

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Regular Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairperson R. McKinley Elliott called the regular Board of Commissioners' (BOC) meeting to order at 10:41 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

INVOCATION:

Commissioner R. McKinley Elliott gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Commission Julie Wuerfel 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, Alex Ott, Sharon Tyler, David Vollrath, Julie Wuerfel, Mamie Yarbrough and R. McKinley Elliott.

1 ABSENT: Chokwe Pitchford.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 29, 2026, SPECIAL MEETING AND THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 29, 2026, STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION:

Commissioner Vollrath moved and seconded by Commissioner Curran, to approve the minutes of the January 29, 2026, Special Meeting and the minutes of the January 29, 2026, Strategic Planning Session. Motion carried, no nays.

COMMUNICATION(S):

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

- Kalkaska County Resolution 2026-03 Supporting HB5151 & 5153. Email received 2/3/2026.
- Visit SWMI- PBS Main Street Viewing Party. Email received 2/4/2026

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 Vollrath moved and supported by Commissioner Ott, to approve today's Consent Calendar.

<u>Resolution(s) #</u>	<u>Description</u>
F2602017	Weekly Bills and Road Payables
B2602064	Weekly Requisitions
F2602110	Approve Harbor Shores Parcel 1 & 2 Brownfield Plan
F2602111	Approve partial termination of the Harbor Shores Brownfield Plan
P2602133	Approve annual work plan with the Michigan State University for Extension Office

ADDED RESOLUTION(S): None.

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

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

**Commissioner Freehling abstained from Resolution #B2602064 on REV Excavating requisitions #83259, 83260 and 83261 due to an abundance of caution*

Motion carried, no nays.

COMMITTEE REPORT(S) – Finance, Administration, and Personnel & Human Services (PHS) Committees:

The Finance, Administration, and PHS Committees presented their Committee Reports. Parent Committee minutes are available at www.berriencounty.org. Discussion was held.

The PHS Committee reported on resolutions that were reviewed. They received an update from Human Resources for recruiting incentives, organization and prioritization within the HR Department.

Re-Appointments for the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission:

Commissioner Harrison moved and supported by Commissioner Wuerfel, to approve the reappointment of Margaret Cichon, Thomas Ellspermann, Dan Fette, Kristen Gundersen, John Humphrey, Kathryn Klemesrud and Paul Pantaleo to the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission with their terms to expire 12/31/2027.

Motion carried, no nays.

Appointment to Mental Health Authority:

Commissioner Harrison moved and supported by Commissioner Wuerfel, to approve the appointment of Commissioner Sharon Tyler to replace Commissioner Alex Ott on the Mental Health Authority for the remaining length of the term.

Motion carried, no nays.

The Finance Committee reported they will be working with the County Finance Department to update the currently used Waiver Request form and reviewing policies on when the form is to be used. The goal is to streamline the process and develop a form that works well for all departments. The Committee reported they selected a vendor to assist with the search for a County Administrator replacement.

The Administration Committee reported the security upgrade plans for the Administration Building have been approved. The Buildings & Grounds Superintendent will gather bids on the project. The Committee complimented the Buildings & Grounds Department on the excellent job of providing clear parking lots and sidewalks at all the County Facilities. They also received an update from the Road Department concerning snow removal on roads. The Road Department is asking local units to submit their local project lists by 3/31/2026. The Road Department Engineering Supervisor, Kevin Stack's last day will be 3/6/2026. The department will work with Human Resources on finding a replacement.

COMMISSIONER REPORT(S):

Commissioner Bell reported that the RFP by MDHHS has been rescinded. The Southwest Michigan Behavioral Health Authority expressed their gratitude for the support given Commissioners that spoke to Legislators concerning the issues with the RFP by MDHHS.

Commissioner Curran gave an update on the events the Berrien County Historical Association will be participating in for the upcoming year. The Association is looking for additional board members.

Commissioner Freehling would like to review the next steps for the 2026 County Strategic Plan and set a date in March to discuss focusing on the topics developed with the Elected Officials and Department Heads.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

Interim Administrator Mike Sepic introduced himself to the public and Board of Commissioners. He looks forward to working with everyone.

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):

Gunther Paul, Hagar Township, spoke about the Evan Drain. He is requesting an evaluation of the assessments that occurred under a former Drain Commissioner, when no work was completed on the drain.

Adolf Peltzer, Hagar Township, spoke about the lack of attendance at the Commission meetings.

OTHER BUSINESS:

FOIA APPEAL

Corporate Counsel Thaddeaus Hackworth reviewed the appeal that was submitted to the Board of Commissioners for a FOIA Request Denial.

Commissioner Wuerfel moved and supported by Commissioner Harrison, to deny the FOIA Appeal submitted by Doug Wolshlager due to the state legislature explicitly exempted the judicial branch from the act's definition of a "public body" as stated in MCL 15.323(h)(iv) and 15.233(1).

Motion carried, no nays.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS: None.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:27 A.M.

R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

Stacy Loar-Porter, County Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next BOC meeting.