

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

The Beacon is a publication written by the Beacon staff; the editorial views expressed are those of the authors.

Direct links to sections in this issue:

- [Airport Proposed “Unattainable” Requirements for Air Shows](#)
 - [Cherry Festival and Air Show Trade Group Oppose Changes](#)
 - [Discussion Scheduled for a Day When Air Show Representatives Could Not Attend](#)
 - [Blue Angels’ Support Aircraft Prohibited](#)
 - [Insurance Requirements Increased from Pre-authority Version](#)
- [Airport Plans for On-site Hotel](#)
- [County Assumes Credit Risk for Airport Bonds at December 3 Meeting](#)
- [BOC To Review Budget, Pension Valuation, Capital Improvements on December 10](#)

Late Breaking Update

This *Beacon* was prepared with documents available as of 11:30 PM on Monday, December 8 regarding the Airport’s Wednesday, December 10 Special Meeting regarding proposed changes to Minimum Standards for Aeronautical Activities. At approximately 9:00 AM on Tuesday, the [Airport posted the 149-page meeting packet](#) containing all comments, and removed the air show section from consideration at this time.

This edition of the *Beacon* reports on the air show section that was removed. A future edition will report on the comments that are now available. The newly available comments regarding the air show can be summarized by this sentence from a memo by John Cudahy, President of the International Council of Air Shows:

The minimum standards as presented for public comment demonstrate a near-total lack of familiarity with basic air show management principles and best practices.

Airport Proposed “Unattainable” Requirements for Air Shows

By Bruce Moore

At tomorrow’s Special Meeting, the airport will vote on policy changes that would make holding

the air show more difficult, if not impossible. [Proposed changes to the “Minimum Standards for Aeronautical Activities”](#) add a section on the air show and include a variety of changes that would holding the air show more difficult including:

- \$10M insurance for air shows (Appendix A)
- Air shows limited to 2 hours, four consecutive days, no interruptions to commercial service of more than one hour (§VII.A)
- List of all aircraft required 150 days prior (§VII.C.1)
- Large military aircraft prohibited (§VII.C.4).

Kat Paye, CEO of the Festival Foundation that runs the National Cherry Festival and other local events states:

The suggested insurance requirements for the air show are unattainable, are not an industry standard, and are outside what can be procured in the real-world market. The FAA has said so itself: “[I]nsurance requirements have to be reasonably attainable and relevant to the aeronautical activity and cannot have significantly higher requirements than similarly situated activities.”

Cherry Festival and Air Show Trade Group Oppose Changes

The *Beacon* obtained letters opposing the changes from four local and national organizations, including the [Festival Foundation](#) that runs the National Cherry Festival. The other comments obtained are from the [International Council of Air Shows](#) (ICAS), the [Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association](#), and the [Experimental Aircraft Association](#). FOIA requests for all comments and the “Special Event Policy” referenced in the proposal were submitted on December 7 and are expected to be fulfilled on January 9, 2026.

The ICAS letter states:

Each year, nearly 200 air shows are conducted in the U.S. More than 25% of those air shows are conducted, at least in part, in collaboration with a Part 139 airport with scheduled airline service. Not one of them works under the types of restrictions and stipulations that the changes to this document would place on NCFAS. By any objective measure, the air show conducted along the shores of Grand Traverse Bay at the end of June each year is minimally disruptive to airport operations at the Cherry Capital Airport. Both absolutely and especially in comparison to the dozens of air shows conducted in coordination with Part 139 airports in all corners of the United States, the air show-related changes proposed to the airport’s minimum standards are unnecessary and excessive.

Discussion Scheduled for a Day When Air Show Representatives Could Not Attend

The Special Meeting is scheduled to coincide with the ICAS annual convention, which runs from December 8-11. This is the event where air show directors recruit potential air show participants. Scheduling the meeting on this day effectively prevents the Cherry Festival air show team from participating in public comment on the minimum standards for air shows.

Public comment for the proposed changes was open through November 30, seven business days before the Special Meeting, making it unlikely that a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request

for comments would be available prior to the meeting. The airport typically takes 20 business days to respond to FOIA requests. The airport included at least some of the comments in the packet posted 26 hours before the meeting, which is not nearly enough time for observers to read and digest the 149-page packet.

Blue Angels’ Support Aircraft Prohibited

The restriction to Airplane Design Groups I, II and III would prohibit the Blue Angels from bringing their C-130 “Fat Albert” support aircraft, as its wingspan of 132 feet exceeds the 118 feet allowed for Design Group III. This rule would also prohibit the Navy from bringing a P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, as its wingspan is 123 feet. The Airplane Design Group classification is intended to set up jetway and gate spacing for terminal construction. Design Group III includes Boeing 737 and Airbus A-320 aircraft which typically have a wingspan of 117 feet 10 inches or 5 inches respectively.

Design Group IV aircraft have used the airport in the past, including the [VC-32A used by President Trump](#) for his 2020 rally at the airport, and a [National Air Cargo 757-200](#) in July of 2024. The 757/VC-32A has a wingspan of 124 feet 10 inches.

Insurance Requirements Increased from Pre-authority Version

The current standards require six types of insurance, while the proposed standards add an additional five: aircraft general liability, aircraft hull liability, USPA membership, business interruption, and commercial property insurance. The previous “environmental liability” is replaced with “pollution liability.” The requirement for “hull liability” insurance with limits of “aircraft value” does not make sense to the *Beacon*.

The current standards apply to thirteen categories of users, while the new standards add three categories: Air Show, Air Carrier Ground Handling and Parachute Activities.

Airport Plans for On-site Hotel

At the [December 10 meeting of the airport Zoning Board](#), the airport will consider a five-story on-site hotel with a roof-top bar. The hotel is projected to open in March, 2027. Construction would require clearing several forested acres inside the airport access drive, as shown in Figure 1. The site plan for the proposed hotel shows **28 gates** at the airport—far more than planned during the current terminal expansion project.

The presentation expects average occupancy of 50-65%, with most customers coming from airline crews and “distressed” passengers who are not local but whose flight was canceled. This will put additional pricing pressure on existing hotels, especially in the off-season.

The proposal does not discuss whether the Cherry Capital Airport Fire Department is equipped to fight a fire in a tall hotel, nor does the proposal discuss whether the building would need to comply with the building height portions of the City’s Charter.

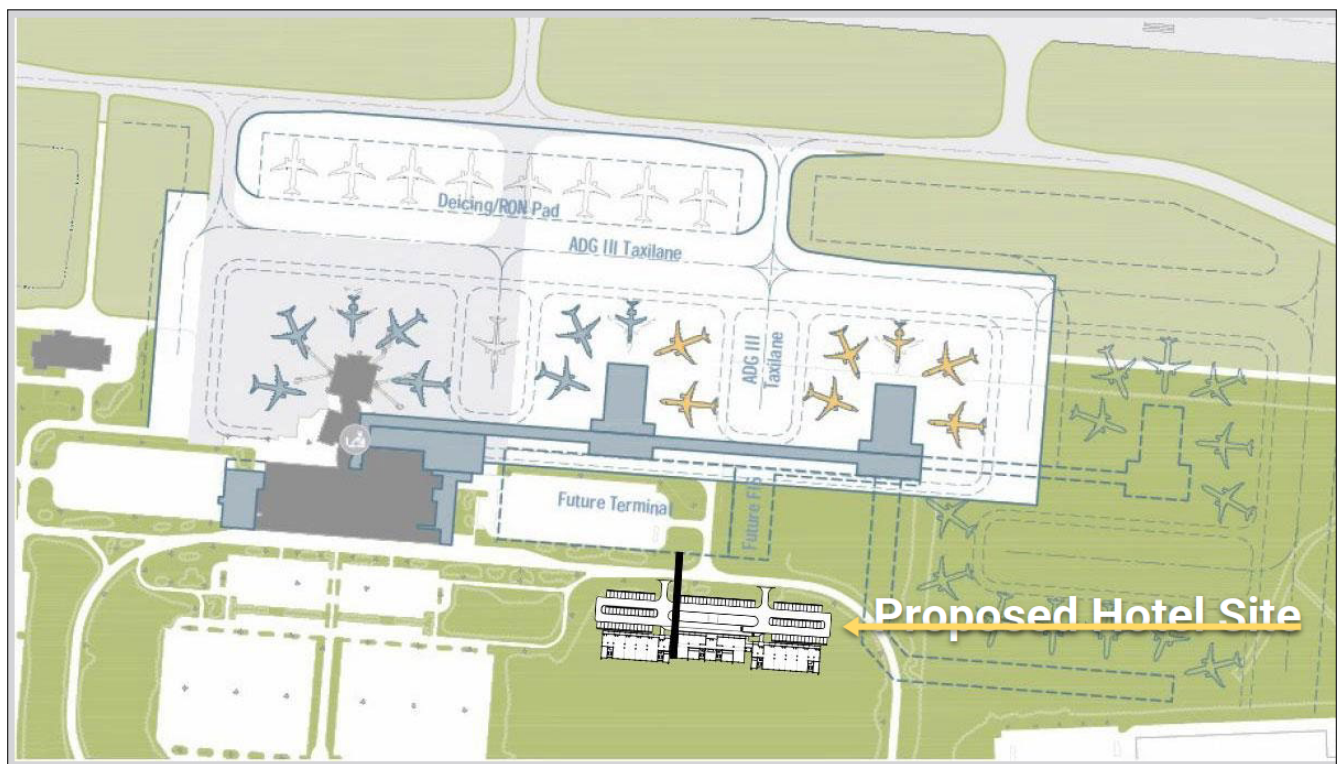


Figure 1: The proposed hotel would be require clearing several forested acres inside the airport access drive.

County Assumes Credit Risk for Airport Bonds at December 3 Meeting

By Bruce Moore

The Board managed to get through the 700-page packet for the December 3 meeting with minutes to spare. In a 5-4 vote, the Board voted to accept credit risk for the airport bonds, with Commissioners Sieffert, Morris, McAllister, Hentschel and Nelson voting to accept credit risk for the bonds. During the discussion, it became clear that the Board intends to start the Justice Facility project much sooner than assumed in the calculations prepared by the County's bond consultant, Steve Burke of MFCI.

Solar Panels, Wells, Employee Retirement Plans and Loan Extensions Rounded Out the Agenda

In other items, the Board voted to include solar panels and a well in the Project Alpha plans (Emergency Communications Center, Emergency Operations Center and Combined Operations Building). There was a brief discussion of the Community Survey and the repercussions from disbanding the Planning Department.

The Board voted to institute a 457(b) deferred compensation/retirement plan with a \$1,000 employer contribution as part of the County's employee retention efforts.

The Community Development Block Grant loans were extended to give the borrowers an additional six months to reach their employment goals.

BOC To Review Budget, Pension Valuation, Capital Improvements on December 10

By Bruce Moore

At the December 10 Special Meeting, the Board of Commissioners will review 2026 budget reports, Municipal Employees Retirement System (MERS) of Michigan 2024 (2024 is not a typo), 2026 Capital Improvement Plan recommendations and the proposed 2026 Environmental Health Fee Schedule. The [220-page packet is available on the County website](#).

Re-categorization of Judicial, Prosecutor, Public Safety and Others Shows Majority of Budget In Criminal Justice

During budget reviews, Commissioners and observers have expressed frustration with the way in which the budget is presented and how the budget aligns with policy objectives. While it is clear that Administration has attempted to improve this aspect of the process, the categorization of expenses provided obscures rather than elucidates some topics. Figure 6 shows the categorization provided by Administration in the budget summary with the detailed department budget table provided on pages 186-188 of the packet.

The *Beacon* took the values from the department budgets and recategorized them as shown in Figure 7. The primary change was pulling the Prosecuting Attorney budget of \$2.2M out of the General Government category and combining it with the Judicial and Public Safety categories for a new "Criminal Justice" category. The Substance Abuse line item became its own category of Crime Prevention. This is far from a perfect analysis—not all judicial costs are related to criminal justice,

but this re-categorization may provide a start to helping Commissioners align policy priorities with budget expenditures.

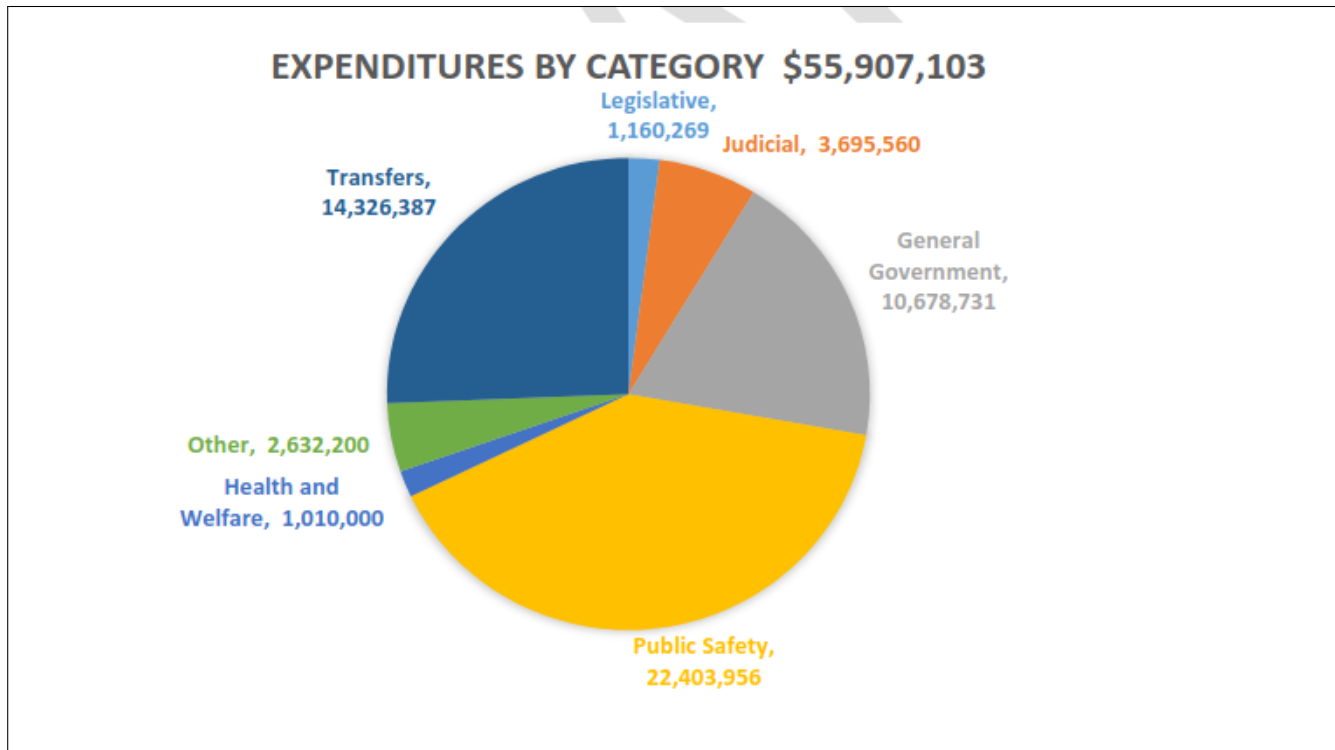


Figure 2: FY 26 General Fund categories provided by Administration minimize appearance of criminal justice costs.

Jail Medical and Mental Health Services Contract Extension

The current contract for Medical and Mental Health Services with Advanced Correctional Healthcare Inc. is expected to be extended for an additional three years.

Jail Door, Video and Other Control Systems Operate on Obsolete Systems

The system that controls door and other operations at the Jail runs on a Windows 7 computer system that is obsolete and difficult/impossible to service. The Board will vote on approving a replacement.

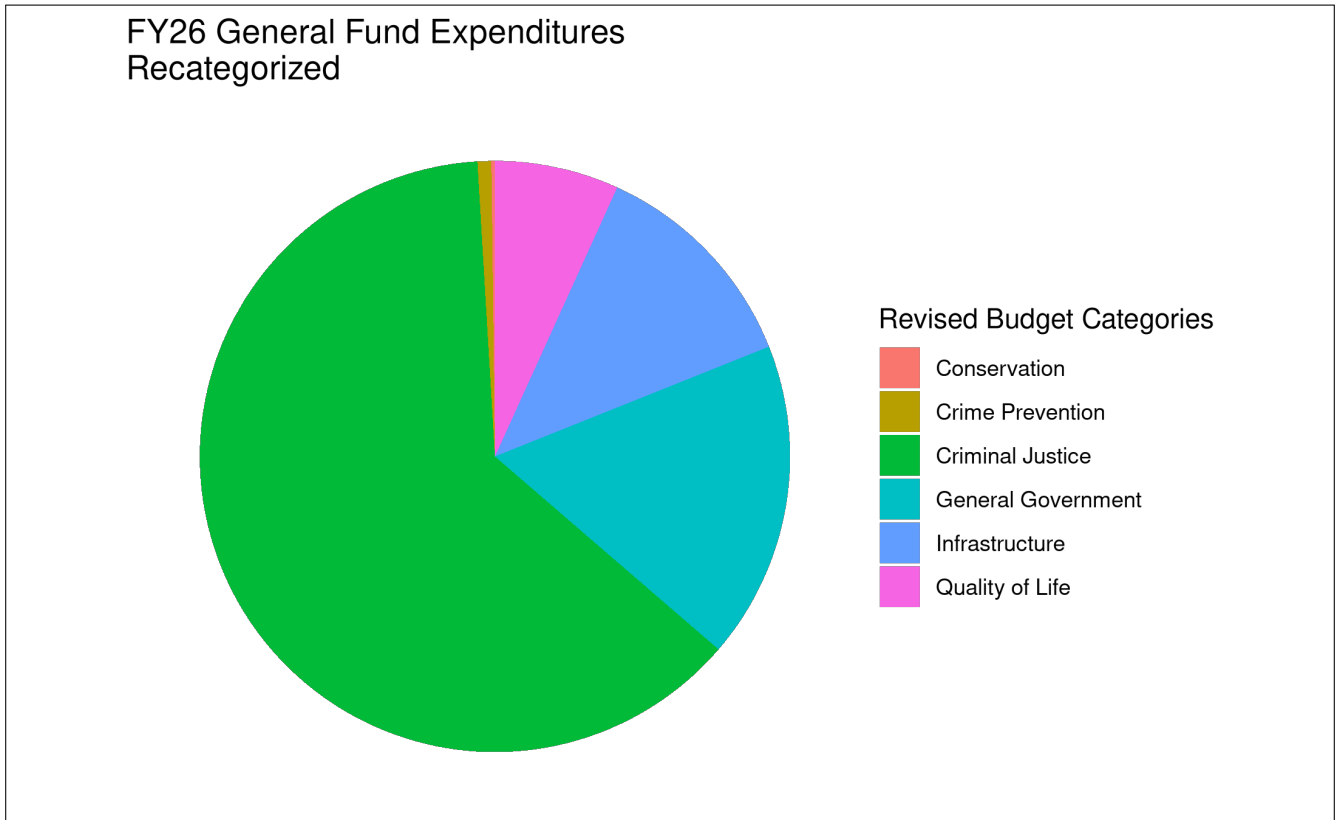


Figure 3: Combining the Judicial, Public Safety and Prosecutor portion of General Government shows just how expensive criminal justice is, especially in comparison to addiction services that could reduce criminal justice costs.

Volunteer Needed to Compile Attendance Figures from Minutes

The *Beacon* is looking for a volunteer to compile commissioner attendance at BOC and other assigned meetings for publication in a January edition. This will involve reviewing the minutes of each meeting and updating a spreadsheet. For more information, contact Bruce Moore at Beacon_Editor@gt Dems.org.

Contacting the Beacon

The Beacon Editor can be reached at Beacon_Editor@gt Dems.org.

Helpful Links and Info

BOC meetings are usually held at 9:00 am on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Find a link to the agenda at: <https://grandtraversecounty.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal>

Watch the livestream of the meetings at: <https://www.tacm.tv/govtvnow.asp>

The BOC permits public comment for up to three minutes each at the beginning and end of each meeting. Public comment remotely is not allowed. If you wish to make a public comment, you need to attend the meeting.

The BOC has nine commissioners—five Republicans and four Democrats—each of whom represents a district. Find your commissioner at: <https://www.gtcountymi.gov/184/Board-of-Commissioners>

Email all commissioners at: commissioners@gtcountymi.gov.

Paid for by the Grand Traverse County Democratic Committee
309 East Front Street
PO Box 1532
Traverse City, MI 49684