



CASS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

LAW ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

March 12, 2024

1. **CALL TO ORDER** — The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Mary Howie at 2:00 p.m.
2. **ROLL CALL** — Members present included Cassopolis Police Chief Todd McMichael, Sheriff Richard Behnke, Prosecutor Victor Fitz, Dowagiac City Manager Kevin Anderson, Commissioner Mary Howie, Edwardsburg/Ontwa Police Chief Doug Westerick, Commissioner Ryan Laylin, Commissioner Roseann Marchetti, Commissioner RJ Lee and Administrator Matthew Newton. Howard Township Supervisor Bill Kasprzak was absent.
2. **PUBLIC COMMENT** — Public comment was given.
3. **SELECTION OF CHAIR & VICE CHAIR**
 - A. **CHAIR** — Commissioner Laylin nominated Commissioner Howie as chair. Commissioner Lee seconded. Commissioner Howie nominated Commissioner Lee as chair. Prosecutor Fitz seconded. Commissioner Howie declined the nomination. Commissioner Lee became chair.
 - B. **VICE CHAIR** — Sheriff Behnke nominated Prosecutor Fitz for vice chair. Commissioner Laylin seconded. Prosecutor Fitz accepted.
4. **MEETING SCHEDULE** — Meetings will be held at 2 p.m. each Tuesday in Commissioners' Chambers.
5. **ADDITIONS & DELETIONS TO AGENDA** — Lee moved, Howie seconded, CARRIED, to add an agenda item to consider the approval of Roger Boyer to the committee.
6. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA** — Marchetti moved, Behnke seconded, CARRIED, to approve the agenda as amended.
7. **NEW BUSINESS**
 - A. **New Member Addition**
 - i. Laylin moved, Fitz seconded, CARRIED, to add Roger Boyer as a citizen member of the committee.
 - ii. Howie moved, Marchetti seconded, CARRIED, to add Lynn Schantz as a second citizen member.
 - B. **Goals & Objectives, Drug Enforcement Millage**
 - i. Sheriff Behnke questioned whether "Law Enforcement Millage Committee" is an accurate representation of the committee's purpose, pointing out that a millage may not be necessary. He said members of the public have shared concerns over the number of millages taxpayers are paying. He said the sheriff's office's budget has decreased as other departments have increased. He believes discussion needs to happen before a millage is presented.
 - ii. While there are no officers specifically designated to CCDET, Behnke said there are patrol officers who handle drug enforcement. He said that while CCDET operations could potentially change, getting rid of it altogether is "not acceptable." He suggested forming a CCDET board.
 - iii. Sheriff explained challenges in recruiting new deputies due to higher-paying opportunities nearby, and shared how his office is working to recruit and retain employees.
 - iv. Prosecutor Fitz talked about the attorney shortage across the state and nation. He said the current model is not working to attract and retain attorneys. He said he proposed a millage



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because something drastic needed to be done. He agreed that he does not want to eliminate CCDET or roll it into a larger public safety initiative.

- v. Westerick agreed that CCDET is needed but said the village police departments in Cassopolis and Edwardsburg should be more involved in how CCDET moves forward. He said he would hate to see an additional law enforcement millage on the ballot at the same time as the village or city police departments ask for millage dollars.
- vi. Anderson said the county is in a fortunate position because it has resources to utilize in response to the challenge of funding law enforcement because there are unused funds in CCDET because of the challenges in finding officers.
- vii. Multiple members cited potential challenges with the name of the committee. Administrator Newton pointed out that the committee was named based on the motion in the committee of the whole meeting.
- viii. Laylin moved, Fitz seconded, CARRIED, to rename the committee Law Enforcement Strategic Planning Committee.
- ix. Newton explained that surplus funds from various departments do not necessarily roll over into the same office in future years. Surplus funds from last year were already allocated into various places for the current year's budget.
- x. Anderson pointed out that hard data is needed to proceed. Laylin said the committee should find out what the needs of the law enforcement offices are and then work backward to find ways to fill those needs.
- xi. Newton reminded the committee that a committee is reviewing class/compensation across the county, and that will need to be factored as the LESPC moves forward. Anderson said the committee's focus will be to focus on a higher level rather than individual salaries.
- xii. Lee asked the committee to share a list of specific needs to Lee, Fitz and Newton before the next meeting. Administration will provide hard numbers for general fund balance and CCDET fund balance.
- xiii. Laylin moved, Lee seconded, to add Steve Grinnwald, Todd McMichael, Clint Roach and Mary Foster to the committee. Anderson shared concerns about productivity with having too many members on the committee. Laylin withdrew his motion.

B. CCDET OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

- i. Anderson suggested adding two or three members of the commission and all the law enforcement agencies within the county. Members debated whether this should happen before the direction of CCDET is determined.

2. ADJOURNMENT — Laylin moved, Marchetti seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 3:34 p.m.