

**HOUGHTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR MEETING  
DECEMBER 15, 2020**

The Houghton County Board of Commissioners held a Regular meeting on Tuesday, December 15, 2020, in the 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference room of the Courthouse, City of Houghton. The public was able to attend by Zoom.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Albert Koskela at 5:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance:

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Koskela.

Roll call:

The following commissioners responded to roll call done by the County Clerk, Jennifer Kelly-By Zoom:

Tom Tikkanen, District 1; Albert Koskela, District 2; Glenn Anderson-By Zoom, District 3; Gretchen Janssen-By Zoom, District 4; Roy Britz-By Zoom, District 5.

Approval of Minutes:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Tikkanen and seconded by Commissioner Britz to approve the November 13, 2020 minutes as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 5, Nays 0.

Approval of Agenda/Additions:

Commissioner Janssen asked to add the Houghton County Planning Commission for a question to the Agenda. They agreed to add it under the Planning Commission appointments.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Britz, seconded by Commissioner Anderson to approve the Agenda with the one (1) addition as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 5, Nays 0.

Public Comments:

None.

Approval of Bills:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Tikkanen to approve paying the bills submitted of \$ 863,094.58 as presented.

The Motion carried by the following vote:

YES: Anderson, Tikkanen, Koskela, Janssen, Britz 5.

NO: None 0.

Correspondence:

Chairman Koskela discussed 20 letters he received regarding the Health Department.

Commissioner Tikkanen discussed an email requesting a forensic audit on the Dominion voting machine. He said it would be presented to the County Office for review.

#### Reports:

##### Standing Committee:

Commissioner Anderson reported to the Board on the following: Expressed sympathy for the passing of Tom Casperson and Barbara Clark. He discussed the Portage Health Foundation and their work with UP Food Pantries, and DNR Trails Division. Glenn shared news about a recent Land and Water Conservation \$1.5 million grant, which will hopefully be matched by the DNR Trails Division for a total of \$3 million.

Commissioner Janssen reported to the Board on the following: Health Department and the recent meeting regarding the Environmental Health Code, the hiring of a new Medical Director for the WUPDH named Robert Lorensen, UP Resource and Conservation District grant opportunities and work to eradicate invasive species, and MSU Extension Office during the time of covid.

Commissioner Britz reported to the Board on the following: Will discuss his report under #7 on the Agenda.

Commissioner Tikkanen reported to the Board on the following: Solid Waste Committee and the November 24, 2020 meeting. He reported on the current status of the contract, and that our Civil Attorney advised us to not make any moves until the current contract with Waste Management is completed. Tom reported on the push to get credit and debit cards ready and in use at the Transfer Station, and also the possibility of future recycling bins located at the Transfer Station and maybe in some of our local municipalities, and that the proposed 5 year Capital Improvement Plan needs to be worked on. Tom talked about the Copper Country Recycling Initiative, and Michigan Tech University's Give Pulse Student group and also Dr. Charles Wallace and his interest to get involved and maybe even creating a phone app. Tom talked about MTU being in the newspaper regarding their recycling initiatives and that they are right now at the 18.9% rate. MTU was at 12% last year, and their goal long term is to be at 45%. Tom also shared the message of the Recreating Authority and calling their Winter meeting at 11 am on January 11, 2021. programs.

Commissioner Koskela reported to the Board on the following: Houghton County Sheriff Department and work camp labor negotiations and contracts have been completed for the next three (3) years, and that the contracts were fairly negotiated with our two (2) Union partners from the POAM and the AFSCME. These will be voted on later in the agenda.

#### County Officers:

Dennis Hext addressed the Board. T Hanger is coming along well, and we are working closely with our contractor DP Construction. We have the walls up, and are making good progress on the shell of the building.

#### New Business:

##### 1. Houghton County Planning Commission Appointments

The Board received three (3) applicants who wished for reappointment.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Janssen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to re-appoint Evan McDonald, John Larson, and Allan Aho to the Houghton County Planning Commission for three (3) year terms.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 5, Nays 0.

Commissioner Janssen asked Chairman Koskela to continue to the Addition on the Agenda that she requested.

Horst Schmidt addressed the Board, and asked about the recent influx and interest in marijuana shops opening in our community.

Commissioner Anderson questioned if a legal opinion is needed from Attorney Zappa for the Houghton County Planning Commission.

Commissioner Tikkanen suggested having the Houghton County Prosecutor review this matter.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Tikkanen, and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to honor the Houghton County Planning Commission's request and turn this matter over to the Houghton Prosecutor for review. This will be done once a written request is received from the Houghton County Planning Commission.

## 2. Houghton County Land Bank Authority Appointments

Chairman Koskela recommended Commissioner Tikkanen be reappointed.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to reappoint Commissioner Tikkanen and John Haeussler to the Houghton County Land Bank Authority Board for three (3) year terms.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 4, Nays 0. Commissioner Tikkanen abstained.

## 3. Designated Assessor Appointment

Ben Larson, Administrator, stated two (2) applications were received, and offered some background on this selection to be made by the Board. This action is required by the State, and Ben is working with Equalization Director, Cheryl Patrick, to get this done. Once a selection is made, Ben and Cheryl will ensure that the Townships vote on this selection, and that the County communicates this to the State before December 31 and the deadline.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Tikkanen to appoint J. Thomas Novascone as the Designated Assessor.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 5, Nays 0.  
(For Equalization records) YES-Anderson, Tikkanen, Koskela, Janssen, Britz.

## 4. UP State Fair Authority Appointment

Chairman Koskela recommended Steve Palosaari be reappointed.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Tikkanen and seconded by Commissioner Britz to reappoint Steve Palosaari to the UP State Fair Authority Board for a two (2) year term.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 5, Nays 0.

## 5. Copper Country Mental Health Appointments

Chairman Koskela recommended Kathleen Johnson and Zach Edgerton be reappointed to the Copper County Mental Health Board. These two appointments were supposed to happen during covid, but got delayed according to Director Cari Raboin. If approved, they will both be retroactive to last March, as they have been serving in their capacity since then.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Britz and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to reappoint Kathleen Johnson and Zach Edgerton to the Copper Country Mental Health Board for a three (3) year term and retroactive to March 2020.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 5, Nays 0.

## 6. Houghton Douglass Falls Park

Ben Larson, Administrator, stated there was encouragement from Brad Barnett and the Keweenaw Convention and Visitors Bureau, and an effort to collect letters of support for the proposed Houghton Douglass Falls Park. The State of Michigan has bought this land from the private landowner, and is considering the next steps if this is to become a marketed, known and safe State Park area. have Houghton Douglass Falls park be turned into a legitimate state park. A letter has been prepared for the Board to sign, and this effort will hopefully be moved forward soon. This park is located on M-26 above Lake Linden and below Calumet, and if approved would highlight Michigan's tallest waterfall. This would obviously be good for tourism, and give more reasons for out of towns to come to the area. The DNR has had recent talks with the Steering Committee for the Recreation Authority, and this subject was talked about at length during those meetings. This letter and many others from the local municipalities and tourism outlets will be sent to the Michigan DNR Executive Director Douglas Rich.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Tikkanen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to sign the letter of support for the Houghton Douglass Falls Park.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 5, Nays 0.

## 7. 911 Radios

Commissioner Britz stated there was originally 371 radios purchased and they are in need of replacement. The money is budgeted for purchasing 75 new radios each year until they are all replaced.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Britz and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to move forward with the purchase of the new radios.

The Motion carried by the following vote:

YES: Britz, Janssen, Tikkanen, Koskela, Anderson 5.

NO: None 0.

## 8. Labor Negotiations

Chairman Koskela stated an agreement was reached with the Houghton County Sheriff Department Union and the correction officers at the work camp for a three (3) year contract.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Britz and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to approve the three (3) year contracts with the Houghton County Sheriff Department and the correction officers at the work camp as presented.

The Motion carried by the following vote:

YES: Britz, Janssen, Tikkanen, Koskela, Anderson 5.

NO: None 0.

## 9. Proposed Environmental Health Code – WUPHD

Chairman Koskela stated he received 40 emails and 30 letters against the Health Code.

Commissioner Tikkanen recommended the three (3) commissioners speak who are on the WUPHD Board. Commissioner Anderson discussed information on the WUPHD meeting where over 100 people attended, the basic premises, and what was covered in the meeting.

Chairman Koskela stated that the first code was in 1978 and amended in 1998.

Commissioner Tikkanen stated in his mind, it is an effort to implement a new code for a statewide Health Code. Michigan does not have such a code currently. He stated a concern that was shared that if approved, that there would be annual inspections on septic systems at the cost of the tax payers.

Chairman Koskela stated he wants to read the 44-page report before he decides.

Commissioner Anderson said the WUPHD is not wanting action taken now as they are still working on the report. He further stated there is no annual septic system review or he would object now. He does not support a statewide code.

Chairman Koskela stated the current UP Code is good and works for the Upper Peninsula just fine without changes. He offered his lifetime of experience in well drilling, working with the many rock structures and ground forms of the Upper Peninsula, and he discussed the differing underground realities of the Upper Peninsula, and how different that they would be from any of the downstate areas and sites being considered.

Old Business:

1. Old Transfer Station

Commissioner Tikkanen stated that himself and Commissioner Janssen and Ben Larson went and looked at the old transfer station.

Commissioner Janssen stated the location is in a fantastic location, but that the building is deteriorating.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Britz to sell the old transfer station for a minimum bid of \$30,000.00. This proposed sale would fully acknowledge the problems with the site and we would sell it “as is”, and a Motion to list it for bids for 90 days was discussed.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 5, Nays 0.

Appropriations:

1. Copper Country Mental Health 1/12<sup>th</sup> Appropriation of \$13,707.91

A Motion was made by Commissioner Tikkanen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to approve the \$13,707.91 payment as presented.

The Motion carried by a voice vote: Ayes 5, Nays 0.

Public Comments:

Chairman Koskela stated he was attending a meeting on Wednesday regarding the opioid litigation.

Jennifer Kelly, County Clerk, asked the Board if they would like to have a representative from Dominion address the Board. She further stated three (3) risk limit audits were performed in Calumet Township, Hancock Township and the City of Hancock along with two (2) absentee counting boards. A hand count was done at each precinct for the senate race, and every ballot matched the tabulator. She praised the clerks and the election workers.

Linda Belote addressed the Board regarding wanting to view the Board Packets on the County website along with the Agenda.

Eric Kiilunen addressed the Board regarding Café Rosetta.

Matt Eliason addressed the Board regarding the WUPHD Code. Attorney Eliason stated he was representing 6-8 contractors. He recommended the Board use extreme caution as this Code is considered.

Randy McClellan addressed the Board regarding the WUPHD Code.

Eric Kiilunen addressed the Board regarding opening the ice rinks.

Commissioner Tikkanen agreed that the hockey arenas should be open.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Tikkanen to write a letter of support to Governor Whitmer and the WUPHD to reopen the bars, restaurants and ice rinks after the 12/20 order expires.

The Motion carried by the following vote:

YES: Anderson, Tikkanen, Koskela, Janssen, Britz 5.

Commissioner Tikkanen thanked people for the letters and emails. He discussed the concern of the discipline or removal of Director Tanya Rule, as employees have lost jobs, school and college lockdowns are effecting athletes dreams, there is turmoil in homes due to alcoholism and drug abuse, spousal and child abuse, and in his opinion, people can be called upon to use common sense when dealing with the pandemic. He quoted a report that stated the 2020 death rate is the same as 2018.

Chairman Koskela stated the current Order is taking people's livelihoods away, and he talked about the waitresses and waiters, small business and restaurant owners and other who are feeling the strain. He mentioned that if those making the rules had to stay home and not get a paycheck, how he thought that things would change rapidly.

Announcements:

None.

Adjournment:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Britz to adjourn.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 5, Nays 0.

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Albert Koskela, Chairman

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Jennifer Kelly, County Clerk