

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Regular Meeting Minutes
January 22, 2026

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairperson R. McKinley Elliott 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 Jim Curran gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Commission David Vollrath 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:

8 PRESENT: Rayonte Bell, Jim Curran, Teri Sue Freehling, Robert Harrison, Jon Hinkelman, David Vollrath, Julie Wuerfel and R. McKinley Elliott.

4 ABSENT: Chokwe Pitchford, Alex Ott, Sharon Tyler and Mamie Yarbrough.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 16, 2026, SPECIAL MEETING:

Commissioner Freehling moved and seconded by Commissioner Harrison, to approve the regular minutes of the January 16, 2026, Special 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): None.

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.

MOTION TO AMEND AGENDA

Commissioner Vollrath moved and seconded by Commissioner Freehling, to approve the amendment to the agenda to add resolution(s) #P2601131 and #F2601132.

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

8 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Vollrath, Wuerfel and Elliott.

Motion carried, no nays.

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

<u>Resolution(s) #</u>	<u>Description</u>
F2601015	Weekly Bills & Road Payables
B2601062	Weekly Requisitions & Purchase Order Change Orders
P2601108	Accept additional funds for Emergency Management health response
A2601109	Agreement with MSU Vet School for mobile animal care services
P2601114	Ad Gators Digital Signage agreement

P2601116	Southwest Michigan Behavioral Health Contract
P2601117	Contract King Media for Marihuana outreach
F2601120	Multi-year contract for Drain Office software
P2601124	Change with filing Attorney Referee vacancy
F2601125	Full Faith & Credit Tanner Creek Drain
F2601127	Approve bond for Paw Paw Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant – Bond 34
F2601128	Approve contract for Bond 34 – Paw Paw Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant
F2601129	Approve contract with Immanual Lutheran Church for Early Voting Site
A2601130	Approve agreement with Bizstream for Juvenile Center software

ADDED RESOLUTION(S): None.

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

8 YEAS: Bell, Curran, *Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Vollrath, Wuerfel and Elliott.

**Commissioner Freehling abstained from Resolution #B2601062 on REV Excavating requisitions #82997, 82999 and 83000, due to abundance of caution.*

Motion carried, no nays.

Motion

Commissioner Wuerfel moved and seconded by Commissioner Harrison, to approve Resolution #P2601131. Resolution to be read by Commissioner Harrison.

WHEREAS, the Human Resources Department provides and processes benefits for county employees and retirees alike; and

WHEREAS, given the increasing complexity of benefits administration, ongoing cost pressures, and the need for enhanced internal support, the County Administrator researched consultants in this field; and

WHEREAS, the County would benefit from having a benefits partner/consultant that can provide expert guidance, support employee education and communication, and serve as a reliable extension of the Human Resources function; and

WHEREAS, proposals were sought from two different companies which laid out the costs involved as well as the services that would be provided by such a consultant; and

WHEREAS, the proposal provided by Gallagher Benefit Services reflects their position to provide immediate and long term value to the County and to strengthen the department's handling of benefit management; and

WHEREAS, the fee for their services is \$4,000 per month with additional carrier commissions; and

WHEREAS, the County Administrator recommends a one year term, effective February 1, 2026, with automatic renewals unless terminated by either party with 90 days' notice.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the Berrien County Board of Commissioners authorizes the Chairman to execute the agreement with Gallagher Benefit Services for consulting services related to benefits administration pending an accepted agreement that has been reviewed and approved by Corporate Counsel.

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

8 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Vollrath, Wuerfel and Elliott.

Motion carried, no nays.

Motion

Commissioner Hinkelman moved and seconded by Commissioner Bell, to approve Resolution #2601132. Resolution to be read by Commissioner Hinkelman.

Commissioner Curran inquired about the use of Road Department fund balance to cover the decreased cash flow due to the reduced funding payments from the Michigan Transportation Fund. Administrator Dissette stated the cash portion of the Road Department fund balance equals approximately \$500,000, \$9 million of the fund balance is valuation of assets, property and buildings.

WHEREAS, the Berrien County Road Department is facing a cash flow issue due to the reduced funding payments from the Michigan Transportation Fund; and

WHEREAS, the current accounts payable amount for the department is \$2,077,439.76 with accounts receivable at \$154,956.75; and

WHEREAS, the department is in need of an advance from the County to maintain its relationship with vendors and continue to ensure a safe road system for the public; and

WHEREAS, the County is in a position to provide an interest free advance of up to \$2 million dollars from the Delinquent Tax Revolving Fund with the stipulation that it be repaid in the 2026 calendar year; and

WHEREAS, if approved, the department would begin repaying the advance in April of 2026 with the initial payment of up to \$200,000; and

WHEREAS, the County Treasurer has provided support for this advance out of the delinquent tax fund.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the Berrien County Board of Commissioners authorizes an advance of up to \$2,000,000 to the Road Department from the Delinquent Tax Revolving Fund to supplement the cash flow issue due to the delay in state funding.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the County Administrator/Controller is directed to advance up to \$2,000,000, as required, from the Delinquent Tax Revolving Fund to the Road Department to accomplish this.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if any of the stipulations described above are not able to, the Finance Committee will be apprised of the situation to authorize any further action needed.

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

8 YEAS: Bell, Curran, Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Vollrath, Wuerfel and Elliott.

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 Finance Committee reported that the Harbor Shores Brownfield Public Hearing that was to be held on January 15, 2026, will be held at a later date in February.

The PHS Committee received an update from Maureen Adams, Veterans Affairs Administrator, on Federal funding for the Veterans Office.

The Administration committee received a report from Trial Court Administrator, Carrie Smietanka-Haney, concerning the part-time Attorney Referee position options. They also received a deferred maintenance update from Don Trail, Building and Grounds Superintendent. Don Trail also will provide the committee with the final design for the security/remodel for the Administration building. The Road Department reported they have received Critical Bridge Funding for 2028; the funding will be used for the Coloma Road Bridge for deck rehabilitation and full reconstruction of Log Cabin Bridge.

COMMISSIONER REPORT(S):

Commissioner Bell reported that the CCAB met and the board continues to work on achieving recidivism and providing proper services for those released from jail or are on probation.

Commissioner Wuerfel stated Love Creek Park will celebrate 50 years of being open this year and there will be some future events. She reported 141,000 people visited the Silver Beach Playground in 2025.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

Administrator Brian Dissette 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):

Berrien County Sheriff, Chuck Heit, New Buffalo Township, stated the Sheriff’s Department will be participating in the Polar Plunge at Watermark, the event will be held on 2/7/2026 and they are accepting donations. He thanked Brian Dissette for his work as the County Administrator and for his friendship.

Daniel Dick, MSU Extension, introduced himself to the Board of Commissioner, he is the new Tree Root Specialist for MSU Extension. He invited the Commission to the Southwest Horticultural Days, which will be held February 4-5, 2026, at Lake Michigan College Mendel Center.

Berrien County Clerk, Stacy Loar-Porter, Lincoln Charter Township, invited the commissioners and the public to attend the Slap the Puck Out of Cancer events being held this weekend at the Garden Ice Arena. The event includes hockey games all weekend and a silent auction. All proceeds go to Berrien County Cancer Services.

OTHER BUSINESS: None.

ANOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS:

- No regular meeting scheduled for Thursday, January 29, 2026 – 5th Thursday.
- Board of Commissioners’ Strategic Planning Session – Thursday, January 29, 2026, at County Conference Room 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:09 A.M.

R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

Stacy Loar-Porter, County Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next BOC meeting.