

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Regular Meeting Minutes
February 26, 2026

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairperson R. McKinley Elliott called the regular Board of Commissioners' (BOC) meeting to order at 10:36 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

INVOCATION:

Commissioner Rayonte Bell gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Commissioner Teri Freehling 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, Robert Harrison, Alex Ott, Sharon Tyler, David Vollrath, Julie Wuerfel, Mamie Yarbrough and R. McKinley Elliott.

2 ABSENT: Jon Hinkelman, and Chokwe Pitchford.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 19, 2026, MEETING:

Commissioner Tyler moved and seconded by Commissioner Wuerfel, to approve the minutes of the February 19, 2026, Regular Meeting. Motion carried, no nays.

REQUISITION REVIEW – Jake Litaker:

Director of Financial Services Jake Litaker presented the requisitions to the Board for their review and discussion.

COMMUNICATION(S):

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

- SW MI Tourist Council - Affordable Spring Break Ideas in Southwest Michigan, email received 2/23/2026.
- Resident email concerning BC Road Department Snowplow. Email received 2/20/2026
 - Attachment of pictures submitted with email.

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.

Chairperson Elliott requested to the pull Honorary Resolution #B2602715 – Rockey Adams Recognition and to have it presented separately.

Commissioner Vollrath moved and supported by Commissioner Wuerfel, not to include Honorary Resolution #B2602715 to the Consent Calendar, so that it can be presented separately and to approve today's Consent Calendar:

<u>Resolution(s) #</u>	<u>Description</u>
F2602019	Weekly Bills & Road Payables
B2602067	Requisition and Purchase Order Change Orders
A2602147	Contract with Best Way Disposal for trash disposal and collection services
A2602150	Apply for HMEP grant
P2602151	Contract with Gallagher Benefits for HR services
P2602153	Schwark Drain Property purchase agreement amendment
P2602154	Accept marijuana education grant funds

A2602155
F2602157

Approve agreement with Point Blue for Three Oaks environmental work
Approve service agreement with Michigan Leadership Institute

**Commissioner Freehling abstained from Resolution #B2602067 on REV Excavating requisitions #83527, 83528, and 83531 due to an abundance of caution.*

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

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

Motion carried, no nays.

ADDED RESOLUTION(S): None.

RESOLUTION PRESENTATION – Commissioner Curran:

Commissioner Curran read the following Honorary Resolution #B2602715:

Motion:

Commissioner Elliott moved and seconded by Commissioner Curran to approve Honorary Resolution #B2602715.

**BERRIEN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
RESOLUTION B2602715
Honoring Rockey Adams
February 26, 2026**

WHEREAS, *Rockey Adams dedicated over 25 years of distinguished service to the Berrien County Sheriff's Office, working in numerous roles of increasing responsibility, including Marine Deputy, Jail Deputy, Road Patrol Deputy, Deputy Investigator, Detective Sergeant, Lieutenant, and as Captain, served as Coordinator of the Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division (EMHSD) from October 2013 until his retirement in 2026; and*

WHEREAS, *Rockey was a member of the Hazardous Materials Response Team for 22 years, serving as Team Leader for 4 years, and graduated from the FBI Hazardous Devices School and was a Bomb Technician with the Berrien County Bomb Squad for 19 years; and*

WHEREAS, *throughout his career, he also served as a Crime Scene Investigation Team Evidence Technician, Honor Guard Member, Field Training Officer, and Defensive Tactics and Use of Force Instructor; and*

WHEREAS, *as Captain of EMHSD, Rockey and his team led extensive training initiatives that prepared thousands of first responders and community partners across West Michigan and beyond, strengthened regional emergency preparedness, and secured more than \$8 million in homeland security grant funding for Southwest Lower Michigan; and*

WHEREAS, *he played a key role coordinating multiple major emergencies, including the 2011 Sawyer truck explosion, the 2012 international terror plot, the 2012 apartment complex bombing, the 2017 Niles tornado, the 2018 flood, COVID-19 pandemic operations, the 2022 Christmas blizzard and power outage, the 2024 Kalamazoo tornado, support of the Palisades Nuclear Plant restart, and advancement of public alerting through the nation's largest nuclear Integrated Public Alert and Warning System study; and*

WHEREAS, *Rockey's exemplary leadership has been recognized with numerous commendations throughout his career, including most recently 2025 Distinguished Emergency Manager Award from the Michigan Emergency Management Association.*

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED *that the Berrien County Board of Commissioners hereby honors Rockey Adams for his outstanding service, dedication, and leadership, and expresses their sincere gratitude for his lasting contributions to the safety and security of Berrien County, while extending best wishes for a retirement filled with happiness and good health.*

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED *that Rockey Adams' career reflects great credit upon himself, his family, Berrien County, the State of Michigan, and the United States of America.*

*Respectfully submitted,
Berrien County Board of Commissioners*

Chairperson Elliott dispensed with the normal roll call and stated all in favor signify by saying aye. The resolution was approved. Motion carried, no nays

COMMITTEE REPORT(S) – The Personnel & Human Services (PHS), Administration and Finance Committees:
The PHS, Administration and Finance Committees presented their Committee Reports. Parent Committee minutes are available at www.berriencounty.org. Discussion was held.

PHS reported an enlightening report from GIS Director Erika Espeland running through all the changes that have been made and the upcoming changes. They had a discussion with Chairperson Elliott and Interim Administrator Mike Sepic about budget issues and HR staffing.

The Administration Committee reported Public Defender Scott Sanford discussed that he is putting together his grant application for 2027 and spoke of his hurdles with staffing and that he is meeting all his previous grant requirements. The regional Supervisor of MIDC suggests that he put that “they do not meet all the MIDC standards” because of the case load and number of trials. There are only so many trials that Attorneys can handle. MIDC has come up with a special counsel assignment that makes it hard for him to come up with numbers for his budget. Don’t be surprised if he asks for more money in his 2027 budget. Commissioner Curran then spoke about upcoming resolutions.

The Finance Committee reported that there were eight waivers, and two bids. Also, a resolution for claims less than \$25,000 for Corporate Attorney to fill out a form without having to go in front of the Board.

COMMISSIONER REPORT(S):

The Commissioners presented their outside committee reports. Discussion was held.

Commissioner Freehling informed the BOC that Berrien County was nominated for Economic Development and Impact along with other deserving candidates at the Chamber Breakfast.

Commissioner Yarbrough reported that the winner of the Economic Development and Impact award was the sisters that own Zo’s Mini Donuts food truck.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

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

Interim Sepic spoke of the reference to the email about the snowplow causing lawn damage and that there is a ticket made out to take care of it. The Parks Department received an award for their Silver Beach County Park Playground Project from the 2026 Great Lakes Park Facility Award. K-pep will be leaving Berrien County but will provide services from their other three locations in Kalamazoo, Muskegon, and Calhoun County.

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):

Sharon Brown, Benton Charter Township, discussed and passed out information on property that she owned that went to the Land Bank, that property was then sold. She is trying to file for claim surplus proceeds derived from the tax foreclosure sale. She was referred to the County Treasurer by Chairperson Elliott. The BOC does not handle disputes with property.

Adolf Pelzer, Hagar Township, spoke of North Lincoln Senior Center space for exercise and he is a member of the Coloma Senior Center that does not have that space.

Kevin Stack, Cass County, Berrien County Road Commission Supervisor, announced he turned in his resignation with the Berrien County Road Commission. Spoke of B.C. Road Commission accomplishments and advancements. Thanked the BOC and the Road Department and stated it has been an honor.

Chuck Heit, New Buffalo Township, thanked Kevin Stack for his service with the Road Department.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Commissioner Freehling informed the BOC about their next Strategic Planning meeting on March 11th, 2026, 1 P.M. to 4 P.M., at the Berrien County Conference Room on Napier Avenue in Benton Harbor.

Commissioner Curran recognized Kevin Stack and thanked him for his service.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS: None.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 A.M.

R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

Kristene Walton, Chief Deputy Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next BOC meeting.