

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Special Meeting Minutes
January 16, 2026

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairperson R. McKinley Elliott called the Special Board of Commissioners' (BOC) meeting to order at 10:32 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

INVOCATION:

Commissioner Vollrath gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Commissioner Curran 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, Jim Curran, Teri Sue Freehling, Robert Harrison, Jon Hinkelman (*arrived 10:35 am*), Chokwe Pitchford, Alex Ott (*arrived 10:36 am.*), Sharon Tyler, David Vollrath, Julie Wuerfel and R. McKinley Elliott.

1 ABSENT: Mamie Yarbrough,

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 8, 2026, ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING:

Commissioner Wuerfel moved and seconded by Commissioner Vollrath, to approve the regular minutes of the January 8, 2026, Organizational Meeting. Motion carried, no nays.

COMMUNICATION(S):

County Clerk Stacy Loar-Porter received and distributed to the Board of Commissioners (BOC) the following communication(s):

- Indiana Michigan Power Project. Email received 1/8/2026.
- Cass County BOC Resolution. Email received 1/9/2026.
 - Resolution R-01-26 Data Center Resolution
- February is Heart Month- Join Us for Wear Red Day on Feb 6. Email received 1/13/2026.
 - Heart Month 2026 Proclamation draft
 - Wear Red Day 2026 Proclamation

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 during public comments may do so no longer than two minutes and shall identify themselves by name and city, township, or village. (Article III, 3.9B-C). The public should refer to the resolution # that they are commenting on as a part of their comments:
None.

RESOLUTIONS - CONSENT CALENDAR:

The following resolutions are considered routine and will be adopted by one motion unless a request for removal, discussion, or explanation is received from a County Commissioner.

Commissioner Curran moved and supported by Commissioner Pitchford, to approve today's Consent Calendar:

<u>Resolution(s) #</u>	<u>Description</u>
P2601001	Monthly Per Diems
F2601014	Weekly Bills & Road Payables
B2601061	Weekly Requisitions & Purchase Order Change Orders
A2601112	Accept Michigan Pet Alliance award training
A2601113	Accept grant for Palisades regulations with Holtec
A2601115	Accept donation for adoption sponsorship
F2601118	Set 2026 mileage and meal reimbursement rates
F2601119	Acceptance of grant for CDBG Home Improvement Program
A2601121	Systemic Trauma and Relational Therapy Contract

A2601122 Juvenile Pre Arrest Diversion Program contract
A2601123 Parenting with Love and Limits Program contract
F2601126 Approve deed work for foreclosed property

ADDED RESOLUTION(S): None.

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

11 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Vollrath, Wuerfel, and Elliott.

Motion carried, no nays.

COMMISSIONER REPORT(S):

Commissioner Tyler reminded the public that the Hunter Ice Festival begins today in Niles.

Commissioner Ott stated he attended a meeting in coordination with the County Drain Commissioner in Bridgman, to review drain issues and assessments that could be associated with repair/maintenance.

Commissioner Freehling stated the State of Michigan will be gathering the annual homeless count for Berrien County on January 28, 2026.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

Administrator Brian Dissette presented his Administrator's Report. Discussion was held.

Administrator Dissette stated that MSU Extension has prepared packets in preparation for the upcoming Strategic Planning.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS - Those speaking during public comments may do so no longer than two minutes and shall identify themselves by name and city, township, or village. (Article III, 3.9 B-C): None.

OTHER BUSINESS:

County Strategic Planning

Commissioner Freehling announced the first Strategic Planning meeting will be held January 29, 2026, at the Berrien County Conference Room, 2149 E. Napier Ave, Benton Harbor. The meeting will be held from 10:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m.

In preparation of the meeting a survey will be sent to department heads and local jurisdictions.

Administrator Dissette will be sending links to the County Master Plan and local jurisdiction Master Plans to the Commissioners ahead of the planning session.

ANOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS:

- County Facilities will be closed on Monday, January 19, 2026, in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

CLOSED SESSION – Closed Session - MCL 15.268(1)(h) "To consider material exempt from discussion or disclosure by state or federal statute."- Memorandum from Corporate Counsel Thaddeus Hackworth.

Chairperson Elliott stated that the BOC will be going into Closed Session, the meeting will no longer be virtual and will adjourn after the Closed Session.

Motion

Commissioner Pitchford moved and supported by Commissioner Tyler, to recess the public meeting and go into Closed Session at 10:49 A.M., Per Closed Session - MCL 15.268(1)(h) "To consider material exempt from discussion or disclosure by state or federal statute."- Memorandum from Corporate Counsel Thaddeus Hackworth.

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

11 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Vollrath, Wuerfel, and Elliott.

Motion carried, no nays.

The Board recessed at 10:49 A.M. to go into Closed Session.

Chairperson Elliott reconvened to Open Session at 11:25 A.M.

Motion

Commissioner Vollrath moved and supported by Commissioner Ott, that the Board of Commissioners authorize the County Administrator to execute a Separation Agreement and Release with the Benefits Manager, substantially in the form presented to and discussed by the Board in closed session, with authority to make non-material modifications as necessary to finalize the agreement.

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

11 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Vollrath, Wuerfel, and Elliott.

Motion carried, no nays.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE CLOSED SESSION MEETING HELD ON DECEMBER 4, 2026, IN THE COW MEETING AND DECEMBER 18, 2026, IN THE BOC MEETING.

Commissioner Wuerfel moved and was seconded by Commissioner Tyler, to approve the closed session minutes of December 4, 2025, closed session of the COW meeting and minutes of December 18, 2025, closed session of the BOC meeting. Motion carried, no nays.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:32 A.M.

R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

Stacy Loar-Porter, County Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next BOC meeting.