

**CASS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORKSHOP MEETING**

August 23, 2024

The Cass County Board of Commissioners met for a workshop on Friday, August 23, 2024.

Chair Jeremiah Jones called the workshop to order at 8:00 a.m. Commissioner Lee led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Clerk/Register Monica McMichael called roll:

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Mary Howie.

Commissioner Laylin requested an Administrator recommended budget. Administrator Newton informed commissioners there was none.

Commissioner Laylin moved, seconded by Commissioner Marchetti, to adjourn. Discussion followed.

Commissioner Laylin withdrew his motion to adjourn.

BUDGET WORKSHOP

Prosecutor's Office (page 23): Prosecutor Fitz provided a brief overview of his office. He informed board members that he hoped to secure a grant that would provide \$30,000 in funding for his office. He also stated that, in light of the budget deficit, he would withdraw his request to add a Law Clerk to FY 25 staffing for the Prosecutor's Office.

The CCDET Millage paid for one drug prosecutor and one part-time office staffer.

The recently approved overtime pay policy for attorneys must be added to the budget.

Veterans Affairs (page 41): Director Karee Krause stated that most of the Veterans Budget consisted of grant funding. The County General Fund paid for wages and benefits for the Director.

Director Krause asked the board to increase the \$300 stipend for veteran's burials to \$500. Administrator Newton stated that legal counsel advised that \$300 was the minimum amount required.

Law & Courts (pages 18-23): Judge Bealor relayed information for District, Probate and Circuit Courts, as well as the Friend of the Court.

The current budget showed an increase of 5.36% over FY 2024.

The budget also reflected an increase from \$75 to \$110 per hour in fees for court-appointed attorneys. The rate of pay must be competitive; otherwise, attorneys would not accept Cass County cases.

Discussion followed regarding grant funding.

Family/Juvenile Court Equipment showed an increase for equipment from \$1,250 to \$31,000. Judge Bealor believed it was due to OnBase but would verify and provide an answer.

Discussion followed regarding the Institutional Care Line Item as the FY 25 request was greatly increased from last year. Judge Bealor informed commissioners that there had been no place to house juveniles; therefore, the line item had not been recently used. Judge Bealor agreed to reduce that line item.

Judge Bealor informed commissioners that the state was working to make court employees state employees.

Judge Bealor also suggested that the county consider leaving positions unfilled for a period of time. That would be a way to reduce a deficit without eliminating employees.

Treasurer (page 11): Treasurer Anderson suggested budget training for commissioners that would provide strategies, best practices and maintaining a sustainable budget.

The FY 25 budget showed a 6% increase from the previous fiscal year. Of the four full-time employees, two were paid out of the delinquent tax revolving fund.

Clerk/Register (page 6 and page 13): Clerk/Register McMichael discussed the two Clerk/Register budgets in the general fund. She first discussed the Clerk/Register budget and informed commissioners that the total requested budget for FY 25 was less than \$200 more than the FY 24 budget.

The FY 25 elections budget totaled less than the FY 24 budget. The reason for the decrease was because FY 25 should only have one countywide election while FY 24 had two. Clerk/Register McMichael explained that Michigan Statute outlines the supplies that the county must provide to local jurisdictions, which is why there was often a budget increase during election years.

BREAK: 9:30 to 9:45 a.m.

Commissioner Laylin left the workshop at 9:30 a.m.

Sheriff's Office (pages 24-31): Sheriff Behnke addressed the FY 25 budgetary request from the Sheriff's Office. He explained that the department hoped to take part in MMRMA grants when they were again available.

He informed the board that the budget included a request for new squad cars.

The Law & Courts Security budget was less than in previous years as they had not replaced the Director.

Secondary Road Patrol was 100% grant-funded.

The Public Safety Budget included funding for contracts for service with Howard, Milton, Marcellus and Silver Creek Townships.

The budget for Jail Operation was 1% less than FY 24 as the jail population had decreased.

Emergency Management Budget showed a small increase as they were in need of computer upgrades.

Ron Butts discussed the FY 25 Animal Control Budget. He informed commissioners that difficult economic times lead to an insurgence of animals in the shelter, which resulted in an increased need for supplies.

Finally, Sheriff Behnke informed commissioners that Central Dispatch and Drug Enforcement Budgets were self-funded.

Drain Commission (page 33): Drain Commissioner Jeff VanBelle stated that his budget had an increase in Professional Services due to new state requirements. He also reported that each time a resident called Miss Dig, the county was charged a fee. Those fees have increased each year.

The Drain Commission Budget also included minor repairs to dams that have no assessment districts.

IT (page 7): IT Director Jodi Nestich discussed services provided by IT that included purchasing all equipment for county departments. She warned commissioners that software fees were expected to increase.

Director Nestich stated that the requested budget included funding for several large projects including Cybersecurity, OnBase upgrades and a cloud-based phone system.

Finance Director Rentfrow questioned Director Nestich regarding the OnBase Software. The software was costly and there were concerns that not all offices were actively using the program. Nestich replied that, from the IT perspective, they would love to have all parties come to the table to work on a document flow system as it would greatly increase efficiencies. The FY25 budget included \$335,000 to add District Court onto the OnBase Software.

Judge Bealor shared comments regarding an issue with communication between SCAO and PAAM. The lack of communication could lead to major issues in smaller counties like Cass and cost taxpayers more money. OnBase integrates with courts, Clerk File Room, Sheriff's Office and

Prosecutor's Office. It will only grow.

Finally, Director Nestich reminded commissioners that the IT Department provided support to outside county entities (Road Commission and Medical Care Facility) with minimal staff.

GIS (page 9): page 9. Director Erika Espeland joined the board meeting via Zoom. She discussed specific line items and provided reasons for small increases.

Director Espeland added that the price for Pictometry software decreased from approximately \$250,000 to an annual fee of \$30,764. The software would be a valuable tool to assessors, the Equalization Department and building inspectors. It would ensure taxes are fair and equitable. She added that many counties who use the program have offset the annual fee with tax adjustments from assessors locating unreported land improvements. There was also a discussion on requesting local units to assist with the cost.

Parks (page 44): Director Scott Wyman stated that he was excited about the positivity within the Parks Department. Dodd Park Cabin reservations had increased as had attendance at the Lawless Dark Sky Park.

He informed commissioners of an increase in maintenance costs due to the need to reseal trails at Lawless Park.

Board members discussed excess properties. Director Wyman informed them that the county owned several lots on local lakes. The Parks Department also maintained two public boat launches in Cass County. He would contact the State to ask if they would assume maintenance responsibilities for the sites.

The budget also included a \$15,000 request to purchase a new mower. The department may be able to withdraw that request if they kept the current mower for another year.

Director Wyman encouraged the county to discuss a long-term plan for parks department funding.

BREAK: 10:50 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Equalization (page 12): Tami Director, Equalization Director, discussed the Equalization Budget. She informed commissioners that a large portion of the budget consisted of funding for state-mandated fieldwork and studies to a contractor.

Director Stewart shared concerns over employee wages. She stated that their office performed many duties that other Equalization Departments did not.

Commissioner Marchetti thanked Tami for preparing information for the Ambulance Meeting.

Administration & Finance (pages 4 and 5): Administrator Newton relayed the needs of the Admin/Finance Department. He informed commissioners that their budget included funding for a full-time Administrative Assistant Position. Due to a shift in duties, the position would be reclassified to a lower pay grade. The position would handle accounts payable duties, which would lessen the duties for the Administrator and Finance Director. Judge Bealor asked if the position should be scored out by the Class/Comp Study as it was a new position.

Commissioner Lee voiced concern over adding a full-time position with a \$3 million budget deficit. Commissioner Barrera suggested revisiting the issue after the Class/Comp Study.

Administrator Newton informed those present that he was waiting for the contracted company to provide details on the Class/Comp Study. Judge Bealor reminded Administrator Newton that elected officials should be included in the scheduling. She also requested that elected officials be included in all communications with the company. The project began as a collaborative project and that is the message that should be relayed to the contractor. Commissioner Marchetti asked Administrator Newton to call the company for an update.

Commissioner Marchetti questioned the large increase in the Board of Commissioners Budget. Finance Director Rentfrow explained that the increase was largely due to the \$250,000 contribution owed to Midwest Energy as approved by the board. Commissioner Marchetti requested confirmation that the project began before providing payment to MEC. After discussion, it was discovered the \$250,000 payment should be split into two \$125,000 payments over the course of two fiscal years.

Facilities (page 14): Administrator Newton informed commissioners that there were no large changes from FY24 to FY25. An increase between the fiscal years was largely due to an increase in utility costs.

The cost for cleaning services could change as the new RFP allowed for flexibility of services.

Commissioner Marchetti noted the projected cost of \$209,000 per year for electric. She hoped the new building would provide a savings as it had motion-sensored lighting.

DISCUSSION

Judge Bealor asked the board to provide Administration and elected officials with direction before adjourning.

Commissioner Marchetti asked that everyone go over their budgets and attempt to shave money.

Administrator Newton informed commissioners that he and Jen would prepare an Administrator recommended budget. A Special Board Meeting was planned for September 24th to approve the budget.

Commissioner Locke left the meeting at 12:15 p.m.

Discussion followed regarding the budget timeline as well as how much of a fund balance should be used to balance the budget.

Finally, commissioners advised Administrator Newton to provide an Administrator recommended budget with a fund balance allocation of no more than \$2 million and no current positions eliminated.

Chair Jones asked Administrator Newton to ensure the board was set for budget training in January of 2025. He also asked for the budget to be an agenda item on all 2025 board agendas.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 12:40 p.m.

Approved: _____
Date

Chair Jeremiah Jones

Monica McMichael, Clerk/Register