



Tuesday, January 7, 2025

Welcome to the 2025 Beacon

by Linda Pepper

The new BOC was sworn in on Monday, December 23. The first meeting is an organizational one which will start at 9:00 am on Wednesday, January 8, to be followed by a special regular meeting for contracting the usual county business. Find a preview of these meetings below.

First, thank you to Ted Wendling for the extraordinary and hard-hitting Beacon of December 17th. He described the many disappointing behaviors that current and former Republican commissioners have displayed. Excellent issue.

Second, I find that my patience with long winded articles has disappeared and I think many of you feel the same. I plan on shortening the reporting on meetings as much as possible. We will summarize the important points.

Third, the BOC now has four Democratic women who read their packets (and I assure you that is a chore) and prepare for these meetings. Do watch as many as you can. It is an education in the importance of local government.

Fourth, the GT Dems have new leadership with Trenton Lee as Chair. Below is a link to the new officers <https://www.grandtraversedems.com/officers>

So we begin 2025. Thank you for your attention and interest to the BOC and the other important commissions serving Grand Traverse County.

No Announcement of Prosecutor Assignment in Hentschel Criminal Investigation

by Linda Pepper

The Record-Eagle had a [front page update](#) Sunday on the efforts of Traverse Indivisible and other advocates for representative democracy to force Hentschel to resign. Traverse Indivisible has an [online petition](#) which currently has over more than 575 signatures urging Hentschel to leave his position on the GT BOC. The article also quotes an email from Attorney General's spokesman Danny Wimmer, "A request for the appointment of a special prosecutor will come first to the Department of the Attorney General for assessment of whether the claimed conflict (of interest) exists. Then, in most cases, (it is) sent to the Prosecuting Attorneys Coordinating Council to be placed with a different prosecuting agency to handle the case."

In the December 17th Beacon, there was a thorough explanation of this and other incidents. Here is the link to the redacted police report by the original investigating officer. Link: [six-page investigative summary](#) Reading it is appalling. We will keep updating our audience on this case and its progress through the legal system.

Vote to Select BOC Chair at January 8 Organizational Meeting

by Linda Pepper

The major event that must occur at the organizational meeting (9:00 January 8th preceding the main meeting) is the election of Chair and Vice Chair. With four votes now held by Democrats, we can hope that Rob Hentschel will be ousted as Chair. We hope that another commissioner will be elected to fill that leadership position. In the opinion of The Beacon, the Vice Chair should be of the opposite party.

Additional decisions to be made include:

- Assignment of commissioners to the various committees and boards that the BOC appoints.
- Decide when the BOC meetings will be held. Evening meetings would enable better attendance by working people. Now retirees make up most of the limited observers. The current 9:00 am start time is much better than 8:00 am.
- Many citizens and Traverse Indivisible have requested that Rob Hentschel not be appointed to any committees.

Below is a list of changes to the standing rules, made by Republicans, that we believe should be reversed:

- The BOC usually adopts their standing rules. Last year the Republican majority forced the change that four commissioners had to ask for a special meeting, not three as previously. This made it harder for the three Democratic commissioners to call a special meeting without Republican concurrence.
- Another Hentschel change was to make friendly amendment acceptance a *may* instead of a *shall* in order "to move meetings along," according to Hentschel's reasoning.
- The most onerous forced change was that appointees to boards and committees had to make decisions in "the best interests of the BOC." Ordinarily, you expect appointees to act in the best interest of the residents of Grand Traverse County. That expectation is a loyalty provision that needs to be deleted.

There are few other usual procedures. The Special Regular Meeting will immediately follow the Organizational Meeting.

Employee Safety and Community Survey up for Discussion

by Linda Pepper

We finally get down to the business of improving the lives of Grand Traverse residents:

- Appoint members to the Ad Hoc safety team that will review the safety policies. Among other issues is consideration of the question of allowing firearms to be carried by non-law enforcement staff into county buildings.
- Questions for the Community survey. The survey has been administered at least twice before and there is the opportunity to customize questions.

Budget Presented and Approved at Last Meeting of the Year—Again Review of BOC Meeting - Dec. 18, 2024

by Linda Pepper

There were four major things that were important in this meeting:

- Thirty citizens picketed outside to insist that Chair Hentschel resign his seat because of the criminal investigation into his alleged behavior in early October. Six used the Public Comment time to speak about the distraction he causes to the BOC and its business.
- Commissioner Andrews represented all county residents well by insisting that the budget would not pass if the appropriation included over \$100k for bathrooms and kayak rental at Camp Greilick. According to Commissioner Walters the objections included that there is not yet a plan for the park, efforts to secure grant funding were promised, and private funding was expected. By knowing the rules and how to use them, Andrews and other commissioners refused to “go along” so that the budget could get passed.
- Staff and legal counsel have been asked for recommendations about an Ethics Ad Hoc Committee or other process to provide an Ethics policy that is enforceable for the elected officials including the BOC. Commissioner Walter made this motion which was approved.
- In final public comment, Bruce Moore pointed out that the budget is always last minute and has been so for the years he has been observing the BOC. He said, and I agree, “the budget process is broken.” An excellent example is the sheriff taking all of his unexpended 2024 funds and spending them on new tasers before Dec. 31. The total five year contract was \$290K. If he can see his balance, why is that information not available to the commissioners as they consider budgets in early fall? The Beacon plans an article on ideas to improve the budgeting process.

Pavilions Issues Press Release on Departure of Recently-Appointed CEO

Dec. 20, 2024

by Linda Pepper

I did not attend the meeting but reviewed the video of it. Here are my takeaways and questions:

- There is a new Pavilions Board member, Karen Griggs. In her introduction she shared that she has a Public Administration degree. That should be helpful in understanding the business of this Board.
- TJ Andrews, the BOC liaison to the Board, reminded them that she might be reappointed to the position but they would not know until the organization BOC meeting on January 8. Also the Ad Hoc Committee automatically dissolves at the end of the year.
- The census was at 163 in November and at 178 so far in December.
- The finances are in better shape and the Board voted to send \$1.2 million to the Pension fund.
- The report on the Cottages by an architectural firm, commissioned by the Foundation, is now expected in January (it was originally due Dec. 1).
- They added a closed session for an attorney's opinion. No specifics.
- When they returned from closed session, they adopted the attorney's recommendation. There was no information about the contents disclosed.

Later that day, they distributed a press release that said Gerard Bodalski, Pavilions CEO, had resigned, effective immediately, following an investigation of his behavior towards some staff and residents. There was a story in the Record-Eagle on December 21. On December 24, the Pavilions Board authorized hiring an interim CEO. The incidents were not discussed at the meeting and there was no additional information provided to the public.

Also, there was an inspection by the state in November to see if the citations from earlier in the fall had been corrected, but there was no mention of the results, even though they should have received a follow up report.

Below is the press release:

DHHS BOARD ACCEPTS PAVILIONS ADMINISTRATOR'S RESIGNATION

The Administrator of Grand Traverse Pavilions, Gerard Bodalski, resigned Friday following a meeting of the county facility's Department of Health and Human Services Board. Recently the board received a report concerning alleged conduct relating to treatment of employees and residents. They then tasked Warner Norcross + Judd, LLP, a Michigan based law firm, to conduct a third-party investigation into the report. It was those findings that led to Mr. Bodalski's resignation today. "The investigation done earlier this week was waged with integrity and without bias," explained Mary Marois, DHHS Board Chairperson. "After reviewing the findings today at our regular meeting, the Board and Mr. Bodalski have decided to part ways." "His resignation is effective immediately," Marois said, while noting that the State of Michigan has been made aware of a facility-reported incident which was included within the scope of Warner Norcross' investigation. "We will cooperate with the State in any further investigation of this issue." "In the meantime," said Marois, "the Board has asked Pavilions' Finance Director Lindsey Dood to assume the role of acting Chief Executive Officer, while the Board works diligently to find a suitable replacement for the now vacant position."

Information received recently indicates that the previous Interim CEO, Dave Hautamaki, will assume CEO duties on Monday, January 6. Mr. Hautamaki led the Pavilions in the fall of 2023 into January 2024 as the Board searched for a new CEO.

HELPFUL LINKS & INFO

BOC meetings are usually held at 9 am on the first and third Wednesday of the month.

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

<https://grandtraversecounty.civicweb.net/Portal/>

You can watch a livestream of the meetings at:

<https://www.tacm.tv/govtvnow.asp>

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.gtcountymi.gov/184/Board-of-Commissioners>

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