



ROB HENTSCHEL STOMPS HIS WAY INTO A NEW TERM

January 17, 2023

With Republicans holding a 6 to 3 majority on the county Board of Commissioners, it was a fait accompli that a Republican would be elected as chairman at the January 4 organizational meeting. The only question was whether the county’s chief culture warrior, Rob Hentschel, would be re-elected as chair or whether a moderate Republican such as Darryl Nelson would take a turn at the helm.

That question was quickly answered when Hentschel’s top ally on the board, Brad Jewett, nominated Hentschel as chair. Minutes later, Hentschel was elected to a two-year term on a party-line vote of 6 to 3. Hentschel then returned the favor by nominating Jewett to serve as vice chair for the next year. That motion also passed on a 6 to 3 party-line vote. Accentuating the irrelevance of three new Democrats to the Republican majority, the board never even voted on a motion by Democrat T.J. Andrews to nominate fellow Democrat Ashlea Walter for vice chair.



Hentschel

And with that, the Society of Mutual Backscratchers was back in session.

So assured was Hentschel of his re-election that he had already sketched out committee assignments. “Commissioner Jewett notified me ahead of time that he was going to nominate me for chair, so in anticipation of being prepared I did go through the list of committee assignments and came up with a recommendation for the board and I’ll present those to you now,” he said.

“Could we get that in writing?” Andrews asked. “Could you make a copy? It looks like there’s a list.”

“This is my chicken-scratching,” Hentschel replied. “I’m going to read it to you. You can write it down as I go if you like and I will definitely email it out.”

Andrews persisted, asking Hentschel again for a copy of his proposed committee assignments and pointing out that Section 10.1 in the BOC’s [Rules of Order](#) says “any motion shall be put in writing at the request of any board member.”

Ignoring Andrews, Hentschel plowed forward, instructing Clerk Bonnie Scheele to start writing as he began reading the assignments into the record.

For Andrews and the other two newly elected Democrats, Walter and Lauren Flynn, this was a small taste of the imperial chairmanship of Rob Hentschel. Remember his performance at the board meeting on July 12, when Republicans removed Northern Lakes Community Mental Health Authority board members Nicole Miller and Justin Reed after recklessly accusing them of misconduct in office? Aware that Republicans would support his motion to give Miller and Reed the heave-ho, Hentschel, “in anticipation of being prepared,” had lined up a successor. He nominated former BOC Commissioner Dan Lathrop. When then-Commissioner Betsy Coffia asked to see Lathrop’s qualifications and noted that board rules say the BOC is required to appoint a committee to interview candidates for board openings, Hentschel made a motion – which, thankfully, was defeated – to suspend the board rule.



Andrews

That’s the way he operates. Rules be damned. It’s my way or the highway.

Imagine the good will that Hentschel would have engendered at the first meeting of the year if he had asked Scheele to make eight copies of the list and pass them out. How long would that have taken? Two minutes?

For the record, here are the committee assignments that Hentschel made:

- ✓ Area Agency on Aging – Walter
- ✓ BATA – Jewett
- ✓ Board of Public Works – Nelson
- ✓ Brownfield Redevelopment Authority – Scott Sieffert
- ✓ Commission on Aging – Walter
- ✓ Community Corrections – Nelson
- ✓ Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee – Andrews
- ✓ Department of Health and Human Services – Penny Morris
- ✓ Economic Development Corporation – Brian McAllister and Flynn
- ✓ Emergency Management – Jewett
- ✓ Farmland Preservation – Andrews
- ✓ Central Dispatch – Jewett
- ✓ Land Bank – Sieffert
- ✓ Local Emergency Planning – Jewett
- ✓ Networks Northwest – Flynn
- ✓ Northern Lakes Community Mental Health – Morris
- ✓ Northern Michigan Community Action Agency – Walter
- ✓ Northwest Regional Airport Authority – Hentschel and Nelson
- ✓ NM Regional Entity – Morris
- ✓ Parks and Recreation – McAllister
- ✓ Traverse Transit Coordinating Initiative – Jewett
- ✓ Veterans Affairs – Flynn
- ✓ Community Collaborative – Andrews
- ✓ Building Codes Board of Appeals – Andrews

WEDNESDAY'S BOC AGENDA: WHAT TO WATCH FOR

JUVENILE JUSTICE CRISIS UPDATE – Grand Traverse County Family Court Administrator Kristyn Brendel and Leelanau County Family Court Administrator Cameron Clark are asking the BOC to approve the construction of a 32-bed juvenile justice facility that would be built near the Grand Traverse County courthouse (agenda item 7a). The court administrators said the estimated cost to build such a facility is \$21 million to \$25 million.

In a memo to the commissioners, Brendel and Clark wrote that there is no juvenile justice facility in northern Michigan and that the nearest juvenile centers are in Ottawa and Midland counties.

“The lack of available placements means that youth in this area are placed out-of-state at great cost or in jails, which places a tremendous burden on law enforcement personnel and requires resources to comply with statutory requirements,” they wrote. “When no placement is available, these youth who are behaving unsafely are released back into the community with family or are spending days and weeks in local hospital emergency rooms awaiting placement.”

Brendel and Clark said operational costs of a new facility would come from the counties’ child care fund budgets and would be matched 50% by the State of Michigan. Other northern Michigan family courts also would use the facility, they said, paying a daily rate for youths that they send to Grand Traverse County.

The administrators said this initiative is supported by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians Tribal Court, Michigan Association of Family Court Administrators, Michigan Sheriffs’ Association, Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police and other entities.

A COMMENDATION FOR PEGGY HAINES – In a magnanimous gesture toward a county

officeholder whom he has treated poorly, Hentschel is proposing that the BOC recognize Register of Deeds Peggy Haines “for proactively taking steps to safeguard property owners in Grand Traverse County from deceptive and predatory business practices” (agenda item 13a).

Hentschel drafted the proposal after reading a recent [story](#) in the Record-Eagle about a listing scheme that MV Realty, a Florida real estate firm, is promoting in Michigan and more than 30 other states.

The story reported that MV Realty has persuaded property owners to join its so-called “Homeowner Benefit Program,” which offers homeowners an up-front payment of up to \$5,000 in exchange for a 40-year listing agreement that is recorded as a lien against the property. Haines told the RE that seven Homeowner Benefit Program memoranda have been recorded in her office and said that refinances, home equity loans and property inheritances can be denied, delayed or complicated if the property has a Homeowner Benefit Program memorandum attached to it.

Haines filed an age-discrimination lawsuit against the county in March 2021 after commissioners denied her request for a raise while approving generous raises to themselves and several other administrators, including Scheele. Hentschel went out of his way to humiliate Haines, silencing her by muting her mic while she was making her case.

A visiting judge dismissed Haines’ lawsuit last January, ruling that Haines is a “hybrid” county employee who doesn’t have the Constitutional protections that other county workers have.

SUNDRIES

ACLU ASKS NESSEL TO INTERVENE IN NORTHERN LAKES DISMISSALS – At the rate that Republicans on the BOC keep putting county government in the crosshairs of civil libertarians, Team Hentschel may be up for an ACLU Full Employment Act Award sometime soon.

On January 5, the ACLU Northwest Michigan Lawyers Committee sent a [111-page referral](#) to Attorney General Dana Nessel, asking her to file a so-called *quo warranto* action on behalf of former Northern Lakes board members Nicole Miller and Justin Reed. *Quo warranto* is a legal action used to resolve a dispute over whether a person has a right to hold office.

In this case, the ACLU is asking Nessel to determine that Miller's and Reed's removals by the BOC's Republican majority were illegal and that Miller and Reed should be reinstated.

Four Republicans on the board – Hentschel, Jewett, Nelson and former Commissioner Ron Clous – voted to remove Miller and Reed after telling them that they had “neglected their official duty” or “engaged in misconduct in office” after they voted not to rescind an offer to appoint interim Northern Lakes CEO Joanie Blamer to the role permanently. Morris, who is a BOC appointee to the Northern Lakes board, abstained on the 4-2 vote after orchestrating the move to have Miller and Reed ousted.

In the referral to Nessel, ACLU attorney Michael Naughton wrote, “The GTCBC violated the law in removing Mr. Miller and Ms. Reed both as a matter of procedure – by failing to provide them with a meaningful statement of reasons and opportunity to be heard – and as a matter of substance by failing to identify anything remotely resembling neglect of official duty or misconduct in office. . . . In reality, the GTCBC did so for no reason other than their disagreement with the votes cast by Mr. Reed and Ms. Miller in favor of hiring Ms. Blamer as the permanent Director of the Authority.”

The removal of Miller and Reed was one of the BOC's uglier episodes in a chaotic year. We'll see whether it comes back to haunt the board.

And that's a wrap. Stay safe, stay engaged and stay warm. Thanks for reading.

HELPFUL LINKS & INFO

BOC meetings are now held at 9 a.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. The next meeting is Wednesday, January 18.

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

<https://grandtraversecounty.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=388>

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