

Road Report

A publication of the Road Commission for Oakland County for public officials serving Oakland County

www.rcocweb.org

Road Commission breaks ground on new admin building

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Board of Road Commissioners and top agency administrators on Oct. 17 broke ground on what will be the agency's first new administrative building since the 1950s. The building will also house a state-of-the-art traffic operations center (TOC).

The new building will allow the Road Commission to combine staff now housed in three locations into one building. RCOC office staff is now based in the agency's Beverly Hills offices, its 1950s building in Waterford Twp. and in the current TOC, housed in rented space in the Oakland County Information Technology Building.

The new building is being constructed next to the agency's current building on its Waterford Twp. campus.

"This has been 50 years in the making," explained RCOC Chair Andrea LaLonde. "The Road Commission has been planning to re-unite its administra-

tive staff in one building since we were forced to expand into two buildings in the 1970s."

She added the new building will improve the efficiency of the agency by improving communications, collaboration and cooperation among staff. "For 50 years, our office staff has been divided into locations that are a half-hour drive apart," LaLonde noted. "While we have made this work, it was never ideal and never intended to be permanent. At long last, we are remedying what was intended to be a temporary situation."

RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar noted the agency is not borrowing money to construct the new building, having been saving extra funds for more than 12 years for the effort. "We are not going into debt," he said.

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NEW BUILDING**



Participating in the groundbreaking were, left to right: RCOC Board Chair Andrea LaLonde, Vice Chair Eric McPherson, Frank Rewold & Sons Vice President Jason Rewold, RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar, Commissioner Nancy Quarles and RCOC Deputy Managing Director Gary Piotrowicz.

Road Commission Board and administration congratulate elected officials following Nov. 5

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Board and administration congratulate the many elected officials serving Oakland County who were elected or re-elected on Nov. 5.

"From our new US senator to our state representatives to our County Executive and County Commission to our city, village and township officials, we salute all those who have committed their time and energy to public service on behalf of the residents of Oakland County," stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "Serving as an elected official is a challenging role, and can be thankless at



times, but these positions are the backbone of our democracy, and we all owe them our gratitude."

Kolar added the Road Commission looks forward to working with all elected officials serving the county at all levels.

"We are here to serve our mutual constituents, and we stand ready to assist our elected officials in any way can," he stated.

"We look forward to meeting with and working with all elected officials who serve Oakland County," Kolar said. "Together, we can ensure that Oakland County continues to be a shining example of committed public leadership."

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ROAD COMMISSION
for OAKLAND COUNTY

RCOC ready for winter after reviewing operations with staff

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is ready for winter, having reviewed its winter operations with its truck drivers, while mechanics have prepared the agency's winter-maintenance equipment including trucks and plows in anticipation of the inevitable winter weather.

"Winter season is a very busy time of year that often requires round-the-clock services to address snow and ice. That's why we have added both full- and part-time workers to help ensure we provide the level of service that Oakland County residents deserve," explained RCOC Chair Andrea LaLonde.

RCOC is also continuing to update its fleet of snowplows/salt trucks. "We continue to replace our aging trucks," said RCOC Vice Chair Eric McPherson. "As a safety feature," McPherson added, "all new trucks are equipped with green lights that can be seen from a greater distance during winter weather. Pick-up trucks used for winter maintenance are also equipped with the green lights."

Road Commissioner Nancy Quarles noted the agency is prepared for whatever Mother Nature brings during the winter, though a milder winter is always appreciated. "Winter maintenance is one of our most critical functions for the safety of everyone," she said. "We always prepare for a worse-than-normal winter which includes having plenty of road salt available."

LaLonde noted the RCOC team is also

constantly looking for best practices when it comes to maintaining roads during the winter months, such as the "wing plows" ordered with new trucks in recent years. "The wing plows extend from the side of the truck and are retracted when not in use," LaLonde said.

"They increase the width of road-way plowed by a single truck, enabling trucks to plow a road lane and the shoulder at the same time, for example. Equipping many of our trucks with wing plows has improved their efficiency," she noted.

RCOC utilizes its pickup fleet to clear crossovers/turnarounds on boulevards in a more timely manner as well as to get into subdivisions/residential streets more quickly. The pickup fleet is also used for winter weather rapid-response operations that allow RCOC staff to get to isolated icing occurrences and other urgent situations more quickly. Additionally, during or following weather events with six or more inches of snow, RCOC uses non-road-maintenance staff to augment its pool of drivers and



RCOC Highway Maintenance Director Darryl Heid, front left, Managing Director Dennis Kolar, front in orange shirt, Deputy Managing Director Gary Piotrowicz and Central Operations Director Mary Gillis discuss winter maintenance with staff at the RCOC Southfield garage.

hires contractors to help on gravel roads.

Despite these efforts, LaLonde explained that motorists must still be vigilant when driving during or immediately after snow events. "Drive for the conditions. That will make a safer environment for everyone on the road," she explained.

LaLonde also reminded motorists that as of this year, Michigan law requires motorists to stay 200 feet back from a plow truck. "This will help to ensure the safety of motorists," she said. "It can take a longer distance to stop in snow and ice, and when vehicles run into the back of one of the big orange trucks, it's not good for the passenger vehicle. So, please don't crowd the plow -- give the plows 'room to groom'."

New Road Commission drone with LiDAR helps improve inventory accuracy

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has acquired a new drone with LiDAR capability that is helping to improve the accuracy of the agency's annual inventory process.

LiDAR is a detection system which works on the principle of radar, but uses light from a laser. The new drone is also providing enhanced road and road project aerial photos and videos.

This fall, RCOC GIS Supervisor and drone pilot Aaron Verhelle visited each RCOC Maintenance garage to use the drone to calculate the quantities of material piles kept at the garages, including 23A gravel, course aggregate and bulk cold patch. The drone is able to provide more accurate quantity calculations than

previous calculation methods, ensuring RCOC is able to maintain more accurate inventory records.



The new RCOC drone, above left. At right, drone pilot Aaron Verhelle prepares to fly the new drone.

New state law requires drivers to stay 200-feet behind plow trucks

It's the law: Drivers are now required to stay 200 feet behind a snowplow/salt truck.

As of July 8, 2024, a new state law requires motorists to stay at least 200 feet behind a snowplow/salt truck. The new law, Public Act 72 of 2024, was passed by the Michigan Legislature in February.

The law also requires vehicles stop at least 20 feet behind a snowplow/salt truck when the truck is stopped at an intersection. The only exception to the 200 foot following rule is when a vehicle is legally overtaking or passing a snowplow/salt truck.

Violation of the rule is a civil infraction punishable by a fine up to \$100.

"We applaud this new law," stated Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "This is really for the safety of the



For perspective, the orange truck in the distance is parked 200 feet ahead of the orange truck to the left.

other motorists using the roads while we are out salting and plowing. Unfortunately, we have witnessed way too

many motorists following our trucks way too closely. Sadly, this sometimes results in those passenger vehicles running into the back of our trucks."

Kolar added that when a passenger vehicle runs into the back of a 12-ton mostly steel truck, it is the passenger vehicle – and the people in it – who are most at risk of getting injured. "Typically, when a car hits one of our trucks, the truck is virtually unscathed, but the car can be severely damaged."

The big orange plow trucks also typically drive slower than passenger vehicles and take longer to stop and turn. "Please don't 'crowd the plow'," Kolar noted. "For your safety, and the safety of others on the roads, please give the plow trucks the room they need to make the roads safe for the rest of us."

New RCOC asset management report identifies need for \$150 million more annually to maintain paved roads

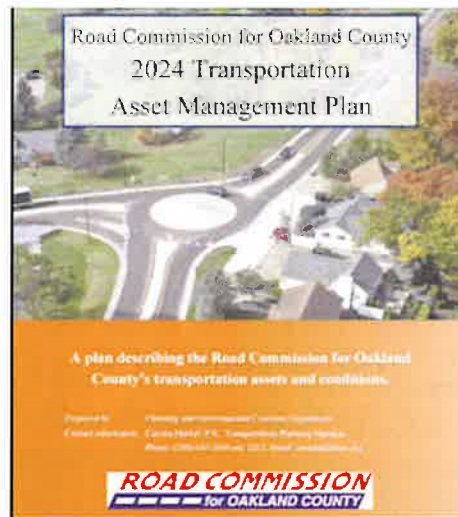
In accordance with state requirements, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has produced its second asset management plan, which identified the need for nearly \$150 million in additional funding annually just to improve all paved roads to the agency's desired condition for the roads.

The asset management plan identifies all assets owned by the agency, including roads, bridges, traffic signals and culverts. It also identifies the condition of each and spells out the agency's plans for best maintaining them based on available funding.

The state Legislature, several years ago, mandated that all local road agencies in the state regularly produce asset management plans. The mandate was a response to road agencies urging the Legislature to increase road funding, and was intended, in part, to answer the question of whether current road funding is adequate to address road needs.

This is RCOC's second asset management report. The first was produced in 2021.

"These reports are amazing tools for our agency," explained RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "They provide a very clear picture of our assets – mainly our roads and bridges – and their current conditions as well as projecting their likely future conditions given expected funding levels. We did what the Legislature asked, and it clearly showed that additional revenue is needed, which is consistent with the numerous studies and reports produced under previous administrations. Now, it is



The cover of the new Asset Management Plan.

time for the Legislature to step up and adequately fund local roads for the long term."

One outcome of the asset management process is to identify the desired condition of all the assets and the amount of money needed to achieve that level of maintenance. The plan also identifies all currently available funding and then calculates the gap between what is currently available and what would be needed to achieve the desired condition for all assets.

The nearly \$150 million annually in additional funding needed just to maintain RCOC's paved roads includes only maintaining and improving the paved surfaces of the roads. It does not include widening

or other improvements to the roads to address congestion. Currently RCOC receives approximately \$122 million in state road funding annually.

The report provides a detailed breakdown of the condition of RCOC's paved main roads and secondary roads as well as its gravel main and secondary roads. It notes that in 2024, 28 percent of RCOC's paved primary (main) roads were in good condition, which is up from about 9 percent in 2016.

Kolar attributes this improvement to the 2015 state road-funding package that generated the first increase in state road funding since 1997 (and which began generating additional funding in 2017). However, he warned that beginning in 2025, RCOC expects the condition of the roads to again begin to deteriorate as the "buying power" of the 2015 road-funding package is eaten up by inflation.

"Essentially, this report explains how we are prioritizing the work on our road system to maximize the benefit of woefully insufficient funding," Kolar noted.

The RCOC Asset Management Plan is published every three years. The 2021 and 2024 reports are available on the RCOC website, www.rcocweb.org: Click on the "About Us" tab at the top of the homepage, select "Publications" from the drop-down menu and then select "RCOC Asset Management Plan" under the "Asset Management Plan" heading.

**31001 Lahser Road
Beverly Hills, MI 48025**

Lincoln Park man charged with threatening Road Commission employee

In October, the Oakland County Prosecuting Attorney filed charges against Kenneth Oliver of Lincoln Park after he sent a threatening message to the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) following an incident where he allegedly confronted the employee after driving through a closed road construction zone.

The victim, an RCOC inspector, observed Oliver drive through the closed construction zone, driving over construction cones and cutting off another driver. She then turned on her RCOC truck lights and honked the horn to warn construction work-

ers at the site. Oliver then allegedly got out of his car, yelled at the Road Commission employee and pounded on her truck.

Twelve days later, a threatening message was sent to the Road Commission, warning that the defendant would find where the employee lived and kill her.

Oliver was charged with malicious use of a telecommunications device.

"We appreciate the Prosecutor's Office following through with charges," stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. "It is never OK to threaten a public employee doing their job."

NEW BUILDING — CONT'D FROM FRONT

Rather, RCOC has set aside money since 2012. This has included income from the sale of surplus vehicles and equipment, the sale of excess land, leasing of space on traffic signal poles to cellular companies, higher than expected interest income, refunds from health insurance companies, an insurance settlement and more.

Additionally, RCOC received \$5 million in federal grants to help pay for the new TOC, which will be included in the new building. RCOC will also save the \$500,000 per year in rent it is currently paying for its TOC space. The agency will also sell its building in Beverly Hills.

The new building is expected to cost \$42 million and to be completed in 2026. "At that point, we will have a modern, environmentally friendly building that

allows us to operate more efficiently, rather than two aging buildings plagued by leaking roofs, flooding basements and outmoded designs," Kolar said.

He added that the Road Commission first considered remodeling and expanding its existing Waterford Twp. building, but that process would have been more expensive than constructing the new building.

Participating in the groundbreaking, in addition to RCOC Board Chair LaLonde and Managing Director Kolar, were Board Vice Chair Eric McPherson, Board Member Nancy Quarles, RCOC Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz, HRC Engineering Project Manager Jane Graham (HRC designed the new building and is overseeing construction) and Jason Rewold of Frank Rewold and Sons, which is doing the construction.

Contacting RCOC

If your constituents need information about a road project or want to report a pothole, traffic-signal concern or other road issue, they should call RCOC's **Department of Customer Services** toll free at:

(877) 858-4804

OR

**Fill out a report via the
RCOC Web site:
www.rcocweb.org**

ROAD REPORT

Road Report is published quarterly by the Road Commission for Oakland County. Have a question or comment about **Road Report**? Call Senior Communications Manager Craig Bryson at (248) 645-2000, ext. 2202.

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