

**CASS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORKSHOP**

January 16, 2024

Chair Jones called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. in the Commission Chambers on Tuesday, January 16, 2024.

Clerk/Register Monica McMichael called roll:

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: RJ Lee, Roseann Marchetti, Ryan Laylin, Samuel Barrera, Jeremiah Jones, Mary Howie, Joyce Locke and James Lawrence.

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None.

OTHERS PRESENT: County Administrator Matthew Newton, Clerk/Register Monica McMichael, Sheriff Behnke, Treasurer Anderson, Judge Bealor, Drain Commissioner VanBelle, Undersheriff Roach, GIS Director Erika Espeland, Veterans Director Karee Krause, Marketing Director Ambrosia Neldon, Conservation District Director Korie Blyveis and Ontwa Township Supervisor Jerry Marchetti.

COMMISSIONER BYLAWS/RULES OF PROCEDURE

Commissioner Howie opened discussion on the Commissioner Bylaws and Rules of Procedure. She questioned the two documents and wanted to ensure that they did not contradict each other. Administrator Newton informed board members that the two documents were combined into one. Commissioner Howie requested that a revision date be added.

Section 1.8 - Commissioners verified that the length of term for the Chair of the Board of Commissioners was one year. Administrator Newton stated that he would draft a resolution to re-affirm the one-year term.

Section 1.2 – Administrator Newton would update the length of term for commissioners from two years to four years.

Section 2.1 – Board members discussed preparation of board meeting agendas and asked why the County Administrator no longer prepared them. Chair Jones stated that the Chair assumed the role of agenda preparation when he became chair in 2022. He added that any commissioner could add or delete items on the agenda. Vice Chair Barrera stated that he had a template for submission of motions and resolutions. Administrator Newton informed commissioners that the county was looking at agenda preparation software that would allow individuals to send items electronically through workflow.

Section 2.3 – Commissioners questioned the word “oldest”.

Section 3.4 – The order of business should be updated.

Section 4.2 – Commissioner Howie questioned the conflict-of-interest statement. Discussion followed. Chair Jones stated that many boards required members to sign a conflict-of-interest form.

Section 4.5 A – An item may be placed on any “**current or future**” Board agenda by motion approved by a majority vote of the Commissioners present.

Section 5.4 – This was revised at the December Regular Board of Commissioners Meeting.

Commissioner Marchetti asked that meetings include two Public Comments – one at the beginning of meetings for agenda items only and another at the end of meetings for comment on any items.

Section 3.2 C – Commissioner Marchetti asked that Administrator Newton add that the board must abide by the Open Meetings Act 267 of 1976.

ROAD PATROL WAGE DISCUSSION

Sheriff Behnke informed commissioners that road deputies appreciated the most recent offer from the county. He explained that deputies rejected the offer because it forced new hires into a defined compensation pension plan. Current deputies were concerned that too few employees would contribute to the pension, resulting in issues for the current deputies. Sheriff Behnke went on to state that departments across the state who had moved to defined compensation pension plans were returning to defined benefit plans due to the shortage of certified police officers. Commissioners and the Sheriff discussed current incentives for recruiting police officers. Chair Jones requested Finance Director Rentfrow to research the CCSO Road Deputies staying in the defined benefit pension plan.

Sheriff Behnke informed board members that since the pension was altered, eleven employees had left the Sheriff's Office for other employment. They stated the pension was their reason for leaving. He informed the board that two additional employees gave notice they were leaving earlier that week. There were also two road deputies planning to retire later that year.

Commissioner Lawrence asked if officers would be willing to come to work at Cass County for a defined compensation pension plan.

Administrator Newton suggested the board approve an increase in salary or look at options other than a defined benefit MERS plan.

Sheriff Behnke informed commissioners that out of five police departments in the county, county deputies ranked 4th out of 5 in rate of pay.

Commissioner Lawrence suggested that the MERS pension trigger be removed, an employee contribution cap of 10% be implemented, salaries be increased by 6% and new hires be included in the defined benefit pension plan.

Administrator Newton stated that he would ask Finance Director Rentfrow to run the numbers.

Commissioner Laylin informed board members that he needed to leave the meeting at 4:30 p.m. Because the last two agenda items were added by him, he asked to remove them from the agenda.

SESC DISCUSSION

Drain Commissioner Jeff VanBelle led discussion on issues with the Soil Erosion Program. He advised that the state audit conducted by EGLE was problematic for counties across the state. The Cass County soil erosion

program was cited on four deficiencies. Three were addressed; however, the first issue consisted of a lack of funding. VanBelle reported that permit fees in Cass County were already high and he suggested not raising them.

Commissioner Laylin reported that county residents were unhappy with the way the SESC Program was currently being managed. He also wanted assurance that funding provided by the county would be used only for soil erosion.

Drain Commissioner VanBelle went on to explain that Cass County had a large number of lakes that led to more permits than counties with larger populations. He used the example of Kalamazoo County having 231 open permits compared to Cass County having 300 open permits.

Drain Commissioner VanBelle suggested that the county provide the Conservation District with the \$76,000 of funding as requested. He cautioned the county against resuming soil erosion services in the midst of an audit as the State Department of EGLE may be overly involved in the move.

Commissioner Locke provided Conservation District Korie Blyvies with various operational questions.

Administrator Newton stated that he would prepare a motion to be added to the January 18, 2024, Special Meeting Agenda. The motion would include language specifying the funds should only be used for SESC purposes.

MISCELLANEOUS

Commissioner Laylin thanked emergency services who worked through the weekend in the snow and frigid temperatures.

Commissioner Marchetti thanked Maintenance Director Dave Reiff and his crew who worked the weekend to ensure parking lots and sidewalks were clear for the 24-hour operations services.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m.

Approved: _____
Date

Jeremiah Jones, Chair

Monica McMichael, Clerk/Register