



Tuesday July 16, 2024

GT Democrats Meeting with Betsy Coffia

by Linda Pepper

I attend tons of meetings and it is often hard to motivate myself to go, especially in the evening. Friday night's meeting is why you should attend anything with Betsy. There was a large crowd with many faithful Dems and some new people. After some mundane questions, Betsy addressed the topic on all our minds: the Joe Biden campaign. Betsy, in her practical way, said that she can't influence that decision, but she can get people, especially Democrats of all ages, out to vote. So that is what she does. We must vote Democratic at the top of the ticket and all the way down. The Trump inspired Project 2025 would be incredibly harmful to our country. Add to that the SCOTUS decision virtually immunizing presidents from the law and we must have people with integrity in the White House. Candidate Trump has no moral compass. We must work to elect all Democrats this year to maintain our Democracy.

If anyone says that Project 2025 will never happen, ask them if they thought a woman's right to choose for her own body would be stripped from her after 50 years. Ask if they thought that the Supreme Court would rule that a president has massive immunity. It can and will happen if we and all our friends and family do not stop it on November 5th.

So, be like Betsy. Talk to everyone about voting. Are the choices perfect? No. Is the choice perfectly clear, autocracy and rule by the rich OR democracy, messy and imperfect but the best form of government for real people? Yes. I'm with Joe Biden and his outstanding and ethical team.

After I wrote this, Trump was almost assassinated, and some rally attendees died. Violence is not the way we settle political questions in this United States. We must remember that we are all Americans, and we must co-exist with many opinions. We must not let hate win! We must volunteer and find common ground with all our neighbors.

July 10 Special Meeting A Poor Excuse for Financial Governance

By Harold Lassers and Linda Pepper

The BOC held a special meeting on July 10 for the purpose of approving urgent digital services. They tacked onto the meeting awarding a new contract for the county administrator, apparently because no one realized that his contract had ended. Commissioners were given no comparative information with similar counties and only 18 hrs. notice to evaluate a new 3-year contract. Mr. Alger was given a raise, along with a clause to increase his benefit in the case of termination from 6 months to 1 year. The package provided to commissioners did not state the amount of the raise, only the new salary (and not his current salary). This was brought to a special meeting with two commissioners absent and no information on which commissioners could form a rational decision. There is no reason this could not have been handled in the next regular meeting, with proper notification, and reasonable information.

This lack of transparency reflects repeated brinksmanship by the chair. There still has not been a study session scheduled on the budget — even though it has been repeatedly requested by several commissioners.

We applaud the motion by Commissioner Sieffert to create a committee to study appropriate compensation for elected officials, staff, directors or managers of departments and administration. Sieffert, Flynn, Andrews and McAllister were approved for this committee. They will work with the HR Director to review and compare current compensation to similar counties. They hope to work quickly and may amend Administrator Alger's contract as well as others.

The first item discussed and approved was an additional \$96K per year for increased cyber security. Traverse City may pursue another application that provides this increased security. The second item was a data migration service and this involves splitting from Traverse City but it is currently still being discussed. The BOC approved spending on this up to \$69K.

Preview of GT Board of Commissioners Meeting Wednesday, July 17th 9 am

by Linda Pepper

Since this is the only regularly scheduled meeting this month, it is jam-packed with many discussions and actions. On the Consent Agenda, there is only one item that provoked my interest. They are having to spend more on repairs to the Easling pool surge deck and they mentioned a \$75K grant for the Law Enforcement Center boiler replacement. Since we saw the antiquated systems on our Facilities Tour, I would ask for an explanation.

Representative Coffia will provide an update on legislative matters and Dan Watkins will give his monthly update. There is a presentation from the Land Conservancy and from the Community Foundation. I suspect it will include the Camp Greilick facility, but it does not say.

There will be a request to replace the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee with the Community Corrections Advisory Board. This seems strange to us because the CJCC has already been dissolved. Does this mean there will be more discussion about a new jail? The Road Commission is asking for the renewal of their 1 mil which will raise \$6.5 million for repair of county roads. The BOC will permit a contract to repair a large part of the Civic Center/Howe Arena roof. Another large section will be slated for next year. By the way, is John Chase now the Facilities Director?

Some of the Opioid Settlement Funds will be allocated at this meeting. The Sheriff's Department requested \$300K to develop a Quick Response Team for overdose situations. The 86th District Court requests \$164K for its drug treatment program and Harm Reduction Michigan requests \$50K for a clean needle exchange program. They did state that the Opioid Task Force has a prioritization plan, and this will be presented to the BOC at a study session. I did not see that on the proposed study session schedule (this schedule appears later in the meeting).

The BOC will appoint an Ad Hoc committee to interview for the Airport Zoning Board which can be important for future development around the airport. Also, Munson is refunding some bonds early to save costs.

The Unfinished Business section has a request from Pine Rest to fund youth treatment. I believe the request is for \$400K. When they appeared in May, they were told that they needed more detail in the request and that the County can pay for services rendered. I am not sure if this meets the requirements. The BOC is being asked for funds to repair Townline Road, one of the accesses to the airport. Garfield Twp., East Bay and the airport have pledged a total of \$520K. I am not sure how much is required to make up the difference. There is a schedule of proposed study sessions and that is very helpful.

The final items are two Freedom of Information Acts appeals by Bruce Moore where he does not think they honored his requests for information accurately. This meeting will be both packed and long.

Candidates for District #9 - Long Lake
GT Board of Commissioners
Primary Election
by Linda Pepper

The primary election on Tuesday, August 6th features a choice for Democratic commissioner candidates in District 9, Lance Boehmer and Pam Kaiser. The other districts only have one Democratic candidate. ON YOUR PRIMARY BALLOT you can only vote one column, Democrat or Republican. If you cross over, your votes for all candidates are thrown out. There is biography of each candidate at <https://www.grandtraversedems.com/localcandidates>

Lance Boehmer was raised in rural Michigan. After attending Lake State, he lived in Indianapolis and Denver. He developed skills in public transportation and increasing affordable housing. He is now a manager of an automotive data company and works remotely. He also has a local landscaping company. He is a pragmatic progressive and wants to implement strategic negotiations and careful financial management. His Facebook page illustrates his activism and management skills. [Learn more about Lance on Facebook](#) Here are his answers to questions about his view of the BOC.

1. What was the main action by the BOC that motivated you to decide to take the action of running for the BOC?

Rising property tax rates and the lack of scrutiny by the current Board of Commissioners (BOC) in financial decisions motivated me to run. Commissioners often approve expenditures without asking critical questions about cost and necessity. This lack of oversight is concerning and needs to change to ensure our tax dollars are spent wisely and effectively.

2. What are your main goals for the BOC if we have a Democratic majority?

- Financial Oversight: Tightening control over finances to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently.
- Qualified Appointments: Hiring and appointing the right people to various county boards, such as public health, community mental health, and the commission on aging, ensuring these positions are filled by qualified individuals rather than political appointees.
- Addressing Chronic Homelessness: Implementing strategies to end chronic homelessness by expanding supportive housing and mental health services.
- Affordable Housing: Collaborating with townships to develop 2,000 affordable housing units by leveraging Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and redeveloping Brownfield properties to increase the housing supply.

3. If you are one of 4 Democrats on the BOC with a 5 Republican majority, how will you handle the inevitable frustrations?

I am pragmatic and center-focused, with extensive experience in negotiation and conflict resolution from my business background. I believe in finding common ground and working collaboratively to achieve the best outcomes for our community. This approach will help navigate any frustrations and ensure progress is made, even in a divided board.

4. What is your opinion of the Facility Master Plan? What is the most urgent to implement?

The Grand Traverse County Facility Master Plan outlines significant improvements to county infrastructure, including the construction of new public service buildings and the consolidation of multiple departments on the LaFranier Road campus. I believe the most urgent aspect to implement is the development of new affordable housing units within this framework. By freeing up properties for sale and redevelopment, we can address our critical housing shortage while also modernizing county facilities. This dual approach can help meet immediate housing needs and support long-term community growth [

5. What is the most important issue that you want to make significant progress solving in the next 4 years with or without a Democratic Majority?

Affordable housing is the most critical issue I aim to address. Grand Traverse County needs at least 3,569 additional rental units to meet current demand. By leveraging TIF funding and redeveloping brownfield properties, we can create new housing opportunities and ensure that all residents have access to safe, affordable homes. This effort is crucial for maintaining the vibrancy and inclusivity of our community.

Pam Kaiser is a 4th generation Grand Traverse County resident. Her goals are promoting safety, sustainability and transparency in local government. Her motivation for seeking this post results from the tragic suicide of her son during the early days of the pandemic. She has worked on several different local committees to protect both people and the Long Lake area. She spends much of her time advocating for better mental health services. You can learn more about Pam at her Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/PamKaiser4GTCountyCommissionLongLake>

Here are her answers to these questions:

1. What was the main action by the BOC that motivated you to decide to take the action of running for the BOC?

Following the preventable death of my son Aaron, I am running to eliminate the dangerous “2nd Amendment Sanctuary” adopted in March 2020 by the GT BOC that is in conflict with the State of Michigan Gun Safety Laws. This has raised the risk of local gun violence threatened by the insurrectionist group “The Proud Boys” who sponsored the initiative at the invitation of GOP members of the board despite protest from the public. A month later, in April 2024, it cost my 24-year-old son Aaron his life, hours after a noncompliant gun merchant defied the Covid 19 Pandemic Emergency order to keep his shop open and sell Aaron, a nursing student at NMC suffering from severe anxiety and depression, a semiautomatic rifle. Aaron died alone in our car hours after the sale. Due to the 2nd Amendment Sanctuary, the Grand Traverse County Prosecutor refused to take action on the complaint submitted by the Grand Traverse County Sheriff against the gun shop. Gun violence became the #1 cause of death of children and young people from birth to age 24 in 2020 and has risen rapidly to this day. The symbolic “2A” status sends the message to people suffering from mental illness, potential criminals, noncompliant sellers and even our county prosecutor that gun safety laws will not be enforced in Grand Traverse County. Despite ongoing resistance from the GTGOP, we must enforce gun safety laws so that innocent people in Grand Traverse County can live here rather than die from gun violence.

I am also running to reverse the illegal and unsustainable decision by GOP members of the GTBOC including the current commissioner from Long Lake to remove Twin Lakes Park from the Grand Traverse County Department of Parks and Recreation despite specifications on the deed by Judge Parm Gilbert giving it specifically to Grand Traverse County. In 2023, Long Lake’s current member of the County Commission joined other GOP members of the Commission to move the cost for maintaining Twin Lakes Park from the 100,000 residents of Grand Traverse County onto the only 10,000 residents of Long Lake Township. This has burdened taxpayers in Long Lake without any public hearings or votes by the public into escalating taxes for maintaining aging buildings at Twin Lakes Park on top of paying for the expensive new firehouse and new township office additions. Due to violation of the deed for Twin Lakes Park, costly litigation challenging the transfer of the park is another expense being born by Long Lake and Grand Traverse Taxpayers, who have been involuntarily overburdened by rising taxes due to decisions made without public hearings or input by the public. It is also costing Long Lake and all Grand Traverse County taxpayers multiple thousands of dollars in litigation fees that could have paid for maintenance and renovations at the park. The future of the pristine 170-acre Twin Lakes Park is at risk of development due to violation of the deed, which would further burden taxpayers with increased traffic and loss of natural habitat protecting our watershed and environment if Long Lake Township were ever to lose it, a dreadful possibility no longer protected by Judge Gilbert’s violated deed.

2. What are your main goals for the BOC if we have a Democratic majority?

With a Democratic majority, I can serve the taxpayers of Grand Traverse County by prioritizing community well being with policies that enhance our economy by putting people and families first, like incentivizing affordable year-round residential homes over seasonal vacation rental housing, planning and implementing responsible

infrastructure and road improvements, expanding public transportation with BATA, building a sorely needed new public jail, fixing the mess at Northern Lakes Community Mental Health and eliminating the new “loyalty pledge” to the GT BOC, which is a play of totalitarian regimes, appointing qualified members of the public to serve on local boards based on merit, expertise and dedication rather than loyalty to the board’s political ideology. We need dedicated, expert volunteers appointed to public boards like Northern Lakes Community Mental Health, BATA, the Road Commission, Parks & Recreation, the Area Commission on Aging, etc, who are independent of political loyalty pledges. I also recommend reinstating the Planning Commission which was eliminated by GOP members of the BOC.

3. If you are one of 4 Democrats on a BOC with a 5 Republican majority, how will you handle the inevitable frustrations?

I will do so as I have other stressors in my life, by spending time outdoors around, in, and on Long Lake with my family, seeking counsel from wise others, reading, contemplating solutions based on my training, public input and conscience, with spiritual support including that of Central United Methodist Church, where I am a member.

4. What is your opinion of the Facility Master Plan? What is the most urgent to implement?

I am familiar with the current master plan and recently toured the outdated and crowded GT County Sheriff's Department Offices on Woodmere and the more spacious County facilities on LaFranier Road, which appear appropriate for renovation and expansion for county purposes, including the addition of a desperately needed new county jail to replace the dark, dangerous, overcrowded and outdated one. I am in favor of a county campus but believe we need to retain and improve security at the County Building on Boardman and 8th Street in the meantime.

The Master Plan is a fluid document dependent on public funding and priorities. It will require time, input from citizens and planners, prioritizing needs, and permission from the taxpaying voters. We will need to be innovative and disciplined about funding. Being a rapidly growing community recently designated as a metropolitan rather than a rural area based on the latest census, where the population, crime and the number of visitors grows exponentially in summer, we may need to look at a visitors’ tax to supplement services, including the roads, police and jail. We will also have to look to grant funding for major community projects, including year round operation of the homeless shelter. Unhoused people need nutrition, protection from the elements and sanitary facilities year round, not only in winter.. Since health and mental health are dependent upon secure housing, we cannot ignore the problem of homelessness in Grand Traverse County.

5. What is the most important issue that you want to make significant progress solving in the next 4 years with or without a Democratic Majority?

The most pressing issue impacting our county is the lack of affordability and availability of housing. People who work here cannot afford to live here. Employers like Munson and TCAPS have jobs unfilled because there is no available housing for new employees. Because of short-term rentals like Air B&B and investor buyers, the cost of residential family homes has risen far beyond the ability of local workers to afford housing.

Our county has severely inadequate access to mental health services and to beds for people with experiencing severe mental healthcare needs, such as crisis stabilization, inpatient, and residential treatment. Instead, people of all ages with severe mental healthcare needs are often housed indefinitely without trial in the Grand Traverse

County Jail, which is not intended or equipped as a mental health hospital. Mental health is health and should be treated with parity by health insurers so we can afford to offer mental healthcare for all.

I passionately believe that we can solve our local challenges by setting partisan politics aside to work together for the public good. On the County Commission representing Long Lake Township, I will continue my four generations' local family tradition of giving back to Grand Traverse County. I care about keeping Grand Traverse County and neighboring Long Lake Township healthy, green, clean, sustainable and affordable places to live, raise a family, and make a living. A vote for me is a vote to work together regardless of politics to make Grand Traverse County a more sustainable community for generations to come. Thanks so much for your consideration and support of my candidacy! Please reach out and visit my website <https://votepamkaiser4gtcommissionlonglakedistrict9.com> for more information.

A Thought on the Primary

by Linda Pepper

Some of you may be thinking of voting in the primary as a Republican. There are several current public servants that deserve your vote even if they run as a Republican. Looking at the Register of Deeds, County Treasurer, County Sheriff and Drain Commissioner, you may wish to consider the credible records of the current office holders or people currently working in the departments before deciding to switch to a new person. I often check Facebook for insight. But please remember to stay in only one column. If you cross over, your candidate votes are lost but your TCAPS or TADL votes will still be counted. Please remember to turn over the ballot and stay in the same party.

The Next Meeting

The next meeting is Wednesday, July 17 and there is a study session on July 24. After that, the next scheduled meeting is August 21. The primary election interferes with the usual first week BOC meeting.

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/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/bo>
[c](#)

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