

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Regular Meeting Minutes
February 12, 2026

CALL TO ORDER:

Vice Chairperson Teri Sue Freehling called the regular Board of Commissioners' (BOC) meeting to order at 10:30 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

INVOCATION:

Commissioner Alex Ott gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Commissioner Jon Hinkelman 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:

10 PRESENT: Rayonte Bell, Jim Curran, Teri Sue Freehling, Jon Hinkelman, Alex Ott, Chokwe Pitchford, Sharon Tyler, David Vollrath, Julie Wuerfel and Mamie Yarbrough.

2 ABSENT: Robert Harrison and R. McKinley Elliott.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 5, 2026, MEETING:

Commissioner Vollrath moved and seconded by Commissioner Ott, to approve the minutes of the February 5, 2026, Regular 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):

- SW Michigan – Stop Hibernating! Winter is better out here. Email received 2/4/2026.
- SW Michigan- Fall for Valentine's Day in Southwest Michigan. Email received 2/10/2026.
- St. Joseph County resolution Opposing Data Battery Storage. Email received 2/9/2026.
 - 1-2026 Battery Storage resolution
- Letter from Supervisor of Hagar Township. Letter received 2/12/2026.

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

<u>Resolution(s) #</u>	<u>Description</u>
F2602017	Weekly Bills & Road Payables
B2602065	Requisition List & Purchase Order Change Orders
A2602136	Apply for Marine Safety Program funds from DNR
P2602137	Renew agreement with Silver Beach Center for parking arrangements
P2602140	Accept Veterans Service Agency Grant
P2602141	Complement Change- Mental Health Court
A2602142	Accept a donation from Best Friends Animal Society for foster help
F2602143	Approve FY27 Berrien Bus contract
A2602144	Update Medical Examiner list with Western Michigan University
P2602145	Service Dog program for Veterans

ADDED RESOLUTION(S): None.

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

10 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Vollrath, Wuerfel and Yarbrough.

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 Administration Committee reported they received a report from the Sheriff's Office. The department noted Robin Lydic, Director of Animal Care of the Humane Society of Southwest Michigan, donated microchip readers for each Sheriff Office's Animal Control vehicles. The scanners enable officers to scan and identify animals with implanted microchips. The Committee also received a Property Use Request for a large event; they directed the requestor to involve the Sheriff's Office and the City of St. Joseph in their planning and then resubmit the request.

The Finance Committee reported they received an update on the sale of the Swartz Drain property from Community Development Director, Dan Fette. The committee also approved a resolution to be presented to the Board of Commissioners at the next meeting to approve the expense of up to \$10,000 to engage professional services for the search of a new County Administrator.

The PHS Committee reported they received a report from the Health Department. Mike Hagerty, Gallagher Benefit Services, Inc. presented an in-depth explanation of services provided for through the optional Benefit Advocate Center. The service will be beneficial for assisting the HR Department in handling the number of health benefit questions received while the Benefits Manager position remains vacant. The committee discussed a possible modification to the vacant position. There was discussion on the clarity needed regarding the search for the new County Administrator.

COMMISSIONER REPORT(S):

Commissioner Tyler reminded the commissioners there is Brownfield meeting today at 12:30 pm being held in the Otto Grau meeting room.

Commissioner Ott reported he, County Drain Commissioner George McManus and Commissioner Freehling, attended the City of Bridgman board meeting to address resident questions concerning Tanner Creek drain assessments assessed by the past Drain Commissioner.

Commissioner Wuerfel stated Michigan Works reported job numbers are increasing. She reported that the Going Pro Program was removed completely from the state budget by the Governor, the program provided apprenticeship programs for many residents and local businesses.

Commissioner Freehling reported the BCBIT Committee received a construction update from MDEC. She reported that the Berrien County Planning Commission received text amendments to the Lake Charter Township Zoning.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

Interim Administrator Mike Sepic presented his Administrator's Report. Discussion was held.

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:

Vice Chairperson Freehling requested the Commissioners review their availability on 3/11/2026 for a possible meeting to continue work on the County Strategic Plan.

ANOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS:

- County Facilities will be closed on Monday, February 16, 2026, for Presidents' 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.

Vice Chairperson Freehling stated that the BOC will be going into Closed Session, the meeting will no longer be virtual.

Motion

Commissioner Hinkelman moved and supported by Commissioner Tyler, to recess the public meeting and go into Closed Session at 11:17 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 and MCL 15.268(1)(h).

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

10 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Vollrath, Wuerfel and Yarbrough.

Motion carried, no nays.

The Board recessed at 11:17 A.M. to go into Closed Session.

Commissioner Vollrath left the meeting at 11:20 A.M.

Vice Chairperson Freehling reconvened to Open Session at 11:35 A.M.

Motion

Commissioner Wuerfel moved and supported by Commissioner Ott, to authorize Corporate Counsel to initiate all necessary legal proceedings against Republic Services, Inc., including the filing of a civil complaint for breach of contract and trespass, to recover overcharges and compel the removal of equipment from County property.

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

10 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Vollrath, Wuerfel and Yarbrough.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE CLOSED SESSION MEETING HELD ON JANUARY 16, 2026, IN THE BOC MEETING:

Commissioner Tyler moved and was seconded by Commissioner Wuerfel, to approve the closed session minutes of the January 16, 2026, closed session of the BOC meeting. Motion carried, no nays.

CLOSED SESSION – Closed Session - MCL 15.268(1)(h) "To consider material exempt from discussion or disclosure by state or federal statute."- Memorandum from Attorney Peggy Kozal, Dickinson Wright.

Vice Chairperson Freehling 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 11:41 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 Attorney Peggy Kozal, Dickinson Wright.

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

9 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Wuerfel and Yarbrough.

Motion carried, no nays.

The Board recessed at 11:41 A.M. to go into Closed Session.

Vice Chairperson Freeling reconvened to Open Session at 11:54 A.M.

With no further business the meeting was adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 A.M.

Teri Sue Freehling, Vice Chairperson

Stacy Loar-Porter, County Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next BOC meeting.