

**CASS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

July 20, 2023

Vice-Chair Laylin called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Commission Chambers on Thursday, July 20, 2023. Chair Jones offered the Invocation. Commissioner Lee led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Clerk/Register Monica McMichael called roll:

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Ryan Laylin, James Lawrence, Joyce Locke, Jeremiah Jones, Mary Howie, Samuel Barrera, Roseann Marchetti and RJ Lee.

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Administrator Matthew Newton, Finance Director Jennifer Rentfrow and Deputy Finance Director James Tito.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Public comment occurred.

ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

Commissioner Marchetti moved, seconded by Commissioner Lee, to amend the agenda to include item F. MI-HOPE Grant – Round 4. Motion carried by voice vote.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Commissioner Marchetti moved, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to approve the July 20, 2023, Cass County Committee of the Whole Agenda, as amended. Motion to approve the agenda carried by voice vote.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Locke moved, seconded by Chair Jones, to approve the June 15, 2023, Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes. Motion carried by voice vote.

PRESENTATIONS

Sheriff Behnke stated he informed the Administrator the representative from the Medical Assisted Treatment Program was unable to attend the meeting.

MSU Extension District Director Julie Pioch provided an annual update on extension programming. She also introduced staff members who shared brief descriptions of services offered to county residents.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Commissioner Marchetti shared a Committee Report.

DISTRICT REPORTS

Commissioners Howie, Lawrence and Barrera provided district reports.

ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Administrator Newton shared the Administrator's Report.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Financial Director Jennifer Rentfrow offered the Finance Report.

VETERAN'S REPORT

Veteran's Services Officer Karee Krause shared the Veteran's Report.

COUNTY PARTNERS

Korie Blyveis of the County Conservation District shared an update from the office.

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Clerk/Register Monica McMichael stated that it would have been helpful to sit in on planning for Historic Courthouse meeting spaces as she was in need of space to conduct early voting as required by Proposal 2 of 2022. Vice-Chair Laylin and Administrator Newton informed her that the size of the rooms was set; however, they requested she share requirements of size, storage and technology.

Sheriff Behnke discussed the Medical Examiner Contract before informing board members the security system in the jail failed. He then asked Animal Control Director Ron Butts to share details of the 107 various animals Animal Control took on from a hoarder who was awaiting

sentencing from the courts. The large number of animals was taxing on staff, space, and resources.

Judge Bealor thanked Emergency Operations Director Manny DeLaRosa for providing Active Shooter Training to the Law and Courts Building.

Judge Bealor also informed commissioners that she held an adoption for a 16-year-old who had been in Foster Care for more than seven years. Over 30 community members attended the ceremony to celebrate the adoption of the young man.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Appointments

Commissioner Locke read the suggested appointments:

- i. Appointment of Bruce Stack to the Central Dispatch Authority as representative for Cass County Fire Chief's Association
- ii. Appointment of Barbara Belland to the Solid Waste Planning Committee for a term expiring June 30, 2025
- iii. Appointment of Mary Howie to the Historic Commission for a term expiring July 1, 2026

Commissioners agreed to move item A. to the August 10, 2023, Regular Board Meeting Agenda.

B. Opioid Settlement Funds – Use and Planning

Administrator Newton stated that the county expected to receive approximately \$1.2 million in Opioid Settlement Funds. A family movie night at the drive-in theatre was suggested to take place in September, which was Sobriety Month. Administrator Newton then suggested the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee to discuss options for remaining funds. Chair Jones asked that restrictions for the settlement funds be made public. Commissioners Barrera and Marchetti offered to serve on the committee.

Commissioners agreed to place item B. on the August 10, 2023, Regular Board Meeting Agenda.

C. Blight Elimination Program – Round 3 & 4

Treasurer Anderson requested that board members approve a resolution in support of the Land Bank Authorities efforts to secure funds in rounds 3 and 4 of the State of Michigan Blight Elimination Program.

Board Members agreed to move item C. to the next Regular Board Meeting.

F. MI-HOPE Grant – Round 4

Treasurer Anderson asked the board to approve a resolution in support of the Cass County Land Bank Authority applying for additional funding in round 4 of the MI-HOPE Grant process.

Commissioners agreed to move item F. to the next Regular Board Meeting.

Vice-Chair Laylin declared a recess from 7:03 – 7:10 p.m.

D. MERS DB/DC

Vice-Chair Laylin opened discussion on the letter from Commissioners Howie and Lawrence regarding the MERS Defined Benefit/Defined Contribution (DB/DC) Retirement Plans.

Commissioner Lawrence made a motion to form a committee to look at the grievances and cost of the MERS DB/DC.

Administrator Newton distributed MERS DC/DB Discussion Notes with commissioners.

Vice-Chair Laylin questioned information contained in the letter. Court Referee Leigh Feldman provided brief answers to questions posed by Vice-Chair Laylin. Attorney Feldman went on to explain that several non-union employees (approximately 25) had not organized as a group but rather had approached commissioners with questions and concerns.

Commissioners Howie and Lawrence requested the board form a fact-finding committee.

Various elected officials including Chief Judge Bealor, Prosecutor Fitz and Treasurer Anderson shared information on the history of the transition from MERS defined benefit to defined contribution.

Commissioner Marchetti gave a passionate speech regarding the issues with MERS and the failure to recover after the 2008 financial crisis. MERS provided a plan for the county to rebound; however, the numbers did not improve.

Chair Jones expressed frustration over the lack of support he received when he voted against moving away from the defined benefit retirement plan.

Human Resources Assistant Dacia Kirkland asked commissioners to consider the 55,000 constituents and not solely the 25 non-union employees. Moving employees back to a defined benefit plan would financially set the county back.

Treasurer Anderson pointed out no one was aware of the legacy debt that would occur. All employees were told that moving plans would solve problems. To have major budgetary issues at this point was especially difficult.

After additional discussion, Vice-Chair Laylin asked commissioners to approve a request to form a committee to examine grievances, costs, and sustainable retirement plans at the next regular board meeting agenda for approval. Motion carried by voice vote.

E. FY 24 Budget

Finance Director Rentfrow shared updated budgets with all commissioners. She explained the various columns and reported that approximately \$628,000 was reduced from the original proposed budget.

Finance Director Rentfrow also reported that the offices below did not reduce amounts from their original proposed budgets:

- Prosecutor's Office
- Treasurer's Office
- Maintenance Department
- Veterans Affairs

Sheriff Behnke stated that only staff-related line items increased over two budget cycles for the Sheriff's Office budget. With the requirement of no staff reductions, it was difficult to make budget cuts. He added that it was his understanding that retirement costs usually increased a year or two after a change in retirement plans before ultimately dropping.

Discussion followed regarding reducing utility bills as well as placing a county attorney on staff instead of contracting with a law firm.

Commissioner Marchetti stated she would not approve the reduced budget as presented.

Finance Director Rentfrow urged the board to approve a budget prior to the end of August in order to allow time for a public hearing as well as public viewing in the Clerk's Office.

Without additional ideas or suggestions, commissioners agreed to revisit the budget discussion at the August 10, 2023, Regular Board of Commissioners Meeting.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Barrera reminded everyone to be respectful when speaking at meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

Approved: _____
Date

Vice-Chair Ryan Laylin

Monica McMichael, Clerk/Register