

**HOUGHTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING
OCTOBER 12, 2021**

The Houghton County Board of Commissioners held a Regular meeting on Tuesday, October 12, 2021, in the 5th Floor Conference room of the Courthouse, City of Houghton. The public was attending in person.

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 Jennifer Kelly, County Clerk:

Tom Tikkanen, District 1; Albert Koskela, District 2; Glenn Anderson, District 3; Gretchen Janssen, District 4.

Absent: Roy Britz, District 5.

Approval of Minutes:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson, seconded by Commissioner Tikkanen to approve the September 29, 2021 and the October 5, 2021 minutes as presented.

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

Approval of Agenda/Additions:

Commissioner Janssen requesting adding two (2) things to the Agenda. #1. Rescheduling 11/9/21 meeting, and #2. Discuss Resolution Secure MI Vote Petition.

Commissioner Anderson requested adding two (2) things to the Agenda. #1. Ben Larson's new resignation date of 10/22/21, and #2. Thank you to McBroom and Markkanen.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Janssen, seconded by Commissioner Anderson to approve the Agenda with the four (4) additions as presented.

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

Public Comments-Agenda Items Only (5 minutes per participant):

Horst Schmidt addressed the Board regarding the Secure MI Vote Petition.
Mary Sears addressed the Board regarding the Secure MI Vote Petition.
Beth Flynn addressed the Board regarding the Secure MI Vote Petition.
William Keith addressed the Board regarding the Secure MI Vote Petition.

Approval of Bills:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Tikkanen and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to approve paying the bills submitted of \$ 2,224,254.97 as presented.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

YES: Tikkanen, Janssen, Koskela, Anderson 4.

NO: None 0.

Correspondence:

None.

Reports:

1. Standing committee

Commissioner Janssen reported to the Board on the following:

She attended the MAC and UPACC Conferences.

Commissioner Anderson reported to the Board on the following:

He thanked the Apportionment Committee for their hard work, and welcomed Sheriff Joshua Saaranen for attending his first Board meeting as Sheriff. He also thanked Representative Markkanen and Senator McBroom for their hard work on the 2018 Flood Match along with Kevin Harju, and Ben Larson.

Commissioner Tikkanen reported to the Board on the following:

He stated he felt the MI Vote Petition was a bi-partisan effort, and was definitely political. He discussed the Recreational Authority and the trail repairs between Dollar Bay and lake Linden, and stated the repairs are funded now.

He gave an update on the 5th Street clean up in the Calumet from the fire. He praised all the workers from the small Village of Calumet up to the Environmental Agency that assisted in the cleanup. He thanked Congressman Bergman for touring the site, and assisting the Petition with UPA for the cleanup. The Land Bank and the village will now work on land ownership.

He stated Dennis Hext will discuss flight diversion in his report.

He stated the Houghton County Transfer Station will be accepting applications for a Manager. There will be an ad for this position put into the Gazette and for the applications to be sent to the County Clerk's Office with a 14-day deadline. The Transfer Station will begin accepting credit cards next week, and recycling is expanding to five (5) day schedule Monday through Friday. It will not be available on Saturdays, and they will be announcing night hours soon. There has been 12 ½ tons of recycling hauled from the Transfer Station to the Marquette Recycling Facility.

There will be a meeting at the Carnegie Museum in Calumet by Zoom and in person on October 21, 2021 at 1:30 pm. Brad Austin from Solid Waste from Marquette and Tracey a UP Recycling Expert will be speaking.

Chairman Koskela reported to the Board on the following:

Welcomed Elizabeth Bjorn, Administrator; Becky Ylitalo, Accountant, and Josh Saaranen, Sheriff to the meeting and congratulated them on their new positions.

Commissioner Anderson told Commissioner Tikkanen he felt Commissioner Tikkanen does not give himself enough credit for all of his hard work for the work he has done for the 5th Street clean up from the fire.

2. Special Committee

None.

3. County Officers

Todd LaRoux, Building Inspector, stated the BS&A system has been implemented for his department, and the training has begun. He thanked Ben Larson for all of his help.

Dennis Hext, Airport Manager, addressed the Board stating the amount of boarding for flights for October are on track. There is a Sun Country charter on November 19, 2021. They are looking at a possible alternative for the airport if a plane cannot land. They may use Rhinelander and complete the trip by bus or refuel and come back to the Houghton County Airport if possible. The Board discussed the low costs in travel at this time is due to the delta variant.

Jacob Djerf, Deputy Equalization Director, discussed the yearly Apportionment Plan that the Board received in their packet.

Josh Saaranen, Sheriff, updated the Board on the progress being made with his staff since he was appointed.

New Business:

1. Public Act 152 Opt out for Healthcare Costs Exemption

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson, seconded by Commissioner Janssen to opt out of Public Act 152 for Healthcare Costs Exemption.

The Motion carried by the following vote.

YES: Anderson, Janssen, Tikkanen, Koskela 4.

NO: None 0.

2. Marina Plume Cleanup Completed

Ben Larson, Administrator, thanked MDOT and MD Deline for their work. He stated there was no cost to the County. The companies installed silt fencing, and made sure that the outlet and waterfall way were cleared out completely of the unwanted sediment. Thanks to a permit from EGLE and the Army Corps of Engineers, the County has five (5) years to continue to clear out the Marina Plume at no cost.

3. Lift Bridge CFR Request to UP MDOT

Ben Larson, Administrator, advised the Board that all of the local letters of support for a Code of Federal Regulation has been sent to the MDOT Regional Office in Marquette. The Board was given a copy of those letters in their packet.

4. Laurium Credit Union Building Property

Commissioner Tikkanen stated that Houghton County owns the building where the Torch Lake Federal Credit Union rents space in Laurium. He stated the County does not need this property, but the County does need access to the tower and electronics in the building. The Credit Union has offered \$325,000.00 for the property. He felt it was a positive action to sell this property and get it back on the tax rolls.

5. Houghton County Arena Property

Ben Larson, Administrator, stated the City of Hancock is discussing having this property. The County currently owes \$430,000.00, and there is a \$40,000.00 payment coming due soon. The Houghton County Arena is debt for the County. He stated if the City of Hancock took over this property it would be a win for every tax payer.

6. Sharon Avenue Church Update

Ben Larson, Administrator stated there was a Zoom meeting with himself, Commissioner Britz, Portage Township, and the City of Houghton. He stated the Portage Township Board is willing to help, and wants the County to buy the property. The Portage Township Board is having a meeting on October 18th. Larson believes that the Portage Township Board will agree to a plan to have the property purchased now, then they have asked the County to show them that the County has clear title to the land and own it after the purchase is made. At the townships meeting on the 18th, the township Board will vote to support the future of the project, and that they would consider a future annexation with a 9-year window to get a millage for the jail passed. At that point the township Board would consider a full annexation to the City of Houghton.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson, seconded by Commissioner Tikkanen to have Ben Larson, Administrator, to finalize the deal before October 22, 2021.

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

7. Yearly Apportionment Plan adoption

A Motion was made by Commissioner Tikkanen, seconded by Commissioner Janssen to adopt the Yearly Apportionment Plan as presented.

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

8. Reschedule November 9, 2021 Board of Commissioner Meeting

Elizabeth Bjorn, Administrator, stated there are conflicts for the November 9, 2021 meeting.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Tikkanen, seconded by Commissioner Janssen to reschedule the November 9, 2021 meeting to November 16, 2021 at 5:00 pm.

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

9. Resolution to Secure MI Vote

Commissioner Anderson said he opposes anything to make it hard for the elderly to vote.

Commissioner Tikkanen said he is an advocate for senior citizens, and feels this Petition is politically motivated.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Janssen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to oppose the Resolution to Secure MI Vote as presented.

The Motion failed by the following vote.

YES: Janssen, Anderson 2.

NO: Tikkanen, Koskela 2.

10. Trail Fund Thank you

Commissioner Anderson discussed the \$2.8 million in road funding for the Houghton County Road Commission, and the \$4 million for the trail funding for the trails between Dollar Bay to Lake Linden. He wanted to thank Representative Markkanen and Senator McBroom for their work in getting this money to Houghton County.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Tikkanen to thank Representative Markkanen and Senator McBroom for their hard work.

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

11. Ben Larson's new resignation date of October 22, 2021

A Motion was made by Commissioner Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Janssen to accept Ben Larson's new resignation date of October 22, 2021 as presented. The Board thanked him for his hard work and stated many of his accomplishments.

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

Public Comments (5 minutes per participant):

Horst Schmidt addressed the Board.

Mary Sears addressed the Board.

Announcements:

None.

Adjournment:

A Motion was made by Commissioner Tikkanen and seconded by Commissioner Anderson to adjourn the meeting at 5:50 pm.

The Motion carried by a voice vote. Ayes 4, Nays 0.

Albert Koskela, Chairman

Jennifer Kelly, County Clerk