

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Regular Meeting Minutes
April 16, 2026

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairperson R. McKinley Elliott called the regular Board of Commissioners' (BOC) meeting to order at 10:35 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

INVOCATION:

Commissioner Chokwe Pitchford gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Treasurer Shelly Weich led us in the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America.

ROLL CALL:

The Chairperson instructed the Clerk to take a roll call with the following results:

9 PRESENT: Teri Sue Freehling, Robert Harrison, Jon Hinkelman, Chokwe Pitchford, Alex Ott, Sharon Tyler, David Vollrath, Mamie Yarbrough and R. McKinley Elliott.

3 ABSENT: Rayonte Bell, Jim Curran and Julie Wuerfel.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE APRIL 9, 2026, MEETING:

Commissioner Vollrath moved and seconded by Commissioner Tyler, to approve the minutes of the April 9, 2026, Regular Meeting. Motion carried, no nays.

COMMUNICATION(S):

County Clerk Stacy Loar-Porter received and distributed to the Board of Commissioners (BOC) the following communication(s):

- Email from a resident- Information for the Record- RVSC Transparency and Accountability.
 - RVSC Factual Verification Report w transcripts
 - To all Friends of the River Valley Senior Center

TELECOMMUNICATOR OF THE YEAR PRESENTATION-Caitlin Sampsell, 911 Director

Berrien County & Niles City 911 Telecommunicators were recognized for their service. Annually 911 Telecommunicators from the County's Emergency Communication Centers are invited to nominate their peers for consideration for the designation of 911 Telecommunicator of the Year. These anonymized nominations are considered by representatives from the County's 911 Advisory Committee. Two Berrien County 911 Supervisors were honored for their service in 2025. The presentation was made by Greg Sanders, Berrien County Undersheriff and Chair of the Berrien County 911 Advisory Committee.

The award for the 2025 Telecommunicator of the Year was presented to Berrien County Dispatch Supervisor Cassidie Pointer, a 20-year veteran telecommunicator of the Berrien County Public Safety Communication Center. Her nomination highlighted her life-saving actions in July of 2025, recognizing ineffective breathing in a patient that had been electrocuted and directing bystanders to perform CPR, providing instructions over the phone.

Also recognized was nominee Berrien County Supervisor Kristina Burks. a field responder commented that Burks works as though it is not just a job, but a duty to keep them safe. Her professionalism, extensive knowledge, ability to handle multiple things at once, and service leadership were highlighted.

PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING RESOLUTIONS - Public comments at this portion of the meeting must be related to resolutions listed on today's agenda only. Those speaking during public comments may do so no longer than two minutes and shall identify themselves by name and city, township, or village. (Article III, 3.9B-C). The public should refer to the resolution # that they are commenting on as a part of their comments:

None.

RESOLUTIONS - CONSENT CALENDAR:

The following resolutions are considered routine and will be adopted by one motion unless a request for removal, discussion, or explanation is received from a County Commissioner.

Commissioner Pitchford moved and supported by Commissioner Vollrath, to approve today's Consent Calendar.

<u>Resolution(s) #</u>	<u>Description</u>
P2604004	Monthly Per Diems
F2604026	Approve Bills & Road Payables
B2604074	Approve Requisitions List
P2604185	Opioid Settlement Agreement with Lincoln Charter Township
P2604189	Approve License Agreement with Corewell
P2604193	Contract with AchieveIt for strategic planning using grant funds
P2604194	Agreement with Schneider Geospatial LLC improved services
P2604197	Apply for SNAPed funding
P2604199	Apply for Primary Substance Use Prevention Grant
B2604200	Approve opioid settlement agreements with Remnant Defendants
P2604205	Approve employment search contract with Yeo & Yeo

ADDED RESOLUTION(S):

None.

The Chairperson instructed the Clerk to call the roll resulting as follows:

9 YEAS: Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Vollrath, Yarbrough and Elliott.

Motion carried, no nays.

COMMITTEE REPORT(S) – Finance, Administration, and Personnel & Human Services (PHS) Committees:

The Finance, Administration, and PHS Committees presented their Committee Reports. Parent Committee minutes are available at www.berriencounty.org. Discussion was held.

The PHS Committee reported holding discussions with the I/S Department concerning staffing for Mobile CAD. They also received a report from Veteran Affairs Administrator Maureen Adams.

The Administration Committee reported receiving monthly updates from the Sheriff's Office. They also received an update on the Juvenile Center from Don Trail, Building and Grounds Superintendent. They also received news from Cornerstone Alliance, they will be contributing \$1.75 million towards the improvement of Yore Rd and the County contribution will be \$151,000 towards the project, for 1.10 miles of new road.

The Finance Committee reported receiving a report from Warren Parrish, Equalization Director on the Equalization Department. They also reported receiving a detailed report on the Juvenile Center from Don Trail, Building and Grounds Superintendent.

COMMISSIONER REPORT(S):

Commissioner Tyler reported that she attended the Mental Health Board meeting, the main topic of the meeting was SWMBH and the new RFP that will be sent out.

Commissioner Vollrath reported that he attended the MAC Finance and General Government meeting, the committee is setting their Legislative priorities.

Commissioner Harrison provided an update on the search for the new County Administrator, reporting that 25 applications were received. The applications will be reviewed to confirm they have the required qualifications. Those that do meet the qualifications will be forwarded to the executive committee by 4/23/2026.

Commissioner Freehling reported she attended the Housing Need presentation held by Cornerstone Alliance. She reported that the recording of the presentation can be viewed at www.gomichigan.com. She also reported that Berrien County Animal Services will be hosting a vaccine clinic on 4/25/2026 from 9:00 am -12:00 pm at their

facilities. The facility is also at capacity with animals, as a result adoption fees have been reduced to encourage adoptions.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

Interim Administrator Mike Sepic presented his Administrator's Report. Discussion was held.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS - Those speaking during public comments may do so no longer than two minutes and shall identify themselves by name and city, township, or village. (Article III, 3.9 B-C): None.

OTHER BUSINESS:

FOIA APPEAL – Corporate Counsel Thaddeus Hackworth

- **Paula Kensu FOIA request dated March 16, 2026**

Corporate Counsel, Thaddeus Hackworth, explained the FOIA received from Paula Kensu on 3/16/2026. The request was for email correspondence from the prosecutor's office related to a criminal case that was prosecuted out of St. Clair County approximately 30 years ago. Research located one email, the email was provided to the requestor. The requestor then requested that staff personal and private emails be searched. The request was denied by corporate counsel with the explanation that staff personal and private emails are not the property of the County. The requestor then submitted the appeal to the Board of Commissioners.

MOTION:

Commissioner Vollrath moved and seconded by Commissioner Yarbrough, to deny the FOIA Appeal received from Paula Kensu. Motion carried, no nays.

CLOSED SESSION – Closed Session - MCL 15.268(1)(c) "For strategy and negotiation sessions connected with the negotiation of a collective bargaining agreement if either negotiating party requests a closed hearing"- HR Director Kristin Reynolds

Chairperson Elliott stated that the BOC will be going into Closed Session, the meeting will no longer be virtual.

Motion

Commissioner Tyler moved and supported by Commissioner Harrison, to recess the public meeting and go into Closed Session at 11:13 A.M., Per Closed Session - MCL 15.268(1)(c) "For strategy and negotiation sessions connected with the negotiation of a collective bargaining agreement if either negotiating party requests a closed hearing"- HR Director Kristin Reynolds

The Chairperson instructed the Clerk to call the roll resulting as follows:

9 YEAS: Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Ott, Pitchford, Tyler, Vollrath, Yarbrough and Elliott.

Motion carried, no nays.

The Board recessed at 11:13 A.M. to go into Closed Session.

Commissioner Vollrath left the meeting at 11:36 a.m.

Chairperson Elliott reconvened to Open Session at 11:51 A.M.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE CLOSED SESSION MEETING HELD ON MARCH 5, 2026, IN THE COW MEETING:

Commissioner Tyler moved and seconded by Commissioner Pitchford, to approve the closed session minutes of the March 5, 2026, closed session of the COW meeting. Motion carried, no nays.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS: None.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:52 A.M.

R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

Stacy Loar-Porter, County Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next BOC meeting.