

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes
March 19, 2026

CALL TO ORDER:

Vice Chairperson Teri Sue Freehling called the regular Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting to order at 8:38 a.m. in the Board of Commissioners' Room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, in St. Joseph, Michigan.

ROLL CALL:

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

9 PRESENT: Teri Sue Freehling, Robert Harrison, Jon Hinkelman, Alex Ott, Chokwe Pitchford (*arrived at 8:42 a.m.*), Sharon Tyler, David Vollrath, Julie Wuerfel and Mamie Yarbrough (*arrived at 8:39 a.m.*).

3 ABSENT: Rayonte Bell, Jim Curran and R. McKinley Elliott.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE MARCH 5, 2026, MEETING:

Commissioner Wuerfel moved and was seconded by Commissioner Vollrath, to approve the Committee of the Whole minutes from March 5, 2026. Motion carried, no nays.

REQUISITION REVIEW - Annette Christie:

Executive Administrative Assistant Annette Christie presented the requisitions to the Board for their review and discussion.

PUBLIC HEARING: DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND GRANT APPLICATION- JILL ADAMS, PARKS DIRECTOR.

Motion:

Commissioner Yarbrough moved and seconded by Commissioner Harrison, to recess the regular meeting at 8:40 A.M. and open the Public Hearing for the Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant Application.

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

8 YEAS: Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Ott, Tyler, Vollrath, Wuerfel and Yarbrough.

**Pitchford arrived after the roll call.*

Motion carried, no nays.

Jill Adams, Parks Director, presented the Madeline Bertrand County Park All Season, Multi-Use Pavilion Project that is being submitted for the Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant Application.

Project Scope:

- All seasons, multi-use pavilion
- Expanded parking lot
- Additional bathrooms
- Accessible pathways around the structure

Location:

- North of existing facilities
- Near the location of the demolished river shelter
- Ability to tie into existing well and septic
- Positions for staff oversight, safety and security

Need:

- Replaces demolished river shelter
- Fill requests for around the year indoor space
- Provide additional, accessible bathrooms
- Provide additional parking
- Fulfill goals outlined in the 5 Year Parks Plan

Used:

- Public Area
- School field trips
- Scout group outings
- Cross country meet check-in
- Outdoor warming/ski season
- Community events
- Small private gatherings
- Business meetings
- Office retreats
- Training space

Timeline:

- MNRTF Grant deadline is April 1, 2026
- Award notifications begin at the end of the year 2026 and continue until January 2027
- Grant agreement, if awarded, would be signed Spring of 2027
- Anticipated construction would begin in the fall or winter of 2027

Cost:

- Estimated project cost is \$1,830,000
- MNRTF Grant request will be for \$400,000, maximum request
- Remaining funds will come from the Park Budget, Berrien County Endowment Fund and fundraising efforts

Board Comments:

Commissioner Yarbrough expressed concern over how long it takes to receive notification after the application has been submitted. Jill stated that there has been discussion with the State that the length of the process hinders projects being scheduled during the typical construction season.

Commissioner Harrison asked about a required financial match for the grant. Jill stated the grant requires a 25% match.

Commissioner Yarbrough stated the Parks Board is very enthusiastic for this project.

Public Comments: None.

Motion:

Commissioner Harrison moved and seconded by Commissioner Wuerfel, to conclude the Public Hearing at 9:05 A.M. and return to regular session.

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

9 YEAS: Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Vollrath, Wuerfel and Yarbrough.

Motion carried, no nays.

SCHEDULED DISCUSSION:

Committee of the Whole Meetings:

Mike Sepic, Interim Administrator, presented the option of reducing the Committee of the Whole meetings to twice a month versus four times a month. This suggestion assists in reducing the number of unnecessary meetings due to lack of programming to present. It would also relieve stress off administration for preparing and/or last-minute cancelling of meetings with no programming. It creates a clearer schedule for the residents as well.

There was consensus of the Board to discuss the matter at the BOC meeting.

Commissioners Harrison and Hinkelman stated this would be a great opportunity to also review the possibility of reducing the number of Board of Commissioner meetings to twice a month as well.

250th Celebration:

There was discussion with the Commission for options to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the United States. The County Parks Department applied for a grant to host a celebration, but they were not picked to receive the grant funding. In 1974, the Commission had a special Stamped Plate, there is not enough time to have this done for this celebration. Interim Administrator Sepic suggested that a special collectable coin be developed. He will research cost and timing of having a collectable coin made and will report back to the Committees and Commissioners.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – Per the Berrien County Board of Commissioners’ Bylaws, 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.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 A.M.

Teri Sue Freehling, Vice Chairperson

Stacy Loar-Porter, County Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next Committee of the Whole meeting.