

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Organizational Meeting Minutes
January 8, 2026

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

Chairperson R. McKinley Elliott called the Board of Commissioners' (BOC) regular meeting to order at 8:38 A.M. in the BOC's boardroom at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, MI.

INVOCATION:

Jail Chaplain Don Bennett from Portage Road General Baptist Church, Niles Charter Township gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chairman R. McKinley Elliott led us in the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America.

ROLL CALL:

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

11 PRESENT: Rayonte Bell (*arrived at 8:48 am*), 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.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 18, 2025, COW AND BOC MEETINGS:

Commissioner Freehling moved and supported by Commissioner Vollrath, to approve the COW and BOC regular meeting minutes of December 18, 2025.
Motion carried.

COMMUNICATION(S):

- Request for Letter of Support from the Berrien County Commission Re: Lawrence Welk Show 70th Anniversary. Email received 12/27/2025.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR:

Chairperson Elliott opened the floor for nominations for Board Vice-Chair.

Commissioner Curran moved, seconded by Commissioner Vollrath, to close the nominations for position of Vice-Chair of the Board of Commissioners and to elect Commissioner Freehling as Vice-Chair. Motion carried, no nays. The motion was passed unanimously.

CHAIRMAN APPOINTMENTS OF COMMITTEES:

- **Administration Committee**
- **Finance Committee**
- **Personnel & Human Services Committee**

Chairperson Elliott stated the parent committees will continue with the same committee assignments.

REQUISITION AND RESOLUTION REVIEW – Annette Christie:

Annette Christie presented the requisitions for their review.

Commissioner Wuerfel requested a report to be able to compare the 2025 to 2026 Blanket Purchase orders by company and by department. Administrator Dissette stated currently there is no report that is generated by the software to provide this information, but the Finance Department is looking for possible alternatives to enable producing such a report.

APPROVAL OF CALENDAR FOR 2026 COMMISSIONERS' MEETINGS – Annette Christie:

Chairperson Elliott discussed the draft Calendar for 2026 Commissioners' Meetings and gave background information. The BOC discussed at least five night meetings to be held at 6:00 pm, with the 1st night meeting being held at the Berrien County Administration Building. The location for the remaining four night meetings will be determined later. The BOC agreed to approve the tentative Calendar for 2026 Commissioners' Meetings.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST WAIVERS DISCUSSION – Annette Christie:

Annette Christie explained the Conflict-of-Interest Waivers form. She distributed to each BOC their original Conflict of Interest Waivers form to review the current information, if nothing has changed, they should sign the form or else the information needs to be amended. Discussion was held.

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, 3.9 B-C): None.

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

<u>Resolution(s) #</u>	<u>Description</u>
F2601013	Weekly Bills & Road Payables Approval
B2601060	Weekly Requisition Approval
P2601107	Apply for a grant for Historical Courthouse Square County Park

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

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

*Commissioner Tyler abstained from Resolution #B2601060 on First Church of God requisition #82235, due to abundance of caution.

Motion carried, no nays.

COMMISSIONER REPORT(S):

The Commissioners presented their outside committee reports.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

Administrator Dissette reminded the Commissioners there is a BCBIT meeting at 12:30 pm today.

Administrator Dissette provided the Commissioner's with his Letter of Resignation effective 1/31/2026. He stated it has been his pleasure working with everyone at Berrien County and thanked the Commission for the opportunities the County has provided him.

Chairperson Elliott thanked Administrator Dissette for his time at the county, noting the change is a great career move and understands the family consideration that also comes with the change.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS - Those speaking during public comments may do so no longer than two minutes and shall identify themselves by name (including last name) and city, township, or village. (Article III, 3.9 B-C):

George McManus, Berrien County Drain Commissioner, reported when he took office a year ago, the Berrien County Drain Office was in violation of the EGLE Soil Erosion Program. This past year the office has completed the required steps to be in compliance. The program was audited by the State, and the Drain Office is now in compliance with the EGLE Soil Erosion Program.

Greg Sanders, Berrien County Undersheriff, expressed his thanks to Administrator Dissette and wished him well in his new endeavors.

OTHER BUSINESS: None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS:

- Committee meetings will take place following the Organizational meeting.
- No regular Board of Commissioners' meeting will be held today.
- The Board of Commissioners will resume their regular meeting day schedule next Thursday, January 15,

2026, The Committee of the Whole Meeting will be held at 8:35 am; Committee Meetings will be held at 9:15 and the Regular Board Meeting will be held at 10:30 am.

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

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 A.M.

R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

Stacy Loar-Porter, County Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next BOC meeting.