

**CHEBOYGAN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
June 26, 2007**

The meeting was called to order in the Commissioners Room by Chairperson Linda Socha at 9:30 a.m.

Roll called and a quorum present.

PRESENT: Commissioners Socha, Redmond, Mushlock, Page, Wallace and Bolinger

ABSENT: Commissioner Makima (excused)

Commissioner Bolinger gave the invocation and Commissioner Wallace led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Motion by Commissioner Bolinger, seconded by Commissioner Wallace, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried with 6 yes, 0 no and 1 absent.

Chairperson Socha explained that Committee of the Whole meetings typically do not have action items on the agenda, but are intended for forum and discussion items and as an appeal to the Board at budget time if there is disagreement with the administrator's or finance's decision or recommendation.

CITIZENS COMMENTS – None

SCHEDULED VISITORS/DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Administrator Overton introduced Steve Schnell, the new County Development Director. Mr. Schnell holds a Masters Degree in planning and has been working for the Village of Mackinaw City. Commissioner Page asked how the physical combination of Construction Code and Planning and Zoning was coming. Mr. Overton said he has waited until the new position was filled, and Mr. Schnell will be working on the feasibility of that.

BOARD MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

Chairperson Socha said the format that would be used today would be first the presentation from the Cheboygan Chapter of MTA by Bruce Brandt. After that a representative from the Road Commission would be given an opportunity to speak, followed by board questions and finally questions from the audience. The Cheboygan Chapter of the MTA would like to have the Road Commission Board increased from 3 to 5 members pursuant to House Bill 4315 which has passed and been signed into law.

Mr. Brandt compared the Road Commission, whose budget is comparable to the county's budget, yet the County Board of Commissioners has 7 representatives, and the airport authority, with a much smaller budget, has a 9-person board. He said the MTA would definitely want to work towards districting in the future; however, districting has not been included in the new legislation that allows a 5-person board. Mr. Brandt advised that the majority of MTA members feel general road maintenance is very lax at this time. Better county representation would result in better planning with an increase in ideas and knowledge of two additional members on the commission. All of the townships are more than willing to work with the road commission and also contribute major funds to improving the roads in the county. Regarding the cost of the increase in membership, Mr. Brandt said the cost presented by Engineer/Manager Luke Houlton was a high estimate as some road commissioners would not take the health insurance, which is more than 50% of the entire cost. Chairperson Socha said the Board of Commissioners, according to legislation, would be required to hold a public hearing prior to taking action on this matter. Chairperson Socha said in 1999 and 2006 this board voted to support the Cheboygan County Chapter of MTA's request to support the pending legislation on road commission membership and districting, however, districting was not included in this new House Bill. Mr. Brandt explained the funding process for road improvements in the townships, in that the road commission employees do the projects, and stated the townships would like to be able to obtain bids from outside entities, which could save money.

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Road Commission Engineer/Manager Luke Houlton addressed the board representing the Road Commission. He said he doesn't think it is fair to imply that the three members of the current road commission are in capable of making decisions. Five of the nineteen townships have board members that regularly attend the road commission meetings. Regarding projects that may have gone over board or not, a contract was written, as the norm, and limited the contract to no more than a 10% increase, however, a township refused to honor the contract. In regards to the size of road commission administration, supervising staff has been reduced by half over the years, three people work in the office, the maintenance crew has dwindled as well, currently at 39 bodies. However, he said he was not prepared to address the reduction in staff over that past 10 or 20 years. Mr. Houlton said the road commission annually holds a long term planning meeting and plans 5 years out. In terms of contracting projects out, that's a breakdown in communications; a viable alternative has been exercised by townships in the past. Commissioner Wallace asked when the road commission received ownership to road that had been only easements before. Mr. Houlton said probably in the 30's or 40's through the McNitt Act which transferred all jurisdiction of public roads to the road commission. Commissioner Wallace also asked why the road commission so opposed to increase in size? He said the board of county commissioners was larger and preferred to stay larger. Mr. Houlton said the system is not broke, and this is a fix looking for a problem, the increase in cost results in money not being spent on the roads. Commissioner Page said assuming \$50,000 is an accurate cost for two additional members; that represents less than 1% of the total budget, are there any other costs by adding two commissioners. Another concern according to Mr. Houlton is space in the board room at the newly constructed building; additional clerical costs would be minute. Mr. Houlton said districting is a double edge saw, the real issue is the transportation system that serves the entire county. He said how could Osmun Road, a road relatively used little, compare to roads like VFW Road, which is used heavily. The road commissioners are responsible for the entire county, every area equally. Houlton said reconstruction work is generally done in house, not the repaving or resurfacing. Mr. Houlton said primary roads versus local roads, funding from gas tax and licensing is split between MDOT, county road commissions, and cities and villages. Most counties have 75% local roads and 25% primary roads. Commissioner Bolinger said as township supervisor for 19 years in Nunda Township and another 19 years as county commissioner, he has had a good relationship with the 3-member road commission, and does not know if a 5-member board would have been better. Mr. Houlton said the County Road Association has concerns with this legislation as the decision to expand that board is absent a key member, the road commissions. Chairperson Socha said she is hearing that the townships want more representation, which is not negativity, and it is not the first time the county commissioners have heard this from the townships. She said we need to know what is going at the state level, we need road commissioners that will lobby and stay on top of issues.

Mr. Brandt said the contract Mr. Houlton referred to with Benton Township did not contain a 10% over statement, that was added to contracts after that.

Commissioner Wallace said he was disappointed that the Road Commissioners did not speak for themselves. Road Commissioner Donovan addressed the board. He said he worked for the road commission for 35 years before being elected road commissioner. He said the Road Commission is not going backwards. In the last 2 ½ years he has not received any phone calls from township supervisors or township board members. He said five road commissioners would a waste of money. Mr. Donovan said Genessee County, who has pushed this legislation, not only wants to increase the number of road commissioners, but also wants to eliminate township government.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

Aloha Township Treasurer Charlie Veneros and District Director for District 5 of MTA addressed the board. He stated HB 4315 was initiated by the Kalamazoo Road Commission. He agreed that districting would behoove the county. Chairperson Socha said the board will have legal counsel check districting.

Aloha Township Supervisor Chuck Maziasz thanked the county commissioners for listening to the townships. He stated the major point is a majority of the townships have major concerns and issues with the road commission. His good friend was a township supervisor for many years before being

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elected to road commission with plans to change things. His friend said he could not change things with only 3 members. Mr. Maziasz said the present road commissioners are good, but it's time they have more help.

Dennis Lennox II, Chair of Citizens Against New Taxes said an increase in the number of road commissioners would enlarge government at a cost of at least \$50,000 per year, and he would not be able to support this. He said it is up to the voters to decide. The County Board of Commissioners has the power to remove any elected officials of this county. The County Board should be open to all reform of government, but not when it fiscally costs. Citizens Against New Taxes is a coalition of community members from all parts of county, and currently has 30 members. Commissioner Page said he does not believe the county board of commissioners has the power to remove an elected official. Mr. Lennox said that is in the statute. Mr. Lennox said he has been a citizen of this county for 23 years.

Former Inverness Township Supervisor, Fred Weeks commended Bruce Brandt for what he did for the MTA. Mr. Weeks said he sits on the EDC Board and the Airport Authority Board, both of which are non-compensated boards. He said Inverness Township had a problem spending money for roads because of the hoops that they had to jump through with the Road Commission.

Chairperson Socha responded to Mr. Lennox. She said the reason the board was interested in the number in Citizens Against New Taxes group was they wanted to know how many county residents the group speaks for.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Chairperson Socha requested a plaque be prepared for Don Burr in appreciation for his service on the Fair Board. Mr. Burr recently passed.

Motion by Commissioner Wallace, seconded by Commissioner Bolinger, to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

Mary Ellen Tryban
Cheboygan County Clerk/Register

Linda Socha
Chairperson