

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Virtual Board Meeting Minutes
May 6, 2021

Staff Present: County Administrator Brian Dissette
Executive Assistant to the Administrator Annette Christie
Chief Deputy Clerk Diane Mensinger
B.C. Sheriff Paul Bailey
B.C. Treasurer Shelly Weich

CHAIRMAN TO CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER:

Chairperson Elliott called the virtual regular meeting to order at 10:34 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners' (BOC) room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

INVOCATION:

Sheriff Paul Bailey gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Commissioner Bob Harrison led us in the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America.

ROLL CALL:

The Chairperson instructed the Clerk to take a roll call with the following results:

11 PRESENT: Rayonte Bell (via Zoom in City of St. Joseph, MI), Jim Curran (via Zoom in Niles Charter Township, MI), Teri Sue Freehling (via Zoom in Baroda Township, MI), Robert Harrison (via Zoom in Lincoln Charter Township, MI), Michael Majerek (via Zoom in City of Niles, MI), Don Meeks (via Zoom, in Benton Charter Township, MI), Ezra Scott (via Zoom in New Buffalo Township, MI), David Vollrath (via Zoom in Coloma Charter Township, MI), Julie Wuerfel (via Zoom in Royalton Township, MI), Mamie Yarbrough (via Zoom in City of Benton Harbor, MI) and Mac Elliott (via Zoom in City of Buchanan, MI)

1 ABSENT: Jon Hinkelman.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE April 22, 2021 MEETING:

Commissioner Majerek moved, seconded by Commissioner Vollrath, to approve the BOC virtual meeting minutes of April 22, 2021.

The Chairperson instructed the Clerk to call the roll resulting as follows:

11 YEAS: Curran, Freehling, Harrison, Majerek, Meeks, Scott, Vollrath, Wuerfel, Yarbrough, Bell and Elliott. Motion carried, no nays.

COMMUNICATION(S):

Chief Deputy Clerk Diane Mensinger received and distributed the following communications:

- Wexford County Board of Commissioners, a resolution supporting passage of legislation to adopt four-year terms for County Commissioners, received on April 22, 2021.
- Grand Traverse County Board of Commissioners, a resolution denouncing threats of violence and affirming equal protection for all citizens, received on April 22, 2021.
- Bay County Board of Commissioners, a resolution supporting Senate Bills 242 and 245 to enact four-year terms for County Commissioners, received on April 26, 2021.
- Alger County Board of Commissioners, a resolution in support of local businesses, received on April 28, 2021.

PRESENTATIONS:

Tax Foreclosure Update – Treasurer Shelly Weich

Foreclosure numbers are down this year. We currently have 123 parcels going to auction. A reminder posting was done in February/March to give a final call to those owing 2018 and prior taxes. An extra step was taken to specifically post a notice to each structure to determine occupancy. Even with one last attempt, we foreclosed on 3 occupied houses, 33 unoccupied houses, 2 unoccupied businesses, one unoccupied apartment building, 81 vacant lots, and one unoccupied boat slip.

An online only auction is scheduled for August 24th with the same vendor we used last year, Title Check.

Due to a change in the statute, an owner and any interested party at the time of foreclosure, may file an intent to claim excess tax foreclosure proceeds. This intent is filed with the county treasurer by July 1st. After the auctions are completed, those that filed a claim will be notified if there are remaining proceeds by January 31, 2022. If so, they will file a claim with Circuit Court between February 1 and May 15th. The judge will hear the case and determine the order of distribution. Currently, the distribution of excess proceeds is for the 2021 auction only. The determination of prior years is still held up in court.

The Intent to Claim Interest in Foreclosure Sales Proceeds form can be accessed on Berrien County's website under the Treasurer's Department.

Berrien County Broadband Internet Task Force (BCBIT)

Presenters: Pierette Dagg, Merit Network; John Egelhaaf, SWMPC; Ben Fineman, Michigan Broadband Alliance; Dr. Johannes Bauer, MSU; Dr. Michalis Kallitsis, Merit Network; Commissioner Teri Sue Freehling.

The Berrien County Broadband Internet Task Force (BCBIT), along with community leaders, suspected that broadband Internet access was lacking in Berrien County, and that this dearth of connectivity was negatively impacting economic prosperity and quality of life for its citizens. BCBIT worked in conjunction with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission to develop a study that established accurate, granular connectivity data in Berrien County.

Survey speed data as well as FCC data on the maximum advertised upload and download speeds per census block were each bucketed into one of the following categories: 1) No Internet, 2) Below 25/3 Mbps, or 3) At or Above 25/3 Mbps. Each survey result was then directly compared to the FCC census block the survey point falls within. The differences between coverage reported by the FCC and data from this survey are drastic.

Their study suggests that within their sample of survey responses that:

- 52% fewer homes have access to broadband Internet speeds.
- 21% fewer homes have some connectivity at speeds lower than broadband.
- 31% more homes have no Internet connectivity whatsoever.

The Homework Gap - Industry experts suggest that speeds of 100 Mbps/100 Mbps are truly reflective of modern bandwidth needs. Of households participating in the speed test, only 13 (less than 0.5%) of respondents had broadband Internet access at that level.

To summarize:

- Broadband is critical to a community's ability to thrive and remain competitive in terms of education, economic development, talent retention, employment opportunities and population growth.
- Much of Berrien County is unconnected or insufficiently connected.

- Connectivity data indicates a problem starker than established FCC data suggests.
- Residents without broadband desire service, and connected citizens believe that more provider options are needed.

Discussion was held.

A copy of today's presentation can be found at the following link:

<https://www.berriencounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/13884/05-06-2021-FinalBerrien-County-Data-Collection-Findings-Presentation>

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

The Personnel and Human Services and Finance Committees presented their reports. Parent Committee minutes are available at www.berriencounty.org.

PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING RESOLUTIONS - Public comments at this portion of the meeting must be related to resolutions listed on today's agenda only. Those speaking through the YouTube chat during public comments shall identify themselves by name (including last name) and city, township, or village: None.

CONSENT CALENDAR:

Commissioner Teri Sue Freehling will abstain from voting on Req. # 50760 and Req. # 50884 for REV as included in the Resolution #B2105076 authorizing payment of requisitions over \$5,000.00.

Commissioner Scott moved, seconded by Commissioner Yarbrough, to approve the Consent Calendar as presented.

Discussion was held. Chairperson gave a summary of the Honorary Resolution #B2105222 recognizing Musetta Hilliard.

<u>Resolutions #</u>	<u>Description</u>
F2105029	Weekly Bills
B2105076	Weekly Requisitions
F2105116	Road Payables
A2105212	Contract with Berrien Township for temporary additional police services.
P2105220	Recognition of Public Health Week
B2105222	Honorary Resolution

The Chairperson instructed the Clerk to take the roll with the following results:

11 YEAS: Freehling, Harrison, Majerek, Meeks, Scott, Vollrath, Wuerfel, Yarbrough, Bell, Curran, and Elliott. Motion carried, no nays.

ADDED RESOLUTION(S): None

BOARD APPOINTMENTS: Personnel & Human Services Committee

Commissioner Harrison moved, seconded by Commissioner Majerek, to approve Committee appointments as follows:

Department of Human Resources - Change classification for Debbie Reaume from alternate to permanent member to fill vacancy with a term ending 10/31/2022.

Mental Health Authority – Appoint Marion Tripplett to fill a vacancy of a three year term expiring 03/31/2024.

The Chairperson instructed the Clerk to take the roll with the following results:

11 YEAS: Majerek, Meeks, Scott, Vollrath, Wuerfel, Yarbrough, Bell, Curran, Freehling, Harrison and Elliott. Motion carried, no nays.

COMMISSIONER REPORT(S):

The Commissioners presented their outside Commissioners' Reports.

ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT:

Administrator Dissette announced that a copy of today's presentation can be found at the following link:

<https://www.berriencounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/13884/05-06-2021-FinalBerrien-County-Data-Collection-Findings-Presentation>

Discussion was held to determine the distribution of the presentation link to local municipalities and media.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS – Those speaking through the YouTube chat during public comments shall identify themselves by name (including last name) and city, township, or village:

- Mike Hildebrand, Oronoko Charter Township Supervisor thanked the County for undertaking the Broadband study.
- Adolf Pelzer, Hagar Township – questioned why high school athletes are still mandated to wear masks when college and professional athletes do not.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Commissioner Wuerfel requested a plan to go back to in-person meetings in June, perhaps an outdoor meeting or some type of hybrid meeting. Chairperson Elliott stated that this issue will be turned over to Commissioner Curran and Administrator Dissette to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS: All Meetings *Virtual*

- Personnel & Human Services Committee, 8:00 a.m., Thursday, May 13, 2021
- Administration Committee, 8:30 a.m., Thursday, May 13, 2021
- Finance Committee, 9:00 a.m., Thursday, May 13, 2021
- Board of Commissioners, 10:30 a.m., Thursday, May 13, 2021
- National Day of Prayer will be held today at noon.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:52 A.M.

R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

Diane Mensinger, Chief Deputy Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next BOC meeting.