Michigan Department of Treasury, reviewed the DRAFT Audit Report, FY2025 with Board and those present. The OPEB and Pension were discussed, and the Balance Sheet was reviewed with an eye towards a comparison of revenues versus expenditures. Due to the uncertainty of funding, Mr. Hall urged the Board not to count on marijuana funds until they are in-hand. He also relayed that the audit went well, as it always does, and that the Board is spending appropriately, and keeping the proper fund balance. Derek closed by saying that if there are ever any questions or concerns to please feel free to contact him. Mr. Hall then left the meeting.

Anttila discussed the proposed Cost-Sharing Agreement for Kalamazoo Street Reconstruction. The City of South Haven and the VBCRC both received grants for the reconstruction of their respective portions of Kalamazoo Street. For the sake of efficiency and mutual cost savings, the project has been combined into a single contract. Anttila and Mike Dopp, Engineer for the City, explained the terms of the Agreement for the Board. Anttila recommended that Chairman Burleson and Vice Chairman Boze be authorized to sign the Agreement on behalf of the Road Commission. Motion by Askew, seconded by Nelson to authorize Chairman Doug Burleson and Vice-Chairman Rick Boze to sign the Cost-Sharing Agreement for Kalamazoo Street reconstruction on behalf of the Board of County Road Commissioners of Van Buren County.

YES: 5

NO: 0

MOTION CARRIED.

The Chairman opened the meeting to first public comment. Ted Bobak, a resident on CR376, Arlington Township, requested an update on CR376. Witkowski requested that Mr. Bobak call him for an update. Mr. Bobak then requested that the Road Commission clean his ditch and Witkowski asked Mr. Bobak to call him on this issue, as well.

Ronnie Denney, 57471 CR376, Arlington Township, explained that there is no ditch on his property and that when it rains the water runs over the road. Witkowski said that staff will investigate this issue.

Larry Jarousz, CR376, Arlington Township, asked if CR376 would be repaved. The Board relayed that staff was working with the Township, but that a program sheet had not yet been signed.

Messrs. Bobak, Denney, and Jarousz all exited the meeting.

Department Updates were provided as follows:

Finance and HR Department:

- Year end is complete! The audit went really well. We are now working on the annual report.

- New hires have started! They all seem to be learning quickly and working well with the team. We have added 4 Road Maintenance employees, 1 general mechanic, 3 apprentices, 3 summer seasonal for the roads and 2 summer seasonal for engineering, and 1 purchasing clerk.
- Melissa has gotten married! We congratulate her on her marriage but are sad to announce that she will be moving to live with her husband several hours away. She's been amazing on the phones and working with frustrated people and we will be very sad to see her go. We will begin the process of hiring her replacement next week.
- I've completed my master's degree in human resources administration from Central Michigan University. My capstone research project was on what factors lead to behavior change and skill development in Michigan Road Commissions. Many of our training practices throughout the state are very antiquated. While we have updated some to more of an adult learning model, many have not. I'm going to be working with CRA, MCRCSIP, and CRASIF to share my research and see if we can standardize processes across the State, which will directly impact the training we get from those organizations.
- Operating Budget is attached through April 30, 2026.

The Board congratulated Rader for completing her master's degree; especially as a full-time employee, which is a recognizable accomplishment!

Operations Department:

Maintenance staff have been actively patching potholes and repairing washouts throughout the week. Hot Mix patching for sealcoat began this week too.

Grading operations continue progressing across the county.

Tree crews have focused on storm cleanup efforts and work along CR 378 in Covert.

Drainage crews are also making steady progress through an increasing number of pipe replacements.

We received our new chip spreader this week—just in time for some final adjustments before putting it into service for the season.

Installation of radios and fire extinguishers in all new mowing tractors happened this week and mowing began Thursday.

De-berming operations are scheduled to begin early next week.

All union staff attended safety training in Lawrence on Monday.

On Wednesday, the equipment committee and key staff met with a representative from Custom Truck One Source to begin developing specifications for a new bucket truck.

Our guardrail spray program also kicked-off this week.

Fine grading began Thursday at the Antwerp Satellite Garage. (Update: fine grading finished today). Once completed, a pad will be constructed, and trap rock will be delivered. We also met a contractor this week to get quotes to install a generator in the building.

Material for this season's program is currently being hauled to the Bangor/Western property at M-43 and 64th Street.

A large pipe for 40th Avenue in Arlington is expected to be delivered next week. (Update: pipe has been delivered). Scheduling is underway for a rental excavator and Miss Dig, with installation anticipated within the following week. This pipe is roughly 8 feet by 5.5 feet and 50 feet long; to my knowledge, it is the largest pipe ever installed by VBCRC Staff.

An additional custom pipe is scheduled for delivery next Thursday for 82nd Street in Covert at the Davis Drain crossing (82nd Street North of I-196).

We are also preparing to begin trucking and placing contract gravel for this season in the coming weeks.

We met with the Conservation District this week to finalize the agreement for our invasive species program later this fall.

Brucks added that he and Alyssa McAndrew attended a road tour with Covert Township today. He also plans to attend Keeler Township's board meeting this evening following the Road Commission's meeting. The Board asked questions about various locations and Brucks responded. The Board also reviewed the new Fog Seal yard signs that will be placed prior to application as a resident notice instead of distributing flyers. And the new chip spreader was delivered approximately 6-9 months early and was displayed in the front lot for the Board to see. Questions were asked by the Board about the new chip spreader and responded to by Brucks. Witkowski thanked the Board for its approval of this equipment which will make a positive difference in our operations this season.

The railroad's project on CR681 was also discussed. The roadway will be closed effective May 11th and traffic will be detoured as a result. The project is expected to take approximately one week, pending weather.

Engineering Department:

- 73rd St. from M-43 to CR 388, South Haven Township - Clearing and Restoration. Trees are down, clean-up and stump removals continue.
- Silver Saddle Rd., Columbia Township - Clearing and turn-around build-up. Trees have been cut. Dirt work to follow.
- CR 352 from 60th Street to CR681, Keeler Township - Clearing, crush/shape, trench/widen, drainage corrections, paving & restoration. Tree work and stump removal portion of project continues.
- CR 653 from Red Arrow Highway to 48th Avenue, Antwerp Township - Federal Aid Project - Crush/shape, trench/widen, drainage corrections, paving, & restoration - Project was awarded by the State to Michigan Paving and Materials. Project schedule to come.
- CR 687 from CR372 to CR376, Bangor/Hartford Townships; grade inspection plan set, and bid documents corrections ongoing. Trees are all cut, still working on clean up and restoration.
- Township project estimate requests ongoing.
- Bids for multiple paving projects in Antwerp Township were opened on April 28th, 2026, as well as for projects on CR 380 in South Haven Township from M-140 to 76th Street, and on CR 365 in Lawrence Township from I-94 south to the Village of Lawrence limits. Will be requesting that the Board award these projects at its May 5th meeting.
- VBCRC Lawrence Garage parking lot paving project was let for a May 28, 2026 bid opening. Also 12th Avenue/Mill Lake Road overlay project from CR388 to 35th Street, Bloomingdale Township. We will be requesting that the Board award these projects at its June 3rd meeting.
- A Request for Proposals was distributed for boundary and topographical survey and design engineering on CR653 from M-40 to the I-94 Overpass. The Proposal was awarded to the low bidding engineering firm, Wightman, in the amount of \$72,834.00. At the same time two other Request for Proposals were distributed for surveying and design engineering services on CR378 from CR687 North to Bangor City limits, Bangor Township; and on CR681 from M-51 to CR352, Keeler/Hamilton Townships due. Proposals for both of these projects were rejected due to cancellation of the projects.

Anttila also relayed that Sam Vandenberg returned as a temporary summer engineering employee on Monday. This is his second season with the Road Commission. The Engineering team is working to accomplish traffic counts, road rating, as well as having reviewed several big pipes for replacement.

Managing Director Witkowski:

1. The next board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 3rd, 2026.
2. The next SW District Council meeting is on May 11, 2026, and will be hosted by the Berrien County Road Department.
3. The next County Supervisors meeting will be on May 28th, 7:00 PM at Lawrence Township Hall.
4. I have met with 14 supervisors for my annual one-on-one and attended 6 board meetings.

5. If all the language is approved by both attorneys, you will need to consider an agreement to extend the lease for the cell tower. It does increase revenue by 53%. We do get a \$30,000 one-time payment, and we will get 20% off any new tenant on the tower.
6. The VBCRC was selected by CRA as its featured county in the September quarterly publication. They are planning a July publication on the flooding. When I receive a date and time for the interview, I will inform the board.
7. As you know, we were blessed when the House passed \$800,000 in funding for the bridge on CR 657; it now needs to pass the Senate and be signed by the Governor. The latest update was that the final budget would be passed in June. The state budget starts on October 1st, which will work well with the need to build the bridge in 2027.
8. Congrats to Linnea Rader for earning her master's degree from Central Michigan.
9. I will be attending the Manager's meeting on May 6th and 7th.
10. VBCRC will be closed on May 25th for Memorial Day.

Witkowski provided a review of the Vouchers for the Board as follows:

Voucher #2461	\$	184,504.63	Payroll
Voucher #2462	\$	859,045.50	Accounts Payable
Voucher #2463	\$	192,264.64	Payroll
Voucher #2464	\$	803,069.55	Accounts Payable
Voucher #2465	\$	193,220.97	Payroll
TOTAL	\$	2,232,105.29	

Motion by Nelson, seconded by Boze to approve Vouchers 2461 through 2465, inclusive, in the total amount of \$2,232,105.29.

YES: 5
 NO: 0
 MOTION CARRIED.

Witkowski reviewed a DRAFT Policy regarding Withdrawal or Rescission of Low Bid by Contractor. It is in the final stages of approval by Attorney Henn and the final version of the Policy is expected to be available at the next regular meeting.

Anttila reviewed a proposed Permissive Use Agreement with the Board which would approve an existing waterline in the right-of-way, and also allow the MDNR, Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery, to install a second waterline in the right-of-way. Anttila and Brien explained staff's recommendation that the installations be approved for the following reasons:

- The State of Michigan own the property on the East side of CR652 and the West side of CR652 at the pipe installations/proposed installations. (See Parcel Map attached).
- Although these are private by definition, they can be indirectly deemed for the benefit of the public because they service the MDNR's Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery which produces the following species for both inland and Great Lakes waters: Chinook salmon, Muskellunge, Steelhead, and Walleye.
- The MDNR is being required by the Permissive Use Agreement to follow Miss Dig protocol in registering the private utilities and to mark said waterlines for any future public utility, road, or other project.
- The MDNR is being required by the Permissive Use Agreement to install signs marking the private utilities to alert contractors, workers, etc. of the waterlines.
- The MDNR is being required by the Permissive Use Agreement to hold an Annual Permit for Working Within the County Road Right-of-Way together with proper insurance. In addition, should either of the lines require substantial maintenance, repairs, or replacement, they are required to obtain a new Permit and pay all applicable fees.

Motion by Boze, seconded by Askew to approve the Permissive Use Agreement with the Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery/State of Michigan, and authorize the Managing Director to sign the Agreement allowing for minor revisions and the replacement of Exhibit A with as-built plans when they have been completed.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

The proposed 2026 Operating Budget Adjustment was discussed by Rader as follows:

1. Adjust beginning available operating fund (AOF) balance to line up with the audited ending balance from 2025.
2. We are still not making any adjustments to MTF. We anticipate this continuing to increase, but as of our May MTF deposit, we are still down 2.09% in revenues compared to this same time period last year. This has rebounded substantially, but as we are still at a loss, I would not recommend making any adjustment until we see the money begin coming in.
 1. Just an FYI, if we go back to when the State budget was initially approved and our revenues dropped, the net effect is this:

1.	December	-\$177,619.21
2.	January	-\$210,573.31
3.	February	-\$216,057.56
4.	March	-\$200,226.66
5.	April	\$102,930.15
6.	May	\$27,452.77
7.	Total	-\$674,093.82
3. Adjusted Other State Revenue to show the anticipated award of funds from the State of Michigan for the CR 657 bridge installation.
4. Township Contributions adjusted to what has been authorized for this year. Many Townships are still signing up for their projects.
5. Primary Heavy Maintenance has been adjusted following bid openings AND added two additional projects:
 1. CR 365 from the Village of Lawrence to I-94
 2. CR 380 from 76th Street to M-140Both projects were initially on hold in the preliminary budget, but we have been able to proceed. Bids for the project are on the agenda for review and approval.
6. Primary and Local Snow and Ice control has been increased substantially. We have already expended 90% of the primary and 83% of the local snow and ice budgets this year. This budget adjustment adds the \$1.7 million required to get us to right about 50% to ensure we can consistently address the rest of the calendar year's winter operations.
7. Primary Special Maintenance is increasing by almost \$1.6 million, allowing for 73.57 miles of primary seal coat, 57.45 miles of de-berming and an additional \$100,000 in primary drainage improvements. This is on top of the already budgeted \$400,000 in tree work on CR 378 and CR 669.
8. Capital Outlay has been adjusted to cover actual bid costs for equipment projected for the year as well as adding a blower attachment necessary for the seal coat process.

Motion by Boze, seconded by Nelson to approve the May 5, 2026 *Operating Budget Adjustment as presented by Finance and Human Resources Director Rader.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

*The May 2026 Adjusted Operating Budget is available for inspection on the VBCRC's website at www.vbcrc.org or by contacting the Road Commission's Administrative Office at 269-674-8011.

Rader presented the FY2025 Act 51 Report which is submitted each year to the State of Michigan. The report compiles our financial information for the year and must be attested to by the CFO and the Chairman of the Board prior to submission. Motion by Askew, seconded by Nelson to authorize the Chairman and the CFO, Bret Witkowski, to sign the attestation page of the Act 51 Report FY2025.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Anttila reviewed bids received for work on CR380 from 76th Street to M-140, South Haven Township for heavy maintenance which were publicly opened on April 28, 2026. He recommended awarding the project to the low bidding contractor, Thomas Excavating, Inc., in the amount of \$520,003.73. In addition, Anttila reviewed bids received for work on CR365 from I-94 to the Village of Lawrence, Lawrence for heavy maintenance which were also publicly opened on April 28, 2026. Anttila recommended awarding the project to the low bidding contractor, Michigan Paving and Materials Company, in the amount of \$241,708.20. Motion by Boze, seconded by Nelson to award the bid for heavy maintenance work on CR380, South Haven Township, to Thomas Excavating, Inc. for the total bid price of \$520,003.73, and to award the bid for heavy maintenance work on CR365, Lawrence Township, to Michigan Paving and Materials Company, for the total bid price of \$241,708.20, in the best interest of the Van Buren County Road Commission.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Anttila reviewed bids with the Board for heavy maintenance work in Antwerp Township which were publicly opened on April 28, 2026 at 11:00 AM. Anttila recommended award to the low bidding contractors as follows:

- Ye Olde Woods Subdivision, overlay; low bidding contractor Michigan Paving and Materials Company, \$31,675.00.
- Hickory Point Subdivision, overlay; low bidding contractor Michigan Paving and Materials Company, \$147,657.50.
- 25th Street from the Village of Mattawan to Red Arrow Highway, overlay; low bidding contractor Michigan Paving and Materials Company, \$59,255.00.
- Territorial Creek Estates Subdivision, overlay; low bidding contractor Michigan Paving and Materials Company, \$140,490.00.
- 31st Street from M-40 to 62nd Avenue, overlay; Rieth-Riley Construction Co., Inc., \$58,907.00.
- 33rd Street from Red Arrow Highway to 48th Avenue, tree trimming and overlay; low bidding contractor Michigan Paving and Materials Company, \$229,525.60.

Motion by Nelson, seconded by Boze to award the heavy maintenance projects in Antwerp Township to the low bidding contractors, as recommended by Anttila, pending approval of the projects by Antwerp Township, in the best interest of the Van Buren County Road Commission and Antwerp Township.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Witkowski provided an update to the Board regarding progress made to amend the Land Lease with Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless for their cell tower located at the Bangor Garage facility on M-43 Highway. The terms of the lease being negotiated are as follows: 53% revenue increase; a \$30,000 one-time payment; and 20% revenue share of any rent received by tenant of any new sublease on the tower. Attorneys Prickett and Henn are negotiating some final revisions to the lease which do not affect these agreed upon terms. Witkowski recommended that the Board authorize him to sign the Lease with these agreed terms upon approval of the Lease by Attorneys Henn and Prickett. If there are substantial revisions, Witkowski will bring the Lease back before the Board. Motion by Boze, seconded by Askew to authorize Witkowski to sign the Lease on behalf of the Board of County Road Commissioners of the County of Van Buren, as recommended.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Commissioner Updates and Reports:

W.C. Askew, Sr. - Attended Covert Township on April 14th, no questions. Attended Bangor Township, no concerns. Attended Geneva Township, no issues. Attended South Haven Township, no issues.

Rick Boze - On April 6th he and Bret attended Lawrence Township annual meeting with Spenner and Reynells. On April 7th attended Keeler Township. On April 9th he attended Hartford Township; on April 14th he attended Hamilton Township. On April 16th he attended Hartford Township annual meeting with Bret. On April 16th he attended Lawrence Township. On April 28th he attended Hamilton Township annual meeting with Supervisor Conway and Bret.

Greg Kinney - No report.

Wayne Nelson - On April 6th attended a meeting with Almena Township Supervisor and the head of the Road Committee, and also went on a road tour. On April 15th he attended Almena Township's board meeting with Bret. April 22nd he attended a meeting with Bret and Mattawan Schools representatives regarding safety signage. Today he attended an annual meeting with Bret and the Antwerp Township supervisor, road liaison, and trustee.

Doug Burleson - Attended Bloomingdale Township on April 15th. Attended annual meeting with Columbia Township supervisor and Bret on April 16th. Attended Columbia Township meeting on April 21st.

Burleson also provided an update for the Board regarding Bloomingdale Township's road millage which was defeated in 2025. The Township has a new road millage proposal on the August 2026 ballot, and he requested that the Board consider sending a letter to the Township supporting the road millage. The Board asked questions and discussed cautious verbiage with staff to focus on how many townships have passed a local road millage in Van Buren County and the work that has been accomplished as a result. The Board reiterated that care must be taken to avoid advocacy and must focus on factual information. Motion by Boze, seconded by Askew to authorize Witkowski to prepare and sign a letter on behalf of the Road Commission that takes into careful consideration the safest and most defensible approach which is to educate and not to advocate.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Boze provided an addendum to his update as follows: At his recent meetings with Hartford Township and Lawrence Township and Managing Director Witkowski discussions were held regarding the intersection of CR681 at Red Arrow Highway and the possibility of additional signage. Witkowski and staff are in the process of reviewing this request and making recommendations in this regard.

The Chairman opened the meeting to Second Public Comment. Vic Pantea of 47078 Woodland Drive, Arlington Township, requested an update regarding the proposed project on Park Avenue. Rader provided an update after momentarily leaving the meeting to review paperwork. Mr. Pantea also requested information regarding Commissioners' travel reimbursement and salary, which was also provided by Rader and the Board. Mr. Pantea relayed his dissatisfaction with Road Commissioner representation in District 4 at Arlington Township meetings specifically. The Board outlined its Communication Policy which is to encourage direct communications with staff as a first means to avoid delays and mis-information regarding locations, etc. And that should that fail, the next course of action should be to discuss concerns with a Road Commissioner.

Motion by Boze, seconded by Askew to adjourn the Call of the Chair at 6:50 PM.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Board Secretary

Board Chairman