

BERRIEN COUNTY ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
Minutes of August 12, 2021

Roll Call Present: Jim Curran, Chairperson
Don Meeks Sr., Vice Chair
David Vollrath
Julie Wuerfel

Absent:

Scheduled: Ezra Scott, BOC Vice Chairman
Steve Pierangeli, Prosecutor
Hon. Mayfield, Chief Judge
Carrie Smietanka-Haney, Trial Court

Others: Jennifer Arent, Recording Secretary

Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 9:16 am.

Prosecutor's Update – Steve Pierangeli

Pierangeli reported they are conducting two to four trials per week and are clearing up the docket. Jeff Taylor has been working at the County since the 1990s and specializes in drug court. They are prosecuting overdose deaths, but are trying to help those that are addicted and need help. Overdose death numbers are trending down because Narcan is saving more lives. Cortney O'Malley is in charge of child sex crimes and is passionate about her work. He discussed SART (Sexual Assault Response Team) and the 24 hour support the team provides to victims. He discussed the new expungement law and how it has been expanded and every request they receive, regardless of qualification, must be reviewed. Discussions ensued regarding the uptick in gun violence in the City of Benton Harbor and Benton Charter Township. There is a planned "21 Days of Peace" in which several community outreach events are planned. The State Police is bringing in an additional 10 officers for a total of 16 for extra patrols. Discussions ensued regarding drug crimes and lab testing at Andrew's University, which has been great since they are able to get test results back much quicker than when they had to go through Grand Rapids. Pierangeli noted they are educating teachers and reminding law enforcement of the mandated reporting for suspected child abuse.

Trial Court Update – Judge Mayfield & Carrie Smietanka-Haney

Judge Mayfield and Smietanka-Haney discussed the protocol updates for COVID mandates at the courthouse. Discussions ensued regarding landlord-tenant cases. Judge Mayfield gave kudos to Honor Credit Union for assisting with financial literacy and home ownership classes. There are several advocacy programs available as well. Judge Mayfield noted that, effective last Friday, Judge Cotter is now the interim presiding Judge as Judges Bruce and Wiley are stepping back. Judge Howard has stepped forward to assist Cotter as well. The Criminal Justice Reforms handout showed the analysis of cases and citation reforms. Discussions ensued regarding expungements, JWorks, which is the new computer program that handles case files, and Juvenile updates including the planned retirement of Rich Dama. She noted they have received several potential applications. Discussions ensued regarding the absence of in-house residential through the end of the year as well. Judge Mayfield requested that communication from the Board be increased with the staff regarding the salary study. She encouraged transparency and discussed morale. Curran stated the study issue is still ongoing.

Q & A with Ezra Scott

Scott noted the August 19th BOC meeting will be held at 6:00pm at the Chikaming Fire Department.

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Vollrath, supported by Meeks, to approve the minutes of the August 5, 2021 meeting. Motion Carried.

Resolutions

The following Resolutions were moved forward to the full Board:

A2108301 – Traffic engineering study on old M-60 in New Buffalo Township sets the new speed limit at 35 mph.

Public Comment

None.

Miscellaneous

None.

Chairman Curran adjourned the meeting at 10:24 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

J.Arent

Jennifer Arent
Recording Secretary