

Public Comment
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Thank you, board chair Ty Wessel and fellow board members, for an opportunity to address a topic that has come before you before but I feel needs further vigilance. If the Leelanau Energy annual meeting was posted, please interrupt me. I did not see the posting on the county website.

I address adherence to the Michigan Open Meetings Act. It's more than a guide for behavior of public officials, it's a requirement. And it takes little very time or effort to follow. Given the complaint filed with the county Prosecutor's office about OMA violations several months ago and the Prosecutor's determination that, indeed, they did occur on this board's watch, it's disappointing that the issue is cropping up again.

I'm referring to the annual meeting of the Leelanau Energy organization on July 24, which I attended through an invitation given to all candidates for this board. Part of the meeting was set aside for commissioner candidates to speak.

Three county commissioners — half of the County Board — attended the meeting and spoke. I believe they are members of Leelanau Energy, although I am not privy to its membership role.

Three other commissioners were invited to attend but did not. Had one of them shown, a majority of the County Board would have been present.

As should have been expected, one topic was county energy policy including a plan to install a solar panel project on this property. The president of Leelanau Energy is Joe DeFors, a clean energy advocate who makes his living in the field. Mr. DeFors is also chair of the Future Energy Task Force, a public body appointed by the County Board. The public body did not post notices of meetings or minutes of meetings for several months during its infancy.

Let me be clear. I am not saying that the Open Meetings Act was violated. It does seem, at least to me, that the spirit of the OMA was breached. Only by happenstance was the meeting one member short of having a clear majority.

I do not know whether commissioners who are members of Leelanau Energy regularly attend its meetings. But if they do, I have a simple solution for the future that has been employed in the past.

That solution is to inform clerk Michelle Crocker whenever three or more commissioners gather together to talk about anything related to county business. Clerk Crocker can post the gatherings as possible meetings, which would make them open to the public. That way the public would know when and where to observe and possibly help in the development of county policy.

It is not my intent to dissuade commissioners from participating in public or private gatherings. On the contrary, we are social beings who share a love for Leelanau and want to help guide the county to a bright future.

But there is a right and a wrong way to participate in that process. As commissioners, you have a higher standard to bear.

Thank you, chair Ty Wessell and other members of the County Board, for this opportunity to address a concern of mine.