

Van Buren County Board of Road Commissioners

January 18, 2024 - Regular Meeting

BE IT REMEMBERED: That on the 18th day of January, 2024 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 (Remote) and Nelson
Managing Director Bret Witkowski
Operations Director Greg Brucks
Administrative Assistant-Board Secretary Jill Brien

ABSENT:

None

GUESTS PRESENT:

Mark Bishop, Quality Forest Management
Eric Matthies, Pine Grove Township resident
Kurt Doroh, County Commissioner
Mike Chappell, County Commissioner (Remote)

Chairman Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Motion by Boze seconded by Nelson to approve the Agenda.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Motion by Kinney, seconded by Askew to adopt the following Resolution:

RESOLUTION 2024-01

WHEREAS: On January 10, 2024, Donald A. Stull retired as the Supervisor of Paw Paw Township, Van Buren County, Michigan; and,

WHEREAS: In his capacity as the Supervisor of Paw Paw Township, Donald Stull was also the Road Liaison, serving as the point of contact for the Van Buren County Road Commission, facilitating communications and coordinating road-related activities within Paw Paw Township; and,

WHEREAS: Throughout his years of service as the Supervisor of Paw Paw Township, Donald Stull has always worked cooperatively with the Van Buren County Road Commission to accomplish many road improvement projects and special maintenance projects in Paw Paw Township; and,

WHEREAS: The residents of Paw Paw Township have been served well by the efforts of Donald Stull to maintain, improve, and reconstruct the certified road network throughout Paw Paw Township.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the Board of County Road Commissioners of Van Buren County hereby adopts this Resolution as a tribute to Donald A. Stull for his contributions to local government and the county-wide transportation network.

IT IS FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Board of County Road Commissioners of Van Buren County extends its best wishes of happiness, success and enjoyment to Donald Stull and his wife, Rhonda.

YES: 5
NO: 0
RESOLUTION ADOPTED.

Mark Bishop of Quality Forest Management introduced himself to the Board and those present in the audience. He provided a handout to the Board and explained the bidding process of a potential harvesting of trees at the Crocker Pit in Pine Grove Township. He also explained the various benefits of responsible harvesting. Questions were asked by the Board and responded to by Mr. Bishop. Managing Director Witkowski recommended that the Board consider moving forward with a harvest using Mark Bishop as the contract and sale oversight administrator when the agenda item comes up later in the meeting. Mr. Bishop exited the meeting at 5:26 PM.

Motion by Nelson, seconded by Boze to appoint Board Secretary Brien to act as Chairperson of the meeting for the purpose of reorganizing the Board.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Brien requested nominations for the office of Chairman. Boze nominated Askew for the office of Chairman. Kinney nominated Burleson for the office of Chairman. Nelson nominated Boze for the office of Chairman. Hearing no further nominations, and all three candidates having verbally accepted their nominations Brien declared nominations for the office of Chairman to be closed. Roll call votes were taken on each nominee in the order in which they were nominated being announced by Brien as follows:

The first election is for Commissioner Askew as Chairman.

Roll call:

Askew: YES
Boze: YES
Burleson: NO
Kinney: NO
Nelson: NO

Brien announced that an election would be held for the second nominee, Commissioner Burleson as Chairman.

Roll call:

Askew: NO
Boze: NO
Burleson: NO
Kinney: YES
Nelson: NO

Brien announced that an election would be held for the third nominee, Commissioner Boze as Chairman.

Roll call:

Askew: NO
Boze: YES
Burleson: YES
Kinney: NO
Nelson: YES

Brien announced that the nominee with the majority vote is Commissioner Boze who will serve as Chairman of the Board for the year 2024.

Brien requested nominations for the office of Vice-Chairman. Boze nominated Askew for the office of Vice-Chairman. Kinney nominated Burleson for the office of Vice-Chairman. Hearing no further nominations, and Askew having declined his nomination, Brien declared nominations for the office of Vice-Chairman to be closed. Brien announced that an election would be held for Commissioner Burleson as Vice-Chairman.

Roll call:

Askew: YES
Boze: YES
Burlison: YES
Kinney: YES
Nelson: YES

After congratulating the newly elected Chairman and the newly elected Vice-Chairman Brien relinquished the Chair to Boze.

Chair Boze requested nominations for the election of Board Secretary. Kinney nominated Brien for the office of Secretary. Motion by Boze to close nominations and to hold an election for Brien as Secretary for the Board:

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

The Chairman requested nominations for the appointment of Chief Fiscal Officer. Kinney nominated Bret Witkowski as Chief Fiscal Officer. Hearing no further nominations the Chairman announced that an election would be held for Bret Witkowski as Chief Fiscal Officer for the Van Buren County Road Commission.

YES: 5
NO: 0

The Chairman requested nominations for the appointment of a Board Attorney. Boze nominated Varnum Law. Hearing no further nominations the Chairman announced that an election would be held for Varnum Law as Board Attorney.

YES: 5
NO: 0

Motion by Askew, seconded by Nelson to approve the Minutes of the December 14, 2023 regular meeting of the Board:

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

The Chairman opened the meeting to first public comment. Eric Matthies introduced himself to the Board as a resident of CR388 in Pine Grove Township. He announced that he is before the Board today because of a driveway off CR388 on which he, along with two other residents, reside. He relayed issues relating to water not getting to the Kendall Drain due, he believes, to the fact that there is not a culvert under said driveway. The Board suggested that Mr. Matthies contact the Drain Commissioner. Witkowski also proposed to reach out to the Drain Commissioner on behalf of Mr. Matthies. Mr. Matthies exited the meeting following his public comment and after providing contact information to the Secretary.

County Commissioner Doroh provided handouts for the Board including the County's Highlights for the months of November and December 2023 and requested that the Board Secretary distribute the reports. Doroh also provided an additional handout and further explanation regarding the county's broadband expansion efforts.

Department Updates were provided as follows:

Operations Department:

The majority of our time since the last board meeting has been spent controlling snow and ice. Roads are actually in pretty good shape considering the conditions we faced the last few days. The high winds and huge temperature fluctuations posed a few more difficulties than usual.

The extremely wet and heavy snow Friday night and Saturday was very difficult to move resulting in very slow going and lots of fuel consumption by equipment. We ran staggered

shifts beginning at 3:30 am and continued to run everyone 10-13 hours. Every road under our jurisdiction, got plowed at least once Saturday.

The vast change in temperatures to below zero on Sunday really packed the snow and ice to the roads surface and the light fluffy snow created wide spread drifting. We caught a little break in the action Sunday afternoon when the wind died down and the lake effect snow was missing most parts of Van Buren County. This allowed staff to clean things up much better and widen everything out. By Sunday afternoon, most roads had been touched at least 3 times. The unfortunate remnant will likely remain on most roads until the temperatures rise enough for the "de-icing" materials to activate. For the most part, this is above 17°.

I have spoken with a few school districts within the county today...most curious as to the road commissions intentions for the remainder of the week. Both myself and several staff members take a little bit of offense when school is canceled. Everyone I talked with complimented our efforts and assured me that school being closed today (possibly tomorrow too), was due to the frigid temps and not due to road conditions.

With higher temps in the forecast and even rain next week, we will be spending the remainder of this week and beginning of next concentrating on breaking up the accumulated snow and ice "pad" (as we call it) from all road surfaces; especially the gravels. Rain helps loosen up the pad on asphalt roads, making them easier to clear. Just the opposite on gravels; it tightens the ice up and makes them extremely slippery.

In addition, Brucks stated that tomorrow would be staff's 12th day in a row with a 4 AM start time due to winter maintenance. The Board provided kudos to Greg and his staff for their hard work and for the help given to the Village of Lawrence due to their equipment breakdowns.

Engineering Department: Report provided by Managing Director in the absence of Highway Engineer, Anttila, as follows:

- Working on township estimates for various bid lettings.
- Working on bid packages for various 2024 Road Commission projects. It is my hope to have these ready for Board approval in either February or March.

Managing Director Witkowski:

1. The VBCRC has had 70 SeeClixFix requests for January so far with a 100% on-time service rate.
2. We are all set for solar signs in Bangor Township. Kirby installed it, and now we will bill Bangor Township.
3. I did meet with Bangor Township this week about installing solar lights for the Wood School in the township. The project would cost **\$19,000**, and the Bangor Township board voted to move forward, so we will start working on that. Bangor Township will pay all costs, **\$19,000** plus all costs for the next ten years.
4. I met with the supervisor of South Haven Township this week; that was a very good meeting.
5. Next week I am meeting with the Porter Township supervisor on Tuesday.
6. COSY radio reached out for an interview, and **on February 27th at 7:00 am**. I will also be presenting to the South Haven Rotary Club.
7. In March I plan to attend township meetings with you; I need to ensure they know who I am and that I am available.
8. We have two good price quotes for installing a garage door in the old sign shop and starting work on the Western Facility. I have new windows and doors, remodeling the bathroom, and a new roof on the bump out. One is over **\$15,000**, so that needs to go through the bidding process, but we are moving forward to bringing our facilities up to standard.
9. The CRA conference is March 19-21, 2024. Please let me or staff if you would like to go.
10. Wondering if it would be ok to go out for bids for solar power at the Administration building, there is a 30% rebate now. The board would have the final say.

By general consensus the Board agreed to look at prices for solar power at the Administration building.

Additional discussion was held regarding a possible farm lease for the Bangor property. The Board also discussed the possibility of a well at the site. Witkowski will look into these possibilities and bring them back to the Board for further discussion.

Review of Vouchers:

Voucher #2340	\$	255,835.16	Payroll
Voucher #2341	\$	763,753.52	Accounts Payable
Voucher #2342	\$	176,381.19	Payroll
Voucher #2343	\$	269,730.76	Accounts Payable
Voucher #2344	\$	212,242.27	Payroll
TOTAL	\$	1,677,942.90	

Motion by Burleson, seconded by Askew to approve the Vouchers totaling \$1,677,942.90.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Witkowski led the Board in a discussion regarding the county-wide road millage which expired on 12-31-23. Options were presented and discussed by the Board. The Board requested a review of millage information from the nine Road Commissions in the Southwestern District Council so as to make a comparison. In addition, the Board wished to further discuss options at the Township Supervisors' Meeting on February 27th with the hope of making a final decision at the Board's regular meeting in March. Witkowski will also prepare a spreadsheet with comparison information should the Board wish to propose an increase on a ballot.

Motion by Nelson, seconded by Askew to award the sale oversight administration contract for the removal of trees to be harvested at the Crocker Pit in Pine Grove Township to Mark Bishop, a sole proprietor doing business as Quality Forest Management, at 10% of the proceeds from the timber sale, in the best interest of the Van Buren County Road Commission.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Motion by Nelson, seconded by Burleson to adopt the following Resolution:

RESOLUTION 2024-02

WHEREAS: Public Act 51 of 1951, as amended, provides that the Michigan Department of Transportation shall jointly, with the Board of County Road Commissioners, ascertain and fix the total mileage of County Primary Roads and the total mileage of County Local Roads in each county of the state which have been taken over as County Primary and County Local Roads; and,

WHEREAS: In complying with the provisions of said Act, the Michigan Department of Transportation has requested that this Board certify the mileage and location of such roads required by said Act to be fixed and ascertained.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the Board of County Road Commissioners of the County of Van Buren, Michigan, does hereby certify that all of the roads on which lengths have been entered along the road bands of the attached township and enlarged section maps are normally open to automobile traffic during the months of May through October, and are under the jurisdiction of the Van Buren County Road Commission as follows:

Township	Sheet Numbers	Township	Sheet Numbers
Pine Grove	80-1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 1E, 1F, 1G	Antwerp	80-11, 11B, 11C, 11D, 11E, 11F, 11G, 11H, 11J, 11K, 11L, 11M, 11N, 11P, 11Q, 11R, 11S, 11T, 11U, 11V, 11W, 11X, 11Y, 11Z, 11AA, 11BB, 11CC, 11DD, 11EE, 11FF, 11GG, 11HH, 11JJ, 11KK, 11LL, 11MM, 11NN, 11PP, 11QQ, 11RR, 11SS, 11TT, 11UU, 11VV, 11WW, 11XX, 11YY
Bloomington	80-2, 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E, 2F	Paw Paw	80-12, 12A, 12B, 12C, 12D, 12E, 12F, 12G, 12H, 12J, 12K, 12L, 12M, 12N, 12P
Columbia	80-3, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E, 3F, 3G, 3H	Lawrence	80-13, 13A, 13B, 13C, 13D
Geneva	80-4, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4E, 4F	Hartford	80-14, 14A, 14B, 14C
South Haven	80-5, 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D	Porter	80-15, 15A(1-7), 15B(1-2), 15C(1-4), 15D, 15E, 15F
Almena	80-6, 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E, 6F, 6G, 6H, 6J, 6K, 6L, 6M, 6N, 6P	Decatur	80-16, 16A, 16B
Waverly	80-7, 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D, 7E, 7F, 7G	Hamilton	80-17, 17A
Arlington	80-8, 8A, 8B, 8C, 8D, 8E	Keeler	80-18, 18A, 18B(1-11), 18C(1-5), 18D, 18E, 18F
Bangor	80-9, 9A, 9B, 9C	Urban	South Haven, Almena, Waverly, Antwerp, Paw Paw, Hartford
Covert	80-10, 10A		

IT IS FURTHER RESOLVED: That Barry Anttila, Highway Engineer, is hereby authorized to electronically sign the Cover Sheet to digitally submit the certification package to the Michigan Department of Transportation.

YES: 5
NO: 0
RESOLUTION ADOPTED.

Motion by Burlison, seconded by Nelson to accept the offer to extend pricing from 2023 to the 2024 season by Michigan Paving and Materials, in the best interest of the Van Buren County Road Commission.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Motion by Askew, seconded by Nelson to mark the ballot for the candidate Joanna Johnson, Kalamazoo CRC, for the open three-year seat on the CRA Board of Directors that represents the Association of Southern MI County Road Agencies.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Commissioner Updates and Reports:

W.C. Askew, Sr.

Attended Covert Township’s inter-county drain meeting on December 21st with Witkowski. Attended Covert Township Board meeting on January 9; no concerns. Attended Bangor Township Board meeting. Attended Geneva Township Board meeting.

Rick Boze

Attended Keeler Township Board meeting on January 2nd. Discussing possible road certifications. Attended Hamilton Township Board meeting. Attended Lawrence Township Board meeting. Attended Hartford Township Board meeting.

Doug Burleson

Attended on-site meeting with Witkowski on CR388, Pine Grove Township. Attended Pine Grove Township Board meeting on January 3rd. Attended Bloomingdale Township Board meeting on the December 17th; gave kudos to the Road Commission.

Greg Kinney

Requested ability to attend February, March and April regular Road Commission meetings remotely with full voting rights. The Board agreed by consent.

Wayne Nelson

No meetings.

Commissioner Nelson discussed his designation as the Road Commission’s representative on the Parks and Recreation Commission and stated his willingness to remain as the designated representative for 2024. Chair Boze designated Nelson as the Road Commission’s designated representative to the Parks and Recreation Commission for 2024. Nelson requested that Brien add this designation to the annual Board reorganization beginning in 2025.

Motion by Nelson, seconded by Askew to recess the Regular meeting to open a Regular meeting of the Board of Public Works at 6:48 PM.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Motion by Burleson, seconded by Nelson to reconvene the Regular meeting of the Board of County Road Commissioners at 7:01 PM.

The Chairman opened the meeting to second public comment. None was received.

Motion by Nelson to adjourn the Call of the Chair at 7:02 PM.

YES: 5
NO: 0
MOTION CARRIED.

Board Secretary

Board Chairman