

**BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**Virtual Board Meeting Minutes**  
**March 18, 2021**

**Staff Present:** County Administrator Brian Dissette  
Executive Assistant to the Administrator Annette Christie  
Chief Deputy Clerk Diane Mensinger  
Sheriff Paul Bailey

**BOC Present:** Chairperson R. McKinley Elliott  
(in-person)

**CHAIRMAN TO CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER:**

Chairperson Elliott called the virtual regular meeting to order at 10:32 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners' (BOC) room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

**INVOCATION:**

Commissioner Bob Harrison gave the invocation.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:**

Commissioner Julie Wuerfel 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:

**12 PRESENT:**

Rayonte Bell (via Zoom in City of St. Joseph, MI), Jim Curran (via Zoom in Niles Charter Township, MI), Teri Freehling (via Zoom in Baroda Township, MI), Robert Harrison (via Zoom in Lincoln Charter Township, MI), Jon Hinkelman (via Zoom in Watervliet, MI), Michael Majerek (via Zoom in Niles, MI), Don Meeks (via Zoom, Benton Charter Township, MI), Ezra Scott (via Zoom in New Buffalo Township, MI), David Vollrath (via Zoom in Coloma Charter Township, MI), Julie Wuerfel (via Zoom in Royalton Township, MI), Mamie Yarbrough (via Zoom in City of Benton Harbor, MI) and R. McKinley Elliott.

0 ABSENT.

**APPROVE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 11, 2021 MEETING:**

Commissioner Freehling moved, seconded by Commissioner Vollrath, to approve the BOC virtual meeting minutes of March 11, 2021.

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

12 YEAS: Curran, Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Majerek, Meeks, Scott, Vollrath, Wuerfel, Yarbrough, Bell and Elliott. Motion carried, no nays.

**COMMUNICATION(S):**

Chief Deputy Clerk Diane Mensinger received and distributed the following communication:

- Tuscola County Board of Commissioners, email received March 16, 2021 – Resolution 2021-25 regarding virtual participation in Board Meetings.

**PRESENTATION – Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) by Dan Fette, Director of Community Development and Al Pscholka from Kinexus**

Why MSA’s Matter

- Population increase from 50,000 to 100,000 eliminates six markets in Michigan.
- Compromises labor market intelligence gathering.
- Eliminates data for grant writing and other possible funding.
- Most site selection questionnaires ask for MSA data.

Impact

- Monthly industry data eliminated for Berrien, which has been vital during COVID.
- Possible disqualification from Cost of Living indexes.
- Makes our data old and reactive, hurts making programs “data driven”.
- Hits possible federal funding reductions for transportation, planning and housing.
- Potential loss in private-sector dollars; companies seeking to expand or relocate frequently do so only within designated MSAs.

Taking Action

- Five members of Congress from Michigan opposed.
- Public comments being taken by OMB until March 19.
- This change does not take into account people leaving major Metros.

Discussion followed.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

The Administration Committee and Finance Committee presented their Committee Reports. Parent Committee minutes are available at [www.berriencounty.org](http://www.berriencounty.org).

Discussion followed the Administration Committee presentation.

**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 through the You Tube chat during public comments shall identify themselves by name (including last name) and city, township, or village:**

Eric Lester, St. Joseph Charter Township – Stated support of Resolution F2103187 – Support of MSA Program.

Peter Colovas, Hagar Township – Stated support of Resolution F2103187 – Support of MSA Program.

Tony Benhart, Sodus Township – Stated support of Resolution F2103188 – Contract with Abonmarche.

**CONSENT CALENDAR:**

Commissioner Curran moved, seconded by Commissioner Freehling, to approve the Consent Calendar as presented with the addition of the Added Resolution #A2103191 to the Consent Calendar.

<u>Resolutions #</u>	<u>Description</u>
P2103003	Monthly Per Diems
F2103023	Weekly Bills
B2103070	Weekly Requisitions
F2103113	Road Payables
P2103183	MI Dept. of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy Grant Application

P2103184 Contract with DLZ for Silver Beach Master Plan  
F2103187 Support of Metropolitan Statistical Area Program  
A2103188 Contract with Abonmarche for Management and Technical Assistance  
A2103189 Contract between Blue Cross Blue Shield and the Berrien County Sheriff's Office  
A2103190 Notification to Concierge Corrections to Discontinue Relationship  
A2103191 FCC Rule Changes Effect on 911 Fees

Discussion was held.

The Chair instructed the Clerk to take the roll with the following results:

11 YEAS: Freehling, Harrison, Hinkelman, Meeks, Scott, Vollrath, Wuerfel, Yarbrough, Bell, Curran and Elliott. Motion carried, no nays.

Commissioner Majerek was temporarily disconnected from the meeting during the roll call vote.

**ADDED RESOLUTION(S):**

<u>Resolution #</u>	<u>Description</u>
A2103191	FCC Rule Changes Effect on 911 Fees

Resolution was moved to Consent Calendar.

**COMMISSIONER REPORT(S):**

The Commissioners presented their outside Commissioners' Reports.

**ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:**

Administrator Brian Dissette gave his Administrator's Report.

**GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS – Those speaking through the You Tube chat during public comments shall identify themselves by name (including last name) and city, township, or village:**

Tony Benhart, Sodus Township – Asked why bids for paving are just now going out.

Adolf Pelzer, Hagar Township – Spoke about public comments and questions.

Jake Corns, Royalton Township – Spoke about public comments.

**OTHER BUSINESS:**

Commissioner Wuerfel asked if the Board has received any response from the Governor or Legislature regarding the recent communications sent to them.

Chairperson Elliott led discussion on Open Meetings Act and virtual meetings.

Commissioner Majerek moved, seconded by Commissioner Scott to direct the County Administrator and staff to work in conjunction with the Emergency Operations Center to craft a Declaration of Emergency in effect from April 1, 2021 to June 30, 2021, to enable all elected bodies and subdivisions to continue meeting virtually until further notice.

Discussion followed.

The Chair instructed the Clerk to take the roll with the following results:

12 YEAS: Harrison, Hinkelman, Majerek, Meeks, Scott, Vollrath, Wuerfel, Yarbrough, Bell, Curran, Freehling and Elliott. Motion carried, no nays.

Chairperson Elliott stated that the County will contact all local municipalities today of the Board of Commissioners' intent to pass a resolution on March 25, 2021, declaring a local (county-wide) State of Emergency so that they can continue to meet virtually.

County Administrator Dissette announced that there is currently a wide-spread power outage which is affecting the Health Department, Emergency Operations Center, Animal Control Department and the Road Department. All of these facilities are running on generators as to not disrupt service to the citizens of Berrien County.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS/REMINDERS:**

- *\*\*Meetings continue to be virtual through March 31, 2021.*
- Economic Development Corporation meeting today at 1:30 P.M.
- Public Works meeting next Wednesday, March 24, 2021 at 9:30 A.M.
- Administration Committee meeting next Wednesday, March 24, 2021 at 10:00 A.M.
- Finance Committee meeting next Thursday, March 25, 2021 at 9:00 A.M.
- BOC meeting next Thursday, March 25, 2021 at 10:30 A.M.
- BCBIT (Broadband) Committee meets today at 1:30 P.M.
- Commissioner Freehling reminded Commissioners and the public to take the broadband survey available at [berriencounty.org](http://berriencounty.org).

**ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 A.M.

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R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

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Diane Mensinger, Chief Deputy Clerk

***Minutes are to be approved at the next BOC meeting.***