

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE BUCHANAN CITY COMMISSION**  
**MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2024 – 7:00 PM**  
**CHAMBER OF BUCHANAN CITY HALL - 302 N REDBUD TRAIL, BUCHANAN MI**

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**MINUTES**

**I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Denison at 7:00 P.M.

**II. Recognition**

**III. Pledge of Allegiance**

Mayor Denison led in the pledge of Allegiance.

**IV. Roll Call**

Present: Mayor Sean Denison, Mayor Pro Tem Mark Weedon, Commissioner Patrick Swem, Commissioner Dan Vigansky, Commissioner Larry Money

**V. Approve Agenda**

Motion made by Vigansky, supported by Swem, to amend the agenda to move VII. Consent Agenda item C. Expenditures under XI. New Business item A.

Roll call vote to approve the amended agenda carries unanimously.

**VI. Public Comment - Agenda Items Only** *(3-minute limit)*

None.

**VII. Consent Agenda** *(can be approved all in one motion, for general housekeeping items)*

**A. 2024 Garage Sale Weekend:** Consider approving garage sale 2024 dates- June 7, 8, & 9. Garage sale permits would be free of charge for that weekend.

**B. Minutes:** Consider approving Regular Meeting Minutes from February 26th, 2024.

~~**C. Expenditures:** Consider approving the expenditures for March 11, 2024, in the amount of \$102,997.74~~

**D. Common Schedule:** Consider approving the common schedule for 2024.

Motion made by Vigansky, supported by Weedon, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Roll call vote carries unanimously.

**VIII. Scheduled Matters from the Floor** *(if any)*

**A. Audit Presentation:** Brian Hake, CPA with Kruggel Lawton with a brief presentation on the FYE 2023 Audit

1) Our Job: Testing accordance with audit standards and provide initial opinions on statements. We have issued unmodified opinions, which is the highest level you can give. This means statements have been fairly presented and are in accordance.

2) The Results of the Audit & Financial Highlights:

- Governmental Activities: (except proprietary funds) funds decrease by \$645,000 and ended at \$8.99 million as of June 2023
- Business-Type Activities: funds decreased by \$1.2 million and ended at \$7.47 million.

- Many ongoing projects, things that started and finished during that fiscal year. One of the main ones was the downtown infrastructure project.
- General Fund: decreased by \$212,000 – worth noting that included a transfer out of \$435,000 so before that: revenues - expenses for general funds = \$192,000
  - That left the general fund as of this quarter end at approx. \$1.2 million.
- One of the metrics people talk about to consider the health of the general fund is the number of months of funds balance. Based on that positive \$1.2 million compared to the expenditures for that fiscal year, that equated to 4.25 months of fund balance. It's not a perfect metric, it's commonly used and a good reference point.

**B. County Commissioner, Mac Elliot:** Update of the AEP Building.

1) AEP BUILDING: The county purchased the old Clark corporate building (July 2022), more recently known as the AEP building, and improvements are continuing for the 24/7 Emergency Operations Center and 911 dispatch. The past three months staff transferred utility accounts into Berrien County control and worked to assign contracts for building maintenance and IT equipment installations. Depending on the scope of operation, 60-90 people will work here. To start transferring folks before the end of the year. We will continue to have the emergency operations center in Benton Twp, and the backup at the South County Courthouse, but the hub will be here. AEP will continue to have their nuclear security group next to the county emergency operations center. These entities work closely and will be physically right next to each other.

2) TOWER: Construction of the 800-megahertz signal tower continues. Located on 20 acres leased by Buchanan Twp behind the Fire Dept. Tower base and equipment shed are going up. The system will be interoperable throughout the whole county. It's redundant, but you want redundancy.

Now working on the Request for Qualification (RFQ) that selects a design team for the Emergency Operations Center and 911 dispatch. RFQ will be presented to the Board of Commissioners in March for final review. Process anticipated to finish in spring/summer.

Denison asks about the soccer fields and Elliot confirms they will still be in use as normal.

**IX. Reports by: Departments, Committees, Boards**

**A. Friends of McCoy Creek trail, Chair Jerry Flenar**

1) Consider approving the proposed Map Locating for the New Trail Markers

With your approval we will work with Mike Baker to set up the signage to get people from one side of Buchanan to the other along the 5.5 mi trail. Also, wanted to share that Edgewater did all the engineering work and donated all the labor and materials for the project.

Motion made by Swem, supported by Money, to approve the map locating trail marker locations.

Roll call vote carries unanimously.

**B. Police Department Report, Chief Harvey Burnett**

1) Consider the purchase of Body Worn Cameras

When upgrading our current body cams in 2019/2020 they started degrading and are now at 70% capability. This means sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. Our vendor is also no longer servicing the model we have. Our recommendation is to purchase six Axon cameras in the amount of \$17,686.46 – Axon is the largest vendor with consistent and reliable cameras. We applied for a federal grant last year and were not chosen. We received a donation of \$10,000 and

a \$6,000 grant from MGCF leaving only \$1,686.46. The costs include all licensing, cloud storage, and camera equipment through Axon. Camera life expectancy is 6-7 years, but we created a capital improvement plan to cycle that. In the future we will work toward in-car camera systems that will sync with body cameras. We applied to a microgrant this year to add a couple more cameras but with a much smaller request.

Currently the state of Michigan does not mandate police agencies to have body worn cameras, but it may go to that eventually. In the meantime, departments are encouraged to record for accountability and to reduce police abuse. Officers really want them as well. It helps to support safety and evidence as the recording can be used for interviewing and is admissible in court.

Motion made by Money, supported by Weedon, to approve the purchase of body worn cameras from Axon Enterprise in the amount of \$17,686.46. Motion is moved to a roll call vote.

Yea: Swem, Denison, Weedon, Money

Nay: Vigansky

Motion carries 4-1.

## 2) 2023 Annual Report

In times past we have done a presentation, and we have a written document which has been posted on the website. Moving forward we want to have a written report similar to the Sheriff Department providing ostensible information and things we have done throughout the year.

The mission is to be a more community-oriented policing department which means we try to work with our community first. The officers are empowered to write citations as needed but we want to educate and work with our community.

## C. Clerk Report- City Clerk, Kalla Langston

### 1) Presidential Primary Election Update.

First election with early voting was a learning process but Berrien County did amazing.

- 9 Buchanan voters attended early voting.
- 334 absentee voter ballots were sent.
- 266 a.v. ballots were received – 79% return (first-year permanent ballots went out)
- 424 voted in-person.
- 690 total voters – 18.5% participation rate

Legislation is moving quick on elections.

- New legislation on terms about not taking office until Dec 1<sup>st</sup>.
- New recount bill looking at the recount-ability of bags. Right now, you can only recount bags that are sealed properly.
- Also, a security grant is coming our way. A group is asking for \$38 million to increase security for election workers. Since 2020, 1 in 3 election workers have had some kind of threat.

### 2) City Commission Nominating Petition Packets (**Due July 23, 2024, by 4:00 PM**).

## X. Unfinished Business

## XI. New Business

**A. Expenditures:** Consider approving the expenditures for March 11, 2024, in the amount of \$102,997.74

Motion made by Swem, supported by Vigansky, to approve the expenditures for March 11, 2024 as presented. Roll call vote carries unanimously.

**XII. Communications** *(informational only, formal board action is not necessary for these items, unless so desired)*

**A. Budget Workshop:** possibly scheduling for the workshop on March 14th at 10 AM or 2 PM OR March 19th at 10 AM or 2 PM

Everyone is on board for Tuesday March 19<sup>th</sup> at 10am.

**XIII. Public Comment - Non-Agenda Items Only** *(3-minute limit)*

Jerry Flenar – brings public awareness to the issue of vandalism on the trail.

James Busby – The northside has noticed the police presence and thanked the police department. Also commented on working with the trail committee to potentially help find funding for trail surveillance.

Jerry Flenar – Addresses the commission regarding a message received by his 16 year old granddaughter inviting her to sign a petition.

**XIV. Executive Comments**

**A. City Manager Comments**

We've navigated to the audit; we are being very mindful of the current budget. We are working on next year's fiscal budget and will meeting with the commission next week. We are continually trying to improve the finances of the city and that is our commitment to our citizens.

**B. Commissioner Comments**

Weedon – None.

Swem – Hats off to the team, good audit. I know there's a lot of extra work there that had to go on. There were some good practices that will continue to being placed to keep up that success. Excellent work to that team and thank you for getting that done. Thank you Harvey, I always appreciate the annual report and keep doing what you're doing. Your activism in the community is really important to see. To my peers, this upcoming goal setting session is really, really important so please take the time to put your wish list items on there. Even if they are not things we can tackle in this next in this next budget or the next couple of budgets. I think it's really important we talk about those hope and dream items too even though they are not something that's an immediate spend to us. Lets get creative and drill things back to what we can actually get done.

Vigansky – I wasn't going to say a thing about any of this because it was pretty quiet but you race baiters and you pukers have to continuously bring it up. You don't like me because I went against your stinking school tax. You can friend me, but thing about it is when I ran for commissioner before I sent out almost 900 friend requests. I didn't pay too much attention other than the fact that they were names. If the friends were accepted, I accepted the friends. I don't go out there searching and I don't like my good character questioned at all. Especially by pukers like you or you Mr. Busby. No, I have the full right to defend my good name. You defamed a good man down here. You both were very instrumental in it. You destroyed Ben Eldridge, it was absolutely awful for you to do that. I blocked her immediately. I think that its absolutely pathetic that you people and what you're trying to do. I'm not going nowhere no matter what you accuse me of. Ever. That's all I got to say, I would've not said a stinking word. You ought to get some of your dogs under control. That's all I have to say.

Money – Well I can't top that one but I have elected to put my comments to pen. Since I belong to a generation that was referred to as slower to speak and think, please bear with me. Recently, I have been the subject of a few people's comments. From what I gather, since I sit on the end seat of the

commission, I would be the last to come under fire. With that being said, I want to refer back to a situation that I was involved in when a gentleman in our audience was commenting on non-agenda items and referred to our annual Memorial Day parade to which I took offense and spoke up. Since that time, that gentleman and his wife have spoken to me, and apologies were offered by both parties. I might add that at no time was his or his wife's veteran status mentioned. But in a letter sent by Miss Johnson, it referred to my association with a veteran service organization of which I was state commander, that I disrespected this gentleman's service. So naturally, the next incident occurred when I was making comments to local citizens Mrs. Harris, Mr. Busby, and Mr. Brown about the progress they were making in the northside neighborhood. I stated that "you folks have done an outstanding job, so thank you." Once again I was chastised for my choice of words in using the term "you folks." I want to thank you for pointing that out. I guess my attendance in Mrs. Snyders English class was not headed properly so from now on, if acceptable I will just refer to our friends in the northside as "yall." Also I want to apologize to Mrs. Johnson for the comment I made about dragging people into our meeting. Apparently, after reading the article published by our friends at the Herald Palladium, the gentleman notified me that he was interested to see first-hand what was going on in the city. And of course it was also pointed out in the same article, my commenting on Mr. Ryman and his anonymous letter. Unfortunately, he did not hear me correctly when I referenced the letter. I never mentioned that he was the author, just that anonymous letters do not hold much weight with me. I do take offense to the fact again that Mr. Ryman's military service is mentioned. As I stated earlier, my service to helping fellow veterans to get a disability claim increase in their military pension or directing them to a place that may be able to help them with some of their demons has no bearing on the proceedings of this city commission. With that being said, I want to one again thank all of you for being here, city staff, the DPW, our law enforcement, and city firefighters for all the hard work they do to keep our city safe and running smoothly. And also to the members of this commission and our city manager for all the work you put in to keeping Buchanan a better place to live. Thank you.

### C. Mayor Comments

Tonight I just wanted to talk briefly, I hear all the time the same comments. Why is it so expensive to live in Buchanan why are taxes so high, why can't you guys fix it, why cant you guys use the marijuana money, where is the marijuana money? All those things. That's on top of hearing that I run the city into the ground, I am wasting money, etc. So just a couple of quick points on that. How many people miss the good ole days. I do. I can remember riding around with my parents when I was 9 or 10 and we'd go visit people on Saturdays or Sundays and just go have coffee and talk. Those were the good ole days. I also remember in 2010, I had my own business and I had built up a bunch up a bunch of debt because my business actually supplied lumber yards with equipment and nobody was building house, so lumber yards weren't selling anything, and so they didn't have any money to buy my equipment. I was pretty heavily in debt and my accountant that year said, Sean it took you longer than a year to get there and its going to take you longer than a year to get out of it and I have never forgotten that. Buchanan got in the shape that it got in over a span of 30-40 years and we are not going to get out of it overnight. But if we keep doing the things that we are doing, we are going to get there eventually I think its really important to know that the things that we are doing aren't for us and they are not for you. They are for your kids, and your grandkids.

## **XV. Adjourn**

Motion made by Weedon supported by Money, to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 8:15pm.

Barbara A. Pitcher, City Clerk

Mayor Sean Denison