



IT'S LONG PAST TIME FOR A CHANGE ON THE COUNTY COMMISSION

November 1, 2022

One week from today, voters in Grand Traverse County will go to the polls to let us all know whether they are ready to fix the most dysfunctional public body in our region.

As we have painstakingly [documented](#), county Commissioners Rob Hentschel, Brad Jewett, Darryl Nelson and Penny Morris – all of whom are running for re-election – have shown that they are unfit for office. Over and over, they have wasted the public's time and money by stoking divisive culture war disputes over vaccines, masks and guns while ignoring pleas from county residents to address the lack of affordable housing, the childcare crisis and gaps in high-speed internet access in rural Northwest Michigan.

We can do something about that next Tuesday by electing the seven Democratic candidates who are running for BOC seats on what will be a new nine-member commission. No Democratic candidates ran in districts 1 and 8.

In District 2, Traverse City's East Side, **Lauren Flynn**, Director of Party Operations for the GT Dems, faces political newcomer Ellen Koenig. Flynn has a master's degree in business management and is a Senior Education Partnership Representative at Davenport University at NMC's University Center. In contrast, Koenig's resume is wafer thin. She says she has lived in Traverse City for 45 years, has raised six children and is a "local law enforcement and First Responder supporter." The Record-Eagle also quoted her as saying she "is involved with a lot of new political organizations," declining to identify any of them. District 2 tilts decidedly Democratic and Flynn should win this race handily.



In District 3, Traverse City's West Side, City Commissioner **Ashlea Walter** faces Joe Welsh, a MAGA election denier who participated in a [pay-to-play scheme](#) to bribe Charlevoix businessman William Hindle to drop out of the GOP primary in the 37th Senate district. Walter also is opposed by former county Commissioner Tom Mair, a Green Party candidate who was embroiled in an ethics scandal in 2019, when he voted to appoint his wife to the library board. With a long list of accomplishments as a city commissioner, arts commissioner, communications professional and small business owner, Walter is expected to prevail in a race in which her district also favors Democrats.



In District 4, which encompasses Garfield Township and parts of Traverse City and slightly favors Republicans, **Dave Fashbaugh**, the human resources and principal officer for International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 498 in Traverse City, is running against an incompetent incumbent, Jewett, one of Hentschel's fellow culture warriors. Jewett was an early Covid denier, hectoring the county health officer with inane comments and cockeyed claims



about infection rates and herd immunity. He sponsored the passage of a [“Pandemic Resolution”](#) in 2021 that instructed local law enforcement to ignore state health department emergency orders during the pandemic. Jewett also has repeatedly refused to recuse himself on votes involving the county-owned Grand Traverse Pavilions even though he owns a nursing home that is in direct competition with the Pavilions. Fashbaugh pledges to bring honesty, integrity and respect to the board. That would be a welcome change.

In District 5, which includes Acme and the Williamsburg area, **Bruce Moore**, a retired operations research analyst and keen observer of the board, is running against Hentschel, the most toxic politician in our region. Not only has Hentschel been the tip of the spear on virtually every culture war battle the BOC has waged, but he has been accused by his ex-wife of [sexual assault](#) and [sabotaging her vehicle](#) during ugly divorce proceedings. He also is a carpetbagger who claims to be living in a \$60,000 mobile home on N. Three Mile Rd. when he actually lives outside his district on E. Arbutus Lake Rd. In a district that tilts red, Moore, a Safe Harbor volunteer, would champion affordable housing and jail reform and would be a welcome voice and tireless advocate for our community’s most vulnerable citizens.



In District 6, a majority red district that encompasses the county’s East Side from the Antrim line to Fife Lake, **Amanda Scott** is running against Nelson, a right-wing election denier who has firmly aligned himself with Hentschel. Scott serves on the Fife Lake Planning Commission and the county’s Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and she works for Child & Family Services of Northwestern Michigan as the YouthWork AmeriCorps director. She staunchly opposed the irresponsible decision by Nelson and his fellow Republicans in March to [transfer Twin Lakes Park](#) to Long Lake Township. Scott has a background in public policy and would be a breath of fresh air on this board.



In District 7, which comprises Old Mission Peninsula and part of Traverse City and favors Democrats, local attorney **T.J. Andrews** faces term-limited Sen. Wayne Schmidt, a squishy lifelong political creature who oozes insincerity, particularly when speaking about controversial issues such as [reproductive rights](#). Andrews specializes in environmental and energy law and serves as legal counsel to the Watershed Center. She was at the forefront of efforts to draw new districts in the county and would be a committed and articulate champion for workers in our region by addressing unmet housing and childcare needs. Andrews also would help to set a new tone for the BOC by demanding transparency, civility and ethical conduct devoid of conflicts of interest.



In District 9, in Long Lake Township, **Pam Kaiser** is running against Morris, who is easily the least qualified member of the BOC. Finishing her first term, Morris is a potted plant at commission meetings, rarely speaking and usually embarrassing herself when she does. Kaiser has devoted her life to family, education and community-building. She has been a teacher, counselor and college instructor at Purdue University and Northwestern Michigan College, and she is co-chair of TCAPS’ District Advisory Committee. If elected in a district that tilts decidedly red, Kaiser would focus on providing access to affordable housing, preservation of our area’s natural resources and improved access to mental health care.



If you remember nothing else about this miserable board’s two-year term, this image should be seared into your memory. It embodies everything that is deeply disturbing about the Republicans who control the BOC. On January 20, 2021, Commissioner Ron Clous, who thankfully chose not to run for re-election, pulled out an assault rifle during a livestreamed BOC meeting – and NOTHING HAPPENED. Clous was not censured and he and Hentschel have never apologized for an incident that subjected our community to worldwide condemnation and humiliation. We hope that those of you who have yet to vote will remember this image on November 8.



WEDNESDAY'S BOC AGENDA: WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Wednesday's agenda is unusually light. There is a large consent agenda that includes the meeting minutes of various boards and commissions and 2% grant applications to the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians from the tribe's video gaming revenue. Commissioners also are expected to approve a request from the Sheriff's Department to buy seven new Dodge Chargers (agenda item 9a) and appoint an ad hoc committee to interview candidates for expiring terms on BATA, the Board of Public Works, the Commission on Aging and other boards and commissions (agenda item 9b).

SUNDRIES

A SPIKE IN CHILDHOOD VACCINE OPT-OUTS – Last Friday, Bridge ran a [disturbing story](#) on the increasing number of parents of school-age children who are seeking vaccination waivers for preventable childhood diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) and other diseases.

The story, which was reprinted in today's Record-Eagle, reported that five Michigan counties – including Leelanau and Kalkaska – had waiver rates in 2021 that topped 10% of the eligible children in those counties. The other three counties were Lapeer, Alger and Houghton in the U.P., which had an astonishing opt-out rate of 19.4%.

Here in Grand Traverse County, parents of 6.1% of the 3,630 kindergarteners and 7th graders sought vaccine waivers last year, Bridge reported.

The increase in requests for vaccine waivers is a depressing outgrowth of whacko “parents’ rights” and “anti-wokeness” groups like “Moms for Liberty,” “Citizens Liberating Michigan” and “Citizens for Sanity” (a more accurate name for the latter organization would be “Insane Citizens for Sanity”). These groups have been threatening and harassing school board members and health professionals across the country. They not only

pushed for schools to remain open during the height of the pandemic, their members have said it is “child abuse” to require children to wear masks in school.

Kalkaska County's 11.8% vaccine opt-out rate isn't all that surprising considering that the Kalkaska County commissioners passed an anti-vaccination and anti-mask ordinance similar to the [“Resolution in Support of Vaccine Awareness and Medical Autonomy”](#) that Grand Traverse County commissioners passed in August 2021.

As for Leelanau County, while alarming, the county's 10.3% opt-out rate is an improvement from the 20% of parents in the county who obtained vaccine waivers during the 2013-14 school year.

Since the late 1970s, Michigan has required kindergarteners and children who have reached the 7th grade to receive a series of vaccines that prevent horrifying infections of the brain, spinal cord and bloodstream. They include the vaccine for polio, which paralyzed hundreds of thousands of children near the turn of the century. Following a global effort to immunize children, polio was thought to be eradicated in the United States [until recently](#).

It's a sad commentary on the political state of this country that we have breweries hosting [Pints for Polio](#) challenges to try to persuade ignorant anti-vaxers to immunize their children.

PETE BUTTIGIEG CAMPAIGNS FOR DEMS – Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg – pictured below with GT Dems Chairman Chris Cracchiolo – was in Traverse City over the weekend to campaign for Gov. Whitmer and meet with local Democrats.



Buttigieg met with BOC candidates and members of the GT Dems' Steering Committee before attending a fundraiser for Whitmer and traveling to Charlevoix to campaign for Whitmer, congressional candidate Dr. Bob Lorinser and Michigan Senate candidate Barb Conley.

Buttigieg and his husband, Chasten, a Traverse City native, moved to Traverse City this summer.

TRAVERSE INDIVISIBLE ENDORSEMENTS

– Traverse Indivisible, a progressive non-partisan organization whose members have worked hard to keep the BOC focused on issues that matter to county residents, has published a list of endorsements in next week's election. It includes non-partisan races such as the Michigan Supreme Court, the TCAPS board and NMC's Board of Trustees.

You can download TI's endorsements [here](#).

BOC CALLS SPECIAL MEETING – Instead of hosting its usual meeting two weeks from tomorrow, on November 16, the BOC has called a special meeting for Monday, November 14. The reason: November 15 is the beginning of deer gun season.

And that's a wrap. Stay safe, stay engaged and remember to Vote Blue next Tuesday. Thanks for reading.



HELPFUL LINKS & INFO

BOC meetings are usually held at 8 a.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. The next meeting is November 2.

You can find a link to the agenda and minutes at:

<https://grandtraversecounty.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=375>

You can watch a livestream of the meetings and view replays of previous meetings online at:

<http://www.co.grand-traverse.mi.us/184/Board-of-Commissioners>

You will have to attend the in-person meeting in order to make a public comment. The BOC permits public comment for three minutes at the beginning and end of each meeting.

The BOC has seven commissioners – five Republicans and two Democrats – each of whom represents a district. You can find your commissioner at this link:

<https://www.grandtraversedems.com/boc>

You can find contact info for the BOC members here:

<http://grandtraverse.org/184/Board-of-Commissioners>

You can email all the commissioners at this address:

commissioners@gtcountymi.gov