



June 6, 2023

The Buck Should Stop At The County by Jim Storey and Harold Lassers

Grand Traverse County has approximately 500 deer/vehicle accidents annually, according to the Grand Traverse County Road Commission (GTCRC). Until recently, the GTCRC dragged the carcasses off the roadway, or claimed they moved the deer carcass to the right of way of more remote roads near State land where it will decompose naturally.

DNR investigated a complaint involving several deer carcasses GTCRC deposited close to the trailhead in Fife Lake. The Beacon contacted Lt. Molnar who clarified that the DNR advised GTCRC that it is unlawful to deposit deer carcasses on State land.

GTCRC has halted deer carcass collection and instead is leaving them to rot by the roadside where killed, regardless of their proximity to homes or businesses. GTCRC Board Chair Joe Underwood claims the state is mandating an unfunded requirement, ignoring that 75% of the GTCRC budget comes from the state, and has refused to investigate lawful disposal options.

The GTCRC claimed in a press release that the DNR is preventing it from conducting road right of way maintenance operations. When asked by The Beacon, GTCRC Managing Director Brad Kuczynski did not answer this question: “What road maintenance operations is DNR preventing?”

Which brings us to the GTCRC’s “manufactured dilemma”. The GTCRC says *removing deer carcasses from the county’s roads isn’t its responsibility; that deer are DNR deer whether living or dead*. Apparently, the GTCRC is trying to make deer carcass disposal the DNR’s responsibility.

During its 25 May 2023 meeting, the GTCRC referenced [an email](#) from Jessica Isler, a legislative analyst at Michigan's Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) department to a staffer for Representative John Roth that refers to an unlawful dump site in Genesee County. The application to Grand Traverse county is dubious

as [the email](#) states EGLE’s Materials Management Division (MMD) has had no interaction with Grand Traverse County, the email is not from MMD, it is somewhat self-contradictory, and it is not a directive for action. Despite this the members of the GTCRC cited the letter as a reason why they cannot pick up road-kill deer.

We believe the issue is this straightforward: The GTCRC has an obligation to the county’s citizenry to maintain county roads free of dead deer carcasses and to dispose of them in accordance with State law. The GTCRC is the agency who patrols roads for obstacles; the GTCRC has equipment and staff. Deer carcass collection and proper disposal would have inconsequential impact on the GTCRC budget. The GTCRC budget has been \$22 - \$30 million; 75% funded by the state; \$4.5million (25%) funded by a millage. It rings hollow when GTCRC suggests it cannot afford proper road-kill disposal..

Other counties dispose of deer carcasses as a normal function of performing road maintenance. If the GTCRC shirks its obvious responsibility, then the county commission must act. Either the county commission must compel the GTCRC do its job or expend additional county resources and contract for a private collection service. Deer must not be left to rot in our residential and business neighborhoods. The “Buck” or more precisely the “Dead Buck” must stop with the county government.

Report on the Strategic Planning Session Wednesday May 24th



This was the first meeting to construct a Strategic Plan. This exercise was an all-day long meeting with the BOC in the morning and the department heads plus the BOC in the afternoon. It provided important team building and useful exchange; it is the first step in building a functional plan.

The opening exercise was to ask all the commissioners how long they had been on the BOC and why they had run. The first thing we noticed was that the Republican members emphasized making bureaucracy easier for businesses and having input on decisions. The three Democratic members spoke about democracy and showing up to improve the community and services to residents. The response that knocked our socks off was Commissioner Sieffert who said “Taxation is theft and the only way to serve my community the best is tactical re-acquirement and redeployment of it.” Think about that response!

Next, they were asked “What does success look like in 5 years?” The consensus was the county moving in a common direction and the government tackling challenges as a strong team. Not one member mentioned community safety until they saw the previous mission and vision statements which included it. Since about 45% of our county budget is devoted to the sheriff’s department and court system, that was a surprise. Budget should reflect priorities.

They discussed the National Community [Survey results](#) and the article in the May 16th Record Eagle. The commissioners, Bonnie Scheele, Dean Bott, Chris Forsyth and Nate Alger went through a SWOT Analysis exercise and agreed on the top three answers to each of the following questions.

1. What is working in GTC? (Strengths)
 - Safe
 - Clean and Desirable
 - Fiscally sound and secure
2. What are our weaknesses?
 - Mental health
 - Better relationships for centralized government
 - Collaboration
3. What is working against success? (Threats)
 - Politics
 - Inability to find common ground.
 - Layers of government; lack of understanding of how local government works; lack of knowledge about the county.
4. Opportunities
 - Clean, natural environment
 - Willingness to act
 - Projected increase in natural value, wages and mental health

In the afternoon the BOC and the County department heads met. In groups, they determined priority items that were later grouped into themes. The process led to productive discussions and interactions. Commissioner Andrews commented that this session provided an excellent opportunity for the greater team of employees and commissioners to know each other better. These were the 6 areas.

- Intentionally drive the mission
- Continue to work together.
- Make GTC the employer of choice.
- Build trust and transparency.
- Focus on priorities
- Plan for future growth and innovation

We are glad to see that the new Democratic commissioners pushed for this necessary strategic planning. For this work to be truly useful, at least two things must be done:

- 1, The BOC must develop the priorities into fundable work areas.
2. A financial plan must follow the strategic plan to implement the priorities.

The county needs a plan that identifies the BOC priorities and shows that the funding is consistent with the priorities. We hope this first step will build a team that can deliver a functional strategic plan and a useful financial plan. Our last official plan is dated 2013 and we have been allocating funds simply by following previous year’s decisions since then. Managing spending is **THE** prime role of the BOC. We are encouraged that our Democratic Commissioners are pushing for an orderly, honest, and transparent process.

Townhall with Betsy Coffia and Jason Morgan
Tuesday May 30, 2023

Tuesday morning provided another excellent opportunity to communicate our priorities to two progressive legislators from small town Michigan. Betsy was raised in Kalkaska and represents the 103rd District and Jason comes from a family of a commercial fisherman from Pinconning. He now represents the 23rd District in Washtenaw and adjacent counties. Both were county commissioners and Jason has worked for familiar politicians from Debbie Dingell to Bart Stupak.

Betsy detailed three sets of bills that she is sponsoring now. The Safe Patient Care Act (HR 4551) forbids forcing mandatory overtime on nurses unless there are special circumstances. This stands with HR 4550 and HR 4552 which address nurse to patient ratios and transparency around hospital staffing. Her bill has John Roth as a cosponsor (His wife is a nurse at Munson) and Sen. McBroom from the UP is supporting it in the Senate.

Betsy has sponsored HR 4569 to allow 16 year olds to pre-register to vote when they get their driver's licenses. They can't vote until they are eighteen but there is evidence that this increases young voters participation by 2 to 8 percentage points. She is a cosponsor with Reggie Miller (HD 31) to allow farmers to repair farm equipment and to require companies to make the manuals and parts available to them (HR 4673).

Jason as a co-chair of the Michigan Democratic Party wanted to know what was on our minds and he got an earful. The first question was the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. <https://www.nationalpopularvote.com/written-explanation> It pledges our electoral votes to the winner of the popular vote of all the 50 states and DC. It has been introduced as HR 4156 and sent to the Elections committee. It guarantees each vote is worth the same in California or in Wyoming in a presidential election.

Since SCOTUS has limited the Clean Water Act and EGLE (Environment, Great Lakes and Energy) will now have to supervise and enforce regulations, our voters want them to have sufficient funds and motivation to police our wetlands especially. Polluter Pay laws (You mess it up, you clean it up) have been degraded under previous administration and they are working on legislation now to rectify this. Senate Bill 14 will eliminate a law which forbid Michigan from having regulations that were more stringent than the federal government.

The audience wants careful action on Short Term Rentals and Betsy and Jason are keeping ears open to see if there is any proposed legislation on that topic, especially loss of local control.

We discussed the Department of Health and Human Services and how previously attempts to privatize their functions hurt delivery of services. That is changing now. Mass shootings are a major concern and we don't want to stop with the first package of bills. While the caucus may not support assault rifles bans now, they are looking for ways to regulate magazines and ammunition as well as making gun manufacturers liable.

Our Betsy is a "Frontliner" and, while that sounds good, it means she has been targeted by the Republicans in 2024. Jaime Churches (HD 27) downriver Detroit and Jenn Hill (HD 109) Marquette are also on this list. We need to support all of them financially as well as volunteering.

Another Action Item is to call or email Speaker of the House Joe Tate and Majority Leader in the Senate Winnie Brinks as well as the Election committee chairs Penelope Tsernoglou (House) and Jeremy Moss (Senate) to fully fund Prop 2 implementation. Tell them you are from the 103rd as we are being noticed in Lansing.

The topics of affordable housing and public transportation as well as retaining teachers and enticing more students into mental health professions were discussed. It was a pleasure to hear from people who care about improving the lives of their fellow Michiganders and who are well informed and working for us.

I did talk to Betsy later about fixing the mess for many car accident victims after the No Fault revisions and Julie Rogers from Kalamazoo will propose bills to fix the problem and not make it worse. Transparency and FOIA reform are also being discussed. One of the biggest topics in Betsy's mind is campaign finance reform. DTE, Enbridge and Consumers Power are huge donors and they attach strings to their money.

Brief Report on the DHHS Meeting May 23rd and the DHHS Pavilions Meeting May 25th

There are three Takeaways from the two meetings:

- The DHHS administration and staff, who deliver many social services especially to families and children, will do everything they can to make the difficulties at the Traverse Bay Children's Advocacy Center not negatively impact the clients DHHS serve. They are committed to their clients and families.
- The Pavilions Board is moving towards recording their meetings and making the recording available to the public. Mary Marois requested this at the end of the meeting.
- The new food service Forefront is making positive changes in meals at the Pavilions. Since meals and snacks are vital to the comfort and attitude of the Pavilions residents, this is a welcome change. There is also an uptick in activities and outings and this is also improving the overall atmosphere.

From the Editor

By now you have realized that the writing in the Beacon has changed. Ted Wendling, who pioneered the BOC Beacon, is returning to professional journalism. He will be mentoring the new reporters at the Record Eagle. He set an extremely high bar. We will try to be as insightful and as inquisitive as he taught us to be. Working with the RE, Ted will benefit all of us who love Northern Michigan. Thank you Ted.

Please forgive our amateur status as citizen journalists. We will all do our best. Criticisms and kudos will be appreciated as well as tips for future articles. We plan to spend time on the National Community Survey results. This first issue on our own was a challenge because dead deer are complicated. We hope we explained it well.

WEDNESDAY'S BOC AGENDA: WHAT TO WATCH FOR

The agenda for tomorrow's meeting is thin. The only thing which seems to be interesting is the request to house GTC prisoners at the Benzie County jail for \$35 per day. Previously the Sheriff's Department contracted with the Leelanau jail. It will be interesting to see why the change is requested. It will involve lots of deputy time ferrying prisoners. Zoom arraignments and hearings?

HIGH (AND LOW) LIGHTS SINCE THE LAST MEETING

The last GT BOC meeting's agenda was innocuous. They consented to many 2% money grants from the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa. This is required by the process. They agreed to the Personal Emergency Response System through the Commission on Aging and renewed a contract with Traverse Connect. They heard a report on the Veterans' Affairs Department.

There were a few fireworks during First Public Comment when Brad Kluczynski, Road Commission Manager, and Joe Underwood, GTCRC Board Chair, came to address that morning's article in the Record Eagle. We have all read the complicated story of the deer carcasses and the GTCRC.

We know that most of the work of the GT BOC is mundane and required by law. We had hoped to see some mention of the plans for the formation of a task force for the Opioid Settlement Money that they discussed in a study session 4 weeks ago. We also wonder what progress is happening with the ARPA projects that were allocated last December. We are grateful for the Enabling Agreements with the six counties of the NLCMHA being signed. That is a giant leap forward for mental health services.

With our county facing many challenges, we need to continue with forward looking leadership.

HELPFUL LINKS & INFO

BOC meetings are usually held at 9 a.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. The next meeting is Wednesday, June 21.

You can find a link to the agenda and minutes at:

<https://grandtraversecounty.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=418>

You can watch a livestream of the meetings and view replays of previous meetings online at:

<http://www.co.grand-traverse.mi.us/184/Board-of-Commissioners>

You will have to attend the in-person meeting in order to make a public comment. The BOC permits public comment for three minutes at the beginning and end of each meeting.

The BOC has nine commissioners – six Republicans and three Democrats – each of whom represents a district. You can find your commissioner at this link: <https://www.grandtraversedems.com/boc>

You can find contact info for the BOC members here:

<http://grandtraverse.org/184/Board-of-Commissioners>

You can email all the commissioners at this address:

commissioners@gtcountymi.gov