



Tuesday, January 14, 2025

The Beacon is a publication written by the Beacon Staff; the editorial views expressed are the views of the authors.

Commissioner Ancillary Board Assignments Top Agenda

Wednesday, January 15, 9 am

by Linda Pepper

Expected highlights:

- Laura Glenn will present a PowerPoint on the newly opened GT Mental Health Crisis and Access Center. They are currently open Sunday through Thursday, 8 am to 8 pm. They forecast a 24/7/365 schedule beginning July 1, 2025.
- New leases between City and County for 501 Front St (currently shared by MSU extension and TC Fire Dept.) and for the Law Enforcement Center on Woodmere. No rent for the city to pay for LEC until MSU Extension leaves the Front St. Building (by Dec 31, 2026). Then the city pays the county \$105K yearly. Regularizes a lease whose terms were never fulfilled.
- Project Alpha Progress Report. There have been questions of the size currently under consideration for storage. They estimate at least a month for budget estimates after schematic designs are finalized.
- Commissioner Assignments - Chair Sieffert has this responsibility.
- Establish a work group to create an equitable process for use of opioid and marijuana funds. Administration recommends two commissioners as well as Administrator, Deputy Administrator, Finance Director and Civil Counsel for this work group.
- Closed session: Consider Emergency Management Plan and the information exempt from discussion or disclosure under state law for security reasons.

We invite you to attend and observe the commissioners in action. Public Comment is your direct voice and you can give a copy of your remarks to the clerk to be included in the minutes. Local government is where we have the most influence.

Votes for Chair and Vice-Chair Reflect Bi-Partisan Board Wednesday, January 8

by Linda Pepper

A packed house saw major changes in the GT BOC. The BOC has four Republican men (Hentschel, Nelson McAllister and Sieffert), one Republican woman (Morris) and four Democratic women (Andrews, Flynn, Spence and Walter). With the sexual crime allegations looming and Hentschel having been chair for 6 years, Hentschel was not nominated. Bonnie Scheele explained that as clerk she would accept nominations for Chair and then poll the nine commissioners. Scott Sieffert (District 8) nominated himself and no one else was nominated. He received all nine votes. The same procedure had Andrews nominated by Walter, Morris nominated herself and McAllister nominated himself. Andrews received votes from all four Democratic women and Chair Sieffert. Morris received the votes of herself, Hentschel and Nelson. McAllister voted for himself. With five votes, Andrews became the Vice Chair.

Before the election of the Chair, there was a half hour of Public Comment. Nine persons said Hentschel should resign. Jim Carruthers asked why we don't believe women who report sexual assault and undergo an invasive procedure like a rape kit. Most commenters focused on the distraction of these accusations and the unwanted publicity for Grand Traverse County. When asked for a show of hands by the audience, about $\frac{3}{4}$ supported Hentschel's resignation.

Four persons supported Hentschel, focusing on the fact that nothing had been charged or proven by this time. Katie Kniss, Chair of the GT Republicans, demanded the Republican commissioners stick together and elect Nelson as Chair and Hentschel as Vice Chair. Two other persons commented on other topics.

The four Democratic commissioners supported a motion to support some evening meetings. However, it did not receive enough support to pass. The assignments of commissioners to committees and boards was postponed until the Jan 15th meeting for the new Chair to gather requests.

Board Resumes Discussion of Safety Policy for County Buildings and Employees Main Meeting Following Organizational Meeting

by Linda Pepper

This was a brief meeting (45 minutes). Chair Sieffert highlighted the problems recorded in the Traverse Area District Library minutes with homeless persons starting in November. Commissioner Walter pointed out that this was usual at this time of the year and had already been dealt with and mitigated. Nelson asked for the ARPA report to be corrected to show the grant to Whitewater Township was changed in December to go towards a fire engine, not a wetland project.

Andrews, McAllister and Sieffert were appointed to an Ad Hoc committee to work with the city/county safety committee. The custom questions for the National Community Survey were discussed and sent back for one more iteration. We may see the next iteration on the Jan. 15th agenda.

Republican Response to New Chairs for the BOC

By Linda Pepper and Harold Lassers

The GT GOP newsletter has a quote that will help me sleep better at night. “We are on the cusp of becoming a blue county”. The GOP chair wrote about her concerns and anger about Scott Sieffert and his support of TJ Andrews for Vice Chair. Meanwhile the Democrats remain committed to bi-partisan work. [Here is a link to the articles in the January Grand Traverse GOP Newsletter.](#)

New Jail?

by Linda Pepper

In my view, the front page, in-depth article on the GT County jail in Sunday’s Record-Eagle raises many valid points. I believe that the BOC should commit to a new jail. The jail needs a plan that considers the mental health needs of the inmates as well as the needs of staff and families of incarcerated people.

An important lesson learned from the recently opened GT Mental Health Crisis and Access Center, is that public support and pressure can influence government action. I believe money can be found.

Please read both the article and the editorial. Aging Jail is Shot

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BbfoUiCis06Yjf486XxJSC-H2194M4GR/view?usp=share_link

It is Time to Address the Aging Jail Issue.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BcsrdJQvtrmdLzbXqUA6Tmlt7mFOMa-/view?usp=share_link

HELPFUL LINKS & INFO

BOC meetings are usually held at 9 am on the first and third Wednesday of the month.

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

<https://grandtraversecounty.civicweb.net/Portal/>

You can watch a livestream of the meetings at:

<https://www.tacm.tv/govtvnow.asp>

The BOC permits public comment up to three minutes each at the beginning and end of each meeting. Public comment remotely is not allowed. If you wish to make a public comment, then you will have to attend the in-person meeting.

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

<https://www.gtcountymi.gov/184/Board-of-Commissioners>

You can email all the commissioners at this address:

commissioners@gtcountymi.gov