



ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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A WORD FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

2021 was a year of extremes. While at the beginning of the year and toward the middle of the year, board meetings regularly lasted between 4 and 5 ½ hours, toward the end of the year the meetings were substantially shorter with the November 18 meeting lasting a scant 1 hour and 14 minutes.

The board meetings transitioned from a hybrid (virtual and in person) meetings to in person only, with the ability to view the meeting through Facebook. This change very likely had something to do with the trend toward shorter meetings, as someone with an interest in speaking during public comment could no longer give public comment virtually and had to physically attend the meeting.

Just when it seemed like things were quieting down regarding the election issue, the facemask in schools mandate took over as the burning issue during public comment. These two issues dominated public comment for a good part of 2021, sprinkled with a frequent dose of concern about the RV park located in Milton Twp.

It can be easy to get impatient when faced with so much public comment. However, I think it is important to remind ourselves, and even celebrate, that we live in a country in which a citizen can express their concerns, opinions, dismay, etc. without fear of reprisal.

Most of administration's activities throughout the year has been outlined for you in my bi-monthly reports, however, there are a few projects that warranted giving the board additional perspective and narrative. These projects particularly had significant impact either on the County's operations or on administration's time.

Even though we experienced a bit of turmoil in 2021, Antrim County has a solid foundation to build on going forward both financially and organizationally.

Looking ahead, we intend to continue addressing the two top priorities of the board: valuing employees and facility issues. We will also pursue additional training for the department heads with a focus both on management and leadership. Improved communications will be an ongoing priority.

In closing, I thank the board for your leadership and am especially thankful to be surrounded by a group of hard working, creative, and caring individuals both on the management/leadership team and the support of employees that are in the trenches making sure the work gets done. They are the reason Antrim County continues to not only function but improve.

Peter Garwood
County Administrator

STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHTS

Election Lawsuit

This lawsuit involved a lot of factors. It took a significant amount of time throughout 2021 and became very contentious as we balanced focusing on the facts for Antrim County, getting the required work completed, while staying out of any political debate. Suffice it to say, because of the short timeframes ordered by the judge for the gathering of information at various stages of the lawsuit, and the multiple filings with requests for information from the plaintiff's attorney, County staff from the Clerk's office and the administration office have had to, at a moment's notice, divert their attention from other County matters and, in many cases, increase the number of hours on the job.

New Parks Direction

This year we have overseen a whole new direction for Antrim County parks. With several priorities set in the Parks & Recreation Plan, the administration office identified implementing a proper parks department with a parks director as a key element. We presented a plan to the board early in the year that would not only be a savings but bring better opportunities for Antrim County parks to serve the public as well as become more self-sufficient. My deputy administrator stepped into the lead on parks as we transitioned. Working through the human resources department, we developed a position description - taking the opportunity to identify key issues and opportunities. Since we hired a director in mid-March, my office has continued playing a large role in bringing the parks to a new level in its service to the community.

Performance Evaluations

The county administrator held performance evaluations for ten department heads and three office staff in June and July of 2021. Follow-up touchpoint meetings were held and completed before the end of the year.

Website & Mapping

While the new website is primarily an IT project, my office has had staff working directly with our IT director through a website committee as well as taking the lead on certain aspects such as the mapping system. In the past, two of our most popular website offerings, parcel search and maps, were directly integrated with our, now outdated website. IT has already implemented a parcel search through BS&A and going forward, my deputy administrator was able to develop an application utilizing the industry standard ArcGIS at no additional financial cost to the County. The direction, which has a much more user-friendly interface, directly integrates

with current County-owned GIS software and BS&A software. Maps went [live](#) at the end of the year and will be an integral part of our new website.

Negotiations

A significant amount of time in the last few months of 2021 were dominated by negotiations with three bargaining units from the Sheriff's department. This round of bargaining took more sessions to come to agreement than in the past few sessions. With a tighter labor market, the bargaining units were requesting more in wage increases than in the past. In the end, I believe we came out with a good deal that not only showed our law enforcement that we support and appreciate them, but also one that is best for the County.

Strategic Planning

Originally intended for early 2021, due to COVID-19 restrictions, strategic planning was moved to August. We worked with MSU Extension's Beth Prykucki and John Amrhein to plan and develop strategic planning sessions beginning with a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis with department heads and elected officials. With a board of nine, it has proven a little more challenging to find shared priorities, but with the help of MSUE, we were able to find two that you, as commissioners, all found common ground with – valuing employees and facilities issues. Each of these top two priorities will be discussed later in this report.

County Facilities

As a result of the “facilities issue” being identified as one of two top priorities, a site safety audit was conducted on December 8 and 9 by the County's workers' compensation representative. The result will add to our knowledge about our facilities as we move forward. As our highly qualified, new maintenance director gets more and more familiar with our facilities, he will become a crucial resource in dealing with facilities as we go forward.

Aerial Imagery

Although the entire project was scheduled to be accomplished in 2021, due to the small window of clear days between snow melt and leaf growth, only part of the order was able to be flown and photographed last year. In particular, the higher resolution around the villages was able to be completed and will become available to local municipalities and the public in early 2022. With the hopeful cooperation of the weather, the rest of the imagery will be flown this spring of 2022 and likely available on our new mapping application in early 2023.

Valuing Employee (Morale)

As I mentioned, employee morale was a key priority identified during strategic planning. We have been in communication with department heads, elected officials, and human resources. We met a number of times to discuss how best to proceed with the identified priority of “valuing employees”. By the end of the year, we had already implemented one of the ideas we came up with, my deputy administrator created the Trillium Award making the awards by hand with winners for leadership, teamwork, and customer service. Longevity awards were also built by the deputy administrator who, along with human resources, presented them to employees serving the citizens of Antrim County for the past 20, 30, and 40 years. We will continue in 2022 getting feedback from employees and developing and implementing new ideas to value our employees.

COVID-19 & Zoom

As we have stated before, COVID-19 changed a lot of things and added significant challenges for businesses, organizations, and individuals throughout the state. As vaccines were developed, Antrim County found itself in a strange spot with no hospitals, Walgreens, or CVS. In response, Antrim County’s emergency manager and CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) stepped up to the challenge, creating new partnerships as we implemented vaccine clinic locations for the Northwest Michigan Health Department to administer vaccinations for our many citizens who needed and wanted the vaccines.

2021 also saw Antrim County not only adapt to a world utilizing Zoom, but we became a leader in implementation. While 2020 created an immediate need, we took it further, creating a standard that created a whole new world of public involvement with a safe and secure method. Throughout the year, we became advisors to villages, townships, organizations, and other communities on how to implement a secure and effective broadcasting method for their meetings. As much as possible, we were able to directly provide service to townships while they developed their own methods of moving forward.

Additionally, there were the ever-changing rules, restrictions, and guidelines that we were required to adopt. My office worked closely with human resources to stay on top of these new requirements which are often different amongst our departments and offices. We have all worked hard to protect the interest and health of County employees, and I am astounded at the significant hours and hard work human resources has put in along with many of our departments/offices as we all worked together. During the first part of the year, we developed a regular schedule for spraying a disinfectant throughout the County facilities. The actual act of spraying was carried out primarily by the maintenance department.

Broadband

Broadband is a difficult and complicated project, but it is clearly a need for residents of Antrim County and priority of the Board of Commissioners. Throughout the year, we continued to meet with NLEA (Northern

Lakes Economic Alliance), bouncing ideas and looking for the best way to proceed. With Truestream making good progress with broadband installation in the County, we had meetings and explored a partnership in which they would serve the entire County with broadband that would meet the new definition of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. Currently, this isn't possible for our village residents without significant cost. Though we were able to work well together, Great Lakes Energy (Truestream's parent company) had made promises to its shareholders that made the partnerships impractical. Ultimately, we decided to adapt the previous year's work into the concept of a middle mile fiber investment, utilizing a neutral host model with the intent of working with multiple internet service providers (ISPs) to connect our residents. With the board's support, we hired a consultant to help us become shovel-ready and navigate the METRO (Metropolitan Extension Telecommunication Rights-of-Way Oversight) Act, which included a resolution passed by the board and a request for proposals (RFPs) developed and released by the administration office. In 2022 we will finish out that RFP as well as the rest of the steps necessary for the METRO Act.

Housing

The Antrim County housing program lends money for emergency needs (such as furnaces, roofs, and wells) at low to no interest and payable when the house changes ownership, helping residents to help themselves. In some cases, if the need is small, finances are granted to residents in dire need. The housing program has had a lot of ups and downs over the last few years, but the program has allowed us to assist many residents through some of the hardest times and continues to bring funds back in from residents who had previously benefited from the program. Our deputy administrator continues to oversee the program, working with NMCAA (Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency), dealing with any discrepancies from the past, and helping residents navigate issues. One particular discrepancy my office was able to clear up through a lot of hard work and research was a 2016 CDBG grant that had been left open. At the end of the 2020 housing program year (June 2021), we reported \$26,653.91 in program income, which was disappointingly low, and actually below the state threshold for rolling it back into the housing program. However, the board saw fit in August to match the funds at 2:1 bringing the total to \$80,000, which at half-way through the program year has already helped residents from our long waiting list experiencing emergency home issues. Because this money was below the threshold, and from the County, we are not obligated to spend it by June 2022, which allows us to also use it to supplement projects in the future.

Medical Examiner

In 2021 we faced and managed the departure of long-time Medical Examiner Dewey Benson. We made a recommendation, and the board made the decision, to move forward by contracting out the medical examiner duties to the Mid-Michigan Medical Examiner Group. My deputy administrator headed up this

transition and while this decision put another workload on my department, the long-term savings and safeguards of this group were believed to be the best move for the County. This is now one of three departments that does not have a department head and my office administers through a third-party. The transition created no shortage of hiccups as we worked closely with the new medical examiner, funeral homes, the clerk, and the treasurer to find a smooth and efficient process.

Parks & Recreation Plan

The finishing touches were put on the Parks & Recreation Plan with the public hearing and approval of a resolution to submit on January 21 in time for submission for the February 1 deadline. The Department of Natural Resources informed us in April that the 2021-2025 Antrim County Parks & Recreation Plan was approved by the state. I would like to thank the Parks & Recreation Plan Committee for the guidance, Jenn Wright for assisting, Julie Weston for mapping, Jeremy Scott for various support, and especially Margie Boyd for providing the majority of the new text in the plan and putting it all together for submission. Approval of the plan enabled Grass River Natural Area to submit a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant application by the April 2021 deadline.

County Building Generator

After forty-three years of service, the board approved retiring the old generator and replacing it with a new more powerful natural gas generator. The generator was installed and operational early in the year. After observing the generator during power outages, we found that not only could it handle increased load attached beyond the previous generator but had a comfortable margin for additional draw. Planning for the best use of the leftover capacity, we settled on the addition of one live outlet in each of the departments so that at least some work could continue in the case of a power outage or other larger event.

Road Commission Bond Issue

The Antrim County Road Commission approached the County in mid-2021 with a request that the County agree to sell bonds for a Road Commission construction project. Starting in June of 2021, the finance director, treasurer, and I worked with Burt Thompson from the Road Commission, the County financial advisor and bond counsel to get all needed documentation together to meet with Standard and Poor's (S&P) regarding the County's credit rating. The results as stated by the S&P representative, "Financial management assessment characterized by reasonable and conservative budget assumptions..." and a strong tax base, led to a rating of AA+ for the County which is the second highest rating any municipality can receive. The rating was largely responsible for the County bonds selling at an excellent interest rate of 1.929%. The bonds will be paid by road commission revenues over the next 20 years.

OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Staff Training

COVID-19 caused a good deal of rescheduling for both training and conferences given the inability to gather in-person closer to the beginning of the year. As the year progressed, more organizations began to feel comfortable holding events in person. In my opinion this is a good thing, as it is very difficult to give a virtual training the undivided attention required when competing everyday issues pop-up throughout the training.

The Michigan Association of Counties (MAC) legislative conference originally scheduled for March 26-28 as an in-person conference in Lansing was rescheduled to a virtual conference that took place on April 28-29. The County administrator participated. The County administrator also attended the Michigan Association of Administrative Officials (MACAO) annual conference which was rescheduled from May 25-28 to September 1-3 as an in-person conference. The County administrator also attended the MAC annual conference which was held September 26-28 in person. The County administrator along with the finance director attended many sessions on the rules for use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. The County administrator participated in a remonumentation webinar.

The deputy administrator participated in several webinars regarding ever changing MIOSHA and MDHHS rules. In addition, he was able to attend Public Information Officer (PIO) training in Marquette which had been rescheduled several times since early 2020. This training in particular has proved valuable as this role has had increasing responsibilities over the last two years. The deputy administrator also participated in a number of webinars that helped him on projects, including our campground reservation system, ARGIS, housing, and broadband. Unfortunately, the deputy administrator was not able to attend MACAO due to a board meeting conflict, but he was able to attend Michigan Municipal Retirement System (MERS) conference in person in 2021. And finally, the deputy administrator attended Michigan DNR River Board training in 2021.

Indigent Defense

Indigent defense was a brand new program in 2019 and was initially administered through the administration office. In 2020 the board approved a contract with Paul Jarboe to take over administration of the program. In 2021 we moved decisions on which attorney gets assigned a case or needs to appear in court on arraignment day from the courts to Mr. Jarboe as the program administrator. He is also responsible for making sure we have the right amount of attorneys to pick from and for making sure the attorneys are attending the required annual training sessions. Essentially, by moving these responsibilities to Mr. Jarboe, the County has complied with Standard 5, which requires independence from the judiciary.

The standard for determining indigency and contribution was approved by LARA on October 28, 2021. This standard is currently and has been in the past performed by the judges. Given that this practice is allowed, is cost effective, and is working well, we saw no reason to change.

In 2021 Leelanau County made the decision to join Antrim County and Grand Traverse County by contracting with Paul Jarboe for the administration of their indigent defense program.

Lawsuits

Over the course of 2021, we navigated our way through and kept our finger on the pulse of a number of different lawsuits as follows:

Bailey v. Antrim County

Zettel/Grainger v. Antrim County

Opioid Litigation

Lockard v. Antrim County

Sommer v. Antrim County

Stevens V. Probate Court

2022 GOALS

Continue and Improve upon Performance Evaluation Process

- Will request input from department heads on the process and make appropriate modifications

Implement Strategic Planning Priorities – Valuing Employees

- Further engage with employees on appreciation and morale
- Finish developing a survey to identify employee priorities and present to board
- Continue and expand the longevity awards to additional milestones

Work to Improve both Internal and External Communications

- County staff will be working on preparation and eventual launch of a new website
- Continue looking for new ideas to improve internal communications

Implement the Parks Plan

- Increase the number of campsites at Barnes Park
- Give the restrooms at Elk Rapids Day Park a facelift
- Improve equipment the parks staff use to carry out their duties and make park improvements

Implement Strategic Planning Priorities – Facilities Issues

- Have workers' compensation carrier conduct a safety-related audit of County facilities
- Contact MMRMA to see if they will conduct a liability related audit of facilities
- Arrange for a panel discussion made up of an employee representative of each Sheriff Office division (road, jail dispatch)
- Draft, and facilitate the execution of, a lease agreement with the Health Department
- Zero in on the Board's chosen strategy and begin implementation
- Identify first (and small) steps that the Board can agree upon. Begin the planning for those steps

Continuing Projects

- Record Digitizing: Administration Office staff continues to work on scanning documents related to committee minutes, contracts, lawsuits, and other historical administrative information into Laserfische.