

Van Buren County Board of Road Commissioners

July 16, 2025 - Regular Meeting

BE IT REMEMBERED: That on the 16th day of July, 2025 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, Burleson, Kinney and Nelson
Managing Director Bret Witkowski
Highway Engineer Barry Anttila
Finance and Human Resources Director Linnea Rader
Administrative Assistant-Board Secretary Jill Brien

ABSENT:

Road Commissioner Boze (Excused)

GUESTS PRESENT:

Van Buren County Sheriff Daniel Abbott
Maureen Lewandowski
Lori Brown
Kathryn Brown

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

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Witkowski requested that items be added to the Agenda as follows: 11(A) Request for Permissive Use of Right-of-Way, and 11(B) Resolution in Tribute of Jessie Keeton, Road Maintenance Employee.

Motion by Nelson to approve the Revised Agenda with the current Agenda Items 11(A)-(E) now being 11(C)-(G).

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Chair Askew presented Sheriff Abbott with a Tribute Resolution (2025-13) in recognition of Sheriff Abbott's leadership and contributions to law enforcement in his selection as 2025 Sheriff of the Year by the Michigan Sheriffs' Association. The Board and those in attendance recognized Sheriff Abbott with a hearty round of applause.

Motion by Kinney, seconded by Nelson to approve the Minutes of the June 4, 2025 Regular Meeting as presented by the Board Secretary.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

The Chairman opened the meeting to first public comment. Maureen Lewandowski identified herself as a resident of 76720 13th Avenue, South Haven, Michigan. She discussed Syndicate Park, a largely undeveloped subdivision in South Haven Township, as a gate was recently installed on a roadway and a key was not shared with South Haven Area Emergency Services. To Ms. Lewandowski, this seemed to signify privatization which would restrict access to its recreational offerings. She urged the Board to do what it could to remove the gate as she is adamant about saving accessible public spaces in South Haven. Commissioner Nelson, the Board's representative to the Parks and Recreation Commission, clarified for all present that the word "Park" in Syndicate Park does not mean that the property is a public park. The County has acquired parcels within the plat but that land has not been in any way deemed to be a public park. Witkowski will look into the matter of the gate and will contact Ms. Lewandowski with his findings.

The June 2025 Board of Commissioners Activity Report was shared with the Road Commission in lieu of a verbal report.

Department Updates were provided as follows:

Finance and HR Department:

- Union negotiations are underway. Our third session was 07/08/2025 and went very well.
- Marla and I met with our health insurance agent. We are again looking at huge increases in employee costs. To combat those costs the agent is looking for options and different carriers while I'm working on some other avenues as well.
- I'm getting lots of questions about the new overtime taxation law. There is no change in how we are to withhold taxes for employees at this time. Taxpayers will recover the tax withheld when they file their taxes. More to come from the attorneys as these changes are implemented.
- An update of our 5-year road plan will be ready for your review at the August meeting. We had hoped to have it for this meeting, but we are working to make it more user friendly and easier to understand. The updates from the federal and state awards have made a great impact on moving projects forward.
- I'm working on the de-escalation and first amendment audit training discussed during the last meeting. More to come later this summer.
- The operating budget as of 7/14/2025 is attached.

Operations Department:

- Between weather and mechanical issues we unfortunately did not have a really good week of chipsealing M-W last week, but Thursday weather was great and our mechanics got everything running perfectly.
- Began patching in the Village of Decatur this week for sealcoat.
- Drainage crews made really good progress on pipe installs and patching.
- Staff continues to work on storm cleanup and tree removals as time allows.
- A shout-out to Jessie Keeton, Road Maintenance Employee, who set a record last week with slightly over 2600 tons of contract gravel spread and compacted in a single day in Lawrence Township. Nice work Jessie!

Engineering Department:

- Hill Drive in Lawrence Township work is complete besides final grading of the roadway. This will take place in the near future.
- Walden Woods Subdivision in Almena Township is complete.
- Our 6 Preventative Maintenance bridge projects began this week. Work started on CR665 over the South Branch of the Paw Paw River. Work will also begin on 45th Street over the Paw Paw River on July 15, 2025. The other structures will follow.
- Bids were opened on Monday, July 7, 2025 for heavy maintenance work on Cider Court in South Haven Township. A revised project sheet was forwarded to the township for their review and approval. This work will bring Cider Court up to a standard acceptable for consideration by the Board for certification at a later board meeting.
- 30th Street in Antwerp Township was milled on Friday, July 11th, with paving to take place on Monday, July 14, 2025.
- Paving should take place on Monday, July 14th on Spring Haven Court in Antwerp Township. Concrete drive approach removal and replacements will follow.
- Red Arrow Highway project from the City of Hartford East to CR681 should begin the week of July 28, 2025, weather permitting.

Managing Director Witkowski:

1. **The next VBCRC board meeting will take place on Wednesday, July 16, 2025, at 5:00 pm.**
2. The next SW district council meeting will be at the Paw Paw Brewing Company on Monday, August 11, 2025, at 10:00 am. Since the VBCRC is hosting, please let Jill or me know if you would like to attend.

3. The Van Buren Conservation Districts will hold their annual meeting and summer picnic on July 23 at the Liberty Hyde Museum, 903 S. Bailey Ave, in South Haven, from 5:30 to 7:00 pm. If you would like to attend, please let us know, and I will reply on behalf of the VBCRC. I will be unable to participate; I will be attending the self-insurance conference to pick up our refund check.
4. This week we were on a family vacation, and I usually spent about an hour a day working on VBCRC issues throughout the day.
5. On Tuesday, I have a bimonthly team meeting, followed by a meeting at Paw Paw Township Hall at 5:00 with the township supervisor and some residents to discuss the process of converting a gravel road into a paved road. On Wednesday, I attend the VBCRC monthly board meeting.
6. On Tuesday, while on vacation I did talk with the lady who came to the board meeting where her son was found at fault in the rolling of his truck; I explained how we did find one water over the road sign had been stolen. Staff was not told why, but only to go out to the site to review signage. She appreciated the follow-up.
7. The membrane roofs at Lawrence and Bloomingdale have been repaired, and the little shingle roof in Lawrence over the cold storage building has been replaced. The cost to replace the shingle roof and gutters at Bloomingdale will need to go out for bid based on the cost estimates, which are coming in at around \$56,000.
8. I have companies coming in to give prices to sandblast trucks, wash steel beams, and paint them. They have some rust, and our insurance carrier pointed them out in their annual report; I have met with one company and will be meeting with a second company this week.
9. We have 47 service requests for the month of July so far and are at a 95% on-time reply rate.
10. We have initiated the process to paint a plow, this time for Van Buren Middle School for the upcoming year.
11. Round 1 of mowing is completed in South Haven, Arlington, Covert, Paw Paw, Lawrence, Hartford, Decatur, Hamilton, Keeler, Waverly, Geneva, Bloomingdale, Porter, Pine Grove, Columbia, and Bangor Townships. We are currently finishing up in Antwerp and Almena townships, and then the 2nd round of mowing will start. Roadside mowing complaints are down 79% from last year through the month of June.
12. Seal coating went 3 out of 4 days last week. We are average, being out there seal coating 60% of the time with a goal of 70%. We are averaging 5.08 miles a day. Last week, they got over 7 miles done on Thursday. We. A list of roads that will be seal-coated can be found on our website at www.vbcrc.org/sealcoat. My goal is to have the fog seal go three weeks after the seal coat. We are 23.40% done with seal coating as of the end of the week,
13. This year, instead of waiting until the seal coat is over, we are installing culverts during seal coat season; staff have done a good job managing everyone's time to make this happen. We are currently doing seal coating for the Village of Decatur as part of our countywide project. We are patching the village roads in preparation for the seal coating.
14. ACT funds YTD are up \$399,021; in the last 12 months, it is up 3.80%, which equals \$468,468.
15. The YTD budget 2025 shows revenues of \$ 14,416,214.77 and expenses of \$8,941,817.20, resulting in a surplus of \$5,474,397.57. Cash on hand is \$14,811,506.00, \$1,268,683.83 more than last week and \$9,127,726.43 more than the previous year. Thankfully, we have a reserve, and because of that, we have funds to match the grants coming this year and the next few years.

Witkowski shared a letter with the Board from Geneva Township's Supervisor, Nancy Ann Whaley, commending Brian Burrows as she has found working with him to be an asset to Geneva Township and a "compliment" to her job at the Township.

Witkowski also shared a copy of a letter with the Board from MCRCSIP regarding a Board of Directors Southern Representative vacancy. Letters of interest along with a resume to MCRCSIP Administrator Gayle Cummings are due by July 31, 2025.

Witkowski shared a voicemail message left for the Van Buren County Road Commission from a person who was unhappy with sealcoating that was accomplished by the Road Commission of Kalamazoo County in Kalamazoo County. Witkowski explained that he shared the message to illustrate to the Board the challenging interactions that staff face in the course of their daily duties.

Review of Vouchers by Witkowski:

Voucher #2418	\$	219,166.83	Accounts Payable
Voucher #2419	\$	177,732.69	Payroll
Voucher #2420	\$	436,084.89	Accounts Payable
Voucher #2421	\$	182,071.60	Payroll
Voucher #2422	\$	238,199.59	Accounts Payable
Voucher #2423	\$	179,787.80	Payroll
TOTAL	\$	1,433,043.40	

Motion by Nelson, seconded by Kinney to approve Vouchers 2418-2423, inclusive, totaling \$1,433,043.40.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Witkowski outlined a request that has been received from Robert and Lorraine (Lori) Brown. Ms. Brown and her sister-in-law, Kathryn Brown, were both in attendance at the meeting and also helped explain the situation to the Board involving plans to install a septic drain field bed in the road right-of-way due to the required placement according to the Health Code of the Van Buren/Cass District Health Department and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) standards for water quality. Because there is no where else for the drain field bed to be installed, Witkowski recommended that the Browns be granted a Permissive Use Agreement allowing the installation in the county road right-of-way until such time as the Road Commission revokes permission. Motion by Nelson, seconded by Burleson to authorize the Managing Director, Bret Witkowski, to execute a Permissive Use Agreement with Robert and Lorraine Brown, 44419 Carla Drive, Paw Paw Township, for the placement of an encroachment described as a septic drain field bed.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

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

RESOLUTION 2025-14

- WHEREAS: Jessie Keeton, Road Maintenance Employee at the Van Buren County Road Commission has, once again, generously volunteered his personal time to operate the Road Commission’s grader and front-end loader at the Van Buren County Youth Fair; and
- WHEREAS: The skilled operation of this equipment is essential to the smooth running and success of the various grandstand events at the Youth Fair; and
- WHEREAS: Jessie’s commitment to coordinating his volunteer service with his evening schedule reflects both his professionalism and the pride he takes in his role at the Road Commission; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Van Buren County Road Commission expresses its sincere gratitude to Jessie Keeton for his contributions, and recognizes his dedication as a vital example of public service and community spirit.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Rader discussed the proposed Cell Phone Reimbursement Policy before the Board for consideration which was provided to her by the County Road Association of MI. Motion by Burleson, seconded by Nelson to adopt Policy 2025-01, Cell Phone Reimbursement Policy, as recommended by Finance and HR Director Linnea Rader.

CELL PHONE REIMBURSEMENT POLICY

Policy No. 2025-01

Purpose.

It is recognized that the day-to-day operations of the Van Buren County Road Commission ("Road Commission") workforce may require voice and data communications, and there is often a need to communicate when access to a regular telephone or computer is unavailable. Cell phones are a valuable resource for certain personnel to conduct Road Commission business in an effective and timely manner and often enhance the employee's personal safety on the job.

Policy.

This policy shall apply to all Road Commission employees.

1. The Finance and HR Director shall determine, in their sole discretion, which employees require a cell phone and/or related wireless communication needs for their duties and responsibilities (hereinafter sometimes referred to as "eligible employees"). Those eligible employees shall receive reimbursement to cover Road Commission use of a personal cell phone.
2. Eligible employees shall receive a monthly stipend for use of their personal cell phone for Road Commission business in the amount of \$60.00 per month. The eligible employee must maintain cell phone coverage that adequately supports the business needs of the Road Commission.
3. The data that is stored on an eligible employee's cell phone, including, without limitation, e-mails, text messages, communication logs (such as records of the numbers called and received) is, in nearly every case, a public record subject to possible disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. It is the eligible employee's responsibility to ensure that all cell phone data related to Road Commission business is retained consistently with Michigan law and all Road Commission rules, regulations, policies, and procedures.
4. Use of a personal cell phone in violation of Road Commission policies is also prohibited, including specifically for any discriminatory, derogatory, illegal, or unethical remarks or purposes (See Road Commission Policy 2020-02, Cell Phone Policy).
5. The Road Commission reserves the right to amend or modify this policy at any time to comply with existing federal, state, or local law or regulation which controls the use of cell phones while on Road Commission business and during normal working hours.
6. Employees who violate this policy shall be subject to discipline, up to and including termination from employment.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Rader outlined the proposed revisions to the Employee Expense Reimbursement Policy, 2008-02. Motion by Nelson, seconded by Askew to adopt revised Policy 2008-02, Employee Expense Reimbursement Policy, as proposed.

Employee Expense Reimbursement Policy

Policy No. 2008-02

Mileage

Van Buren County Road Commission employees will be reimbursed for approved work-related miles driven using their personal vehicle. Reimbursement will be paid at the IRS determined standard mileage rate in effect at the time the miles were driven. This rate is established annually by the IRS. (See attached). Detailed records regarding the point of origin and point of destination must be submitted when seeking reimbursement.

Conference/Workshop Related Expenses

Van Buren County Road Commission employees will be reimbursed for approved expenses incurred while attending an approved conference or workshop. Detailed receipts are required for reimbursement.

Meal rates will vary from year to year based upon the U.S. General Services Administration per diem rate for Michigan, which applies for all locations without a specified rate. (See attached). These rates may be modified to the destination city rate, as requested by the employee. Under no circumstances will alcoholic beverages be reimbursed, nor shall they be included on any receipts submitted for reimbursement. Tips should not exceed 15%.

Lodging costs will be considered on an individual case basis to be booked at either the Government Rate, training rate, or otherwise lowest single room rate charged by the hotel.

Parking fees will be reimbursed; however, valet parking is not permitted.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Rader presented proposed revisions to the Paint the Plow Program Policy, 2024-01. So as to allow for additional student participation, the following revised Paint the Plow Program Policy was adopted upon motion by Burleson, seconded by Nelson.

**Paint the Plow Program
Policy No. 2024-01**

Overview

The Paint the Plow Program is an opportunity for the Van Buren County Road Commission (VBCRC) to partner with local schools and community members to promote safety, and winter driving best practices, as well as create awareness of transportation career opportunities. Students are invited to paint creative, original artwork onto a VBCRC snowplow blade. The idea is that the decorative blades reflect each school individually, while promoting a selected VBCRC theme. Snowplow blades will be visible during winter snow removal months on roads throughout Van Buren County.

Paint the Plow Program

1. The Paint the Plow program is an annual program open to all Van Buren County schools.
2. Each year the VBCRC will determine the grade level(s) to invite to participate (i.e., elementary, middle, high, etc.).
3. Each year the VBCRC will select a Paint the Plow theme. Artwork must be original and in good taste. Any design deemed inappropriate or not original will be precluded from the program at the sole discretion of the VBCRC. Only non-partisan, non-political and non-violent material will be accepted.

4. VBCRC staff will deliver snowplows to the participating schools, as well as pick up the completed snowplows on selected dates at no cost.
5. The VBCRC does not provide paint or painting supplies/materials, or financial assistance for this program. It is permissible for schools to reach out to local booster clubs or social organizations for support.
6. The VBCRC will provide guidelines to the participating schools outlining:
 - A. Who can participate.
 - B. The yearly theme.
 - C. Specific provisions regarding delivery/pickup of the snowplow, program deadlines, design approval process, and display and promotion of the finished product.
 - D. That the program is subject to change at any time.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Upon discussion it was moved by Askew, seconded by Nelson to mark the MCRCSIP official ballot for Lester Livermore to serve the At-Large position for a three-year term ending 2028 on the MCRCSIP Board of Directors.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Upon review and recommendation by Brucks it was moved by Askew, seconded by Nelson to award the bid for Underbody Scraper Blades to all bidding vendors with Winter Equipment Company, the low bidding vendor, as Primary Supplier, at the bid price of \$117.22 each, in the best interest of the Van Buren County Road Commission.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Upon review of the bids and at the recommendation of Anttila it was moved by Askew, seconded by Nelson to award the bid for milling and paving Cider Court in South Haven Township to the as-read low bidding contractor, Michigan Paving & Materials, for the total bid price of \$138,250, in the best interest of the Van Buren County Road Commission and South Haven Township. The project has already been approved by South Haven Township.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Commissioner Updates and Reports:

Wayne Nelson

Attended Antwerp Township's regular meeting.

Greg Kinney

Attended Decatur Township’s regular meeting last Thursday, but it had been canceled. Kinney also noted that Decatur Township’s regular board meeting time has changed from 6 PM to 7 PM. He also reviewed CR352 and CR668 sealcoat segments and said that both projects looked good. The black strips on M51 were also discussed as staff believed them to be emulsion placed in rumble areas. Kinney said that he will be attending Decatur Township’s Special Meeting at 7 PM tomorrow.

Doug Burleson

Attended Columbia Township’s regular meeting on June 17th.

Attended Bloomingdale Township’s regular meeting on June 18th.

W.C. Askew, Sr.

Attended Covert Township’s regular meeting on 7/8.

Attended Bangor Township’s regular meeting.

Attended South Haven Township’s regular meeting.

Motion by Askew, seconded by Nelson to recess the Regular Meeting to open a Regular Meeting of the Board of Public Works at 6:02 PM.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Motion by Nelson, seconded by Askew to reconvene the Regular Meeting of the Board of County Road Commissioners at 6:05 PM.

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

Motion by Nelson, seconded by Askew to adjourn the Call of the Chair at 6:14 PM.

YES: 4
NO: 0
ABSENT: 1
MOTION CARRIED.

Board Secretary

Board Chairman