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The BOC Beacon

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WELCOME TO THE BEACON

Today we're debuting the *BOC Beacon*, a weekly GT Dems newsletter that will provide you with cogent updates on what to expect at Wednesday's Grand Traverse County Board of Commissioners meeting.

We'll analyze the agenda, explain what's important and why, and keep you apprised of political shenanigans by the Republican majority. We'll also update you about what Democratic commissioners Betsy Coffia and Bryce Hundley are doing to improve the lives of county residents, and we'll provide you with a summary of the highlights, and lowlights, of the previous week's meeting.

Our hope is that, during the Covid-19 pandemic, more of you will tune in to the commission meetings and, if inspired to do so, weigh in during the public comment period on subjects that are important to you.

If you want to continue to receive the *BOC Beacon* please efill in the form at GTDems.org/boc-special. Or you can send an email to communications@gt Dems.org with the subject "BOC Beacon." Please be sure to include your first and last name and a phone number. Suggestions and comments are welcome.

Thanks for reading!

TOMORROW'S BOC AGENDA: WHAT TO WATCH FOR

NATE ALGER'S PERFORMANCE REVIEW – Appointed County Administrator in June 2018, Nate Alger reports to a board whose chairman, Rob Hentschel, is an inveterate micromanager. Fellow Republicans Brad Jewett, Ron Clous and Gordie LaPointe are usually in lockstep with Hentschel, putting them at odds with Coffia, Hundley and, often, Sonny Wheelock Jr.

Walking a tightrope over this ideological chasm is Alger.

As LaPointe noted in an understated comment on Alger's performance review, "Nate as the GT County Administrator reports to seven very diverse individuals often with politically very diverse opinions on issues before the county."

Nevertheless, according to the board majority, Alger has exceeded expectations regarding his relations with commissioners; met strategic planning expectations; exceeded expectations with regard to his leadership and relations with staff; and met financial management expectations.

By contract, meeting or exceeding expectations entitles him to a \$3,000 raise. That will bump his annual salary to \$130,720.

Not every commissioner expressed enthusiasm about Alger's performance. Coffia ranked him as needing improvement in his relations with the board. She criticized his communication skills, faulted him for failing to maintain positive working relationships with all board members, and said he has done a poor job framing issues and synthesizing information to help the board make informed decisions.

"While the pandemic response obviously has constrained his bandwidth in the last 2 months, my observation for the last 1.5 years is that the administrator needs to work on more consistent, effective engagement with all 7 commissioners and developing his ability to support the board in making sound, well informed decisions," Coffia wrote. She also urged the board to "give the administrator significantly more latitude in agenda setting, currently controlled by the chair alone."

SUMMER TAX RATE REQUEST –

Commissioners are scheduled to deliberate on a request from County Finance Director Dean Bott to reduce the millage rate by a millage-reduction fraction of .9906 for the 2020 tax year.

ROAD COMMISSION WORK SESSION – Yes, this is a BOC-centric newsletter, but we thought you might want to know that the Road Commission is holding an important meeting Wednesday on Phase II of the East/West Corridor Project.

The major discussion item will be the replacement of MKSK and Parallel Solutions as the Public Engagement Lead and Facilitator. The proposal is to replace them with Networks Northwest.

Phase I of the public engagement effort did not result in a recommendation to build the Hartman-Hammond bridge. That annoyed Road Commission members, who voted to proceed with planning for a bridge anyway. The change of firms for the public engagement portion of the contract is viewed by some as a method of subbing in a company that will sell the public on the bridge instead of collecting

public input on the entirety of the East-West corridor traffic flow.

LAST WEEK'S HIGH (AND LOW) LIGHTS

If you weren't able to tune into last Wednesday's BOC meeting, you missed a master class on how to help constituents with their unemployment claims.

Using a PowerPoint presentation (see link below), Coffia delivered a tutorial on the problems that have bedeviled out-of-work Michiganders, beginning



with the Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency's (UIA) faulty MiDAS computer system.

She noted that a class-action lawsuit pending in the Michigan Supreme Court claims that MiDAS – launched

by GOP Gov. Rick Snyder – falsely accused about 40,000 people of engaging in unemployment fraud. Although the state has appealed the suit, it has acknowledged that the victims were wrongly accused. The Supreme Court is simply being asked how damages should be assessed to people who suffered wage garnishments and even bankruptcy as a result of the false charges.

Coffia noted that the UIA has been overwhelmed by claims since March. She said the agency had been staffed to handle a daily volume of 2,000 calls, but instead has been receiving up to 175,000 calls a day. So far, 1.7 million workers – more than one-third of Michigan's workforce – have filed for unemployment. The UIA has paid out more than \$5.6 billion in benefits.

Coffia credited downstate Rep. Alex Garza, D-Taylor, for helping her to break the UIA logjam for local residents. She said Garza told her that his

office has been filling out so-called Centralized Response Team (CRT) forms on behalf of his constituents to help expedite claims. She said that when she learned that her office could not help out-of-work Traverse City residents fill out the CRTs, she persuaded Sen. Wayne Schmidt, R-Traverse City, to help. Due to Coffia's persistence, Schmidt has now dedicated an employee in his office to help local residents with the CRTs.

Following her presentation, Coffia offered to share her slides – which include step-by-step guidance and contact information for the Schmidt staffer – with her fellow commissioners. Only Hundley requested them. Sadly, none of the Republicans responded.

Think about that. They were spoon-fed information that could be of real assistance to their out-of-work constituents, and they just sat there. Like stumps.

BOC LINKS

Commissioner Coffia's UIA PowerPoint is available [HERE](#):

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1dE1c5dF-WmoCUoq9EyE5B5C3bWSNOlmi_0SPjMGEoGc

You can find a link to the agenda, packet, and minutes of the May 20 BOC meeting [HERE](#):

<https://grandtraversecounty.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=163>

You can watch the meetings live AND see replays of previous meetings online [HERE](#):

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiB1eEx7uvQn7L1LM1kShGQ>