CASS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

March 21, 2024

Chair Jones called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Commission Chambers on Thursday, March 21, 2024. Commissioner Lee offered the Invocation. Commissioner Howie led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Clerk and Register of Deeds Monica McMichael called roll:

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: James Lawrence and Samuel Barrera.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Public comment occurred.

ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

Commissioner Laylin removed item C. Public Defender Office Renovation Project from the agenda and returned the item to the Capital Projects Committee. He also added the following items under New Business: Community Project Funding Grant Application, Cass County Transit Authority and a Discussion on the Law Enforcement Strategic Planning/CCDET Advisory Board.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Commissioner Laylin moved, seconded by Commissioner Lee, to approve the March 21, 2024, Cass County Committee of the Whole Agenda as amended. Motion to approve the agenda carried by voice vote.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Marchetti moved, seconded by Commissioner Lee, to approve the February 15, 2024, Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes. Motion carried by voice vote.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Finance Director Jennifer Rentfrow offered the Finance Report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Resolution to Increase Cass County Planning Commission to 11 Members

Commissioner Marchetti explained that the County Planning Commission would benefit by increasing membership from nine to eleven members. She stated that expanding the number of board members would enhance meeting effectiveness by providing additional coverage and perspectives when current members were unable to attend. The increase in membership would also provide a broader representation of the community.

Commissioner Marchetti moved, seconded by Commissioner Laylin, to move item A. to the next regular board meeting. Motion carried by voice vote.

B. Master Plan Commitment Agreements

Commissioner Marchetti requested approval of the Joint Master Plan Commitment Agreements with Pokagon Township, Wayne Township, Volinia Township and the Village of Vandalia. A $2,000 cost sharing fee from each unit would assist the county with the overall cost of the Master Plan and solidify their commitment to the process.

Commissioner Marchetti moved, seconded by Commissioner Locke, to place item B. on the next regular board meeting agenda. Motion carried by voice vote.

C. Resolution in Support of Citizens for Local Choice

Commissioner Locke requested board members approve a resolution in support of restoring local control in the solar and wind project approval process.

Commissioner Locke moved, seconded by Commissioner Laylin, to place item C. on the next regular board meeting agenda. Motion carried by voice vote.

D. 2024 Remonumentation Contracts

Administrator Newton explained the 2024 Remonumentation Contracts must be approved by the board. The grants were fully funded by a state grant and would finalize proposals from local surveyors.

Commissioner Laylin moved, seconded by Commissioner Locke, to place item D. on the next regular board meeting agenda.

E. Early voting & Presidential Primary Voting Expenditures

Clerk/Register McMichael requested $60,127 in order to pay invoices from the Presidential Primary Election. She informed commissioners that all monies should be reimbursed by the State of Michigan.

Commissioner Laylin moved, seconded by Commissioner Marchetti, to move item E. to the next regular board meeting agenda. Motion carried by voice vote.

F. Historic Courthouse Update & Review

Administrator Newton provided an update on the Historic Courthouse Project.

G. Dissolution of MERS Committee

Commissioner Laylin requested an update from the MERS Committee. Because Commissioner Lawrence served as Chair of that committee and was absent, Commissioner Laylin withdrew his request to dissolve the MERS Committee. He would wait for a report from Commissioner Lawrence upon his return.

H. County Policy on Personal Email Use

Commissioner Laylin asked the policy committee to draft a policy on conducting county business only on county e-mail. Judge Bealor asked if courts were exempt from the policy as they were exempt from FOIA.

Commissioners agreed to send item H. to the Policy Committee. Commissioner Marchetti announced the next Policy Committee Meeting would take place at 2:00 p.m. on April 11, 2024.

I. Lawless Park Cropland Lease Agreements

Parks Director Scott Wyman announced that the Parks Department requested bids to lease cropland near Lawless park every three years. The department received four bids and recommended the board approve the highest bid of $201 per acre.

Commissioner Laylin moved, seconded by Commissioner Marchetti, to place item I. on the next regular board meeting agenda.

J. FY24 Budget Amendments

Administrator Newton requested a budget amendment in order to fund the Friend of the Courts Services Coordinator position. The board approved the position with motion M-200-23; however, failed to allocate funds to pay for the position.

Commissioner Laylin moved, seconded by Commissioner Lee, to place item J. on the next regular board meeting agenda.

K. Community Project Funding Grant Application

Sheriff Behnke explained that the Sheriff's Office would pursue a grant from Senator Walberg's Office in order to purchase a $3 million radio system for local fire departments. The deadline for submission was Tuesday, March 26, 2024.

Commissioner Laylin agreed, seconded by Commissioner Locke, to authorize the grant application and to provide a letter of recommendation from the Board of Commissioners. Motion carried by voice vote.

L. Cass County Transit Authority Loan Request

Transportation Authority Director Gerry Bundle asked the board to provide an interest-free short-term loan in the amount of $308,500. He explained that a conventional loan would cost the taxpayers approximately $7,000 in interest and fees. A loan from the county was the best option to preserve taxpayer money.

Commissioner Laylin expressed his disagreement, stating that the county was not a bank. Finance Director Rentfrow reminded board members that money was invested with an interest rate of 4-5%. If approved, the loan would result in a loss of interest revenue to the county.

Commissioners discussed approving the loan with an interest rate of 4% to compensate for the lost interest.

Chair Jones moved, seconded by Commissioner Howie, to place item L. on the next regular board meeting agenda.

M. Law Enforcement Strategic Planning/CCDET Advisory Board

Commissioner Lee informed board members that the Law Enforcement Strategic Planning Committee recommended the board approve a CCDET Advisory Board that would include the following members:

- County Sheriff
- County Prosecutor
- Manager of the Village of Cassopolis
- Manager of the City of Dowagiac
- Edwardsburg/Ontwa Township Chief of Police
- County Administrator
- Two County Commissioners

Judge Bealor questioned why outside entities would have a vote concerning county funds. She also explained that the millage language was approved for any "Criminal Justice". The language was broad and could encompass many items, as the county legal counsel previously advised.

Administrator Newton expressed concern over forming an Advisory Committee before the county decided on how the funds would be allocated. He suggested that a plan first be put in place.

Clerk and Register McMichael agreed with Judge Bealor and Administrator Newton. She suggested the board wait to designate an oversight committee until a plan was in place.

Commissioner Laylin suggested the board discuss the item at a future workshop.

Commissioner Laylin moved, seconded by Commissioner Marchetti, to appoint Administrator Newton, Sheriff Behnke and Prosecutor Fitz to research and prepare a plan for CCDET. The committee could also include anyone they deemed helpful. Motion carried by voice vote.

Sheriff Behnke reminded the board of the May 14, 2024, deadline to approve ballot language.

Commissioner Lee moved, seconded by Commissioner Laylin, to prepare ballot language to renew the CCDET millage and place the proposal on the August Primary ballot. The item would appear on the next regular board meeting agenda. Motion carried by voice vote.

Commissioner Laylin left the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

CLOSED SESSION

Commissioner Marchetti moved, seconded by Commissioner Lee, to enter a Closed Session to review Labor Negotiations and to include Clerk and Register McMichael, Sheriff Behnke, Administrator Newton, Finance Director Rentfrow, and any other party as may be designated by the Board Chair.

The Chair instructed the Clerk to call roll:

Yes (5): Commissioner Marchetti, Howie, Locke, Jones and Lee.

No (0): None.

Absent (3): Commissioners Lawrence, Barrera and Laylin.

Motion to enter Closed Session carried by roll call vote. The meeting moved to Closed Session at 6:33 p.m.

The meeting returned to Open Session at 7:02 p.m.

NEW BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

N. FOPLC Letter of Understanding

Commissioner Locke moved, seconded by Commissioner Lee, to approve an offer of a 10% wage increase as well as longevity bonuses (amount to be determined) to the FOPLC. Motion carried by voice vote.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioners Marchetti and Lee shared comments.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Approved: _____________
Date

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Vice-Chair Samuel Barrera

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Monica McMichael, Clerk/Register