

**Leelanau County Board of Commissioners**  
**Special Session – Tuesday, December 10, 2024**  
Tentative minutes

*Proceedings of the meeting are being recorded (audio and video). The video of the meeting can be found at the following link: <https://www.leelanau.gov/meetingdetails.asp?MAId=2814#video>*

Meeting called to order by Chairman Ty Wessell at 1:04 p.m. Today's meeting is being held at the Government Center, 8527 E. Government Center Drive, Suttons Bay, Michigan.

Pledge of Allegiance/Moment of Silence:

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and Moment of Silence was held at a prior meeting.

|                   |             |                    |                               |
|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| <u>Roll Call:</u> | District #1 | Vacant             |                               |
|                   | #2          | James O'Rourke     | ABSENT (arrived at 1:04 p.m.) |
|                   | #3          | Doug Rexroat       | PRESENT                       |
|                   | #4          | Ty Wessell         | PRESENT                       |
|                   | #5          | Kama Ross          | PRESENT                       |
|                   | #6          | Gwenne Allgaier    | PRESENT                       |
|                   | #7          | Melinda C. Lautner | PRESENT                       |

Guests present.

Public Comment: (3 minutes – Agenda Specific)

None.

Commissioner Comments:

None.

Purpose of Meeting – Discussion/Potential Action:

Discuss Whether Commissioners-Elect Should Have the Opportunity to Participate in County Administrator Candidate Interviews on December 12, 2024:

Interim Administrator Lewis stated that back on November 26, 2024, Michigan Leadership Institute (MLI) Consultant Chet Janik sent out an email updating all of the Commissioners, as well as Commissioners-Elect, as it relates to one of the final three candidates removing himself from consideration. On that same date, Commissioner-Elect Campbell suggested that besides just being involved in the meet and greet that there should be more involvement within the proceedings of the interview sessions. Campbell further requested that the Commissioners-Elect should be allowed to participate in the interview process and up here (Lewis motions with is left hand out in front of him) or somewhere here and might be able to directly ask the Administrator Candidates questions instead of trying to participate from the audience chairs as observers. Lewis continued that he did forward that request to Cohl, Stoker & Toskey, PLLC, because he didn't realize that this is something that can be done or not be done.

Interim Administrator Lewis commented that this very same issue is happening within Ottawa County and he saw an article in the Traverse City Record Eagle about this same topic. The bottom line is that there are no legal concerns regarding having the Commissioners-Elect being a part of the process "up here" asking questions. Although, there is the portion of it that the

only individuals that can make this decision, which is a formal decision by vote, are the current sitting six commissioners. He said he believes that everyone understands that and that both he and Janik would like to make sure of that, whoever gets decided upon, we want to make sure this Board, as well as the incoming Board are comfortable with the selection. Lewis stated he is a bit selfish about a candidate being selected because the sooner the Board decides to get somebody on board and they start, then the sooner he can go back to total retirement.

MLI Consultant Chet Janik was present and explained the upcoming timing of the meet and greets with regards to the Administrator candidates and the interviews scheduled for Thursday, December 12, 2024. Janik also explained the contract language and that once there is a selected candidate the timing will need to be that there is an agreement by December 31, 2024, or the next Board of Commissioners will be selecting the next County Administrator. Janik stated that both candidates have discussed with him how the contract negotiation works with the Board of Commissioners. He recommends that the Board should interview and then the Commissioners-Elect could ask their questions.

Commissioner Rexroat asked Janik what does that process look like? Is it under public comment? Do they tell this Board which candidate they choose? Janik replied, the Commissioners-Elect may or may not wish to tell the Board their choice. Commissioner Rexroat continued that it doesn't make any sense to him to have the Commissioners-Elect here asking questions if they don't give the Board their opinion when it is done because we might as well not even do it. The whole idea of this is to have their input.

MLI Consultant Janik stated he recommends that the Board members should ask their questions. When that round is done, then the Commissioners-Elect will start their questions. After both interviews have concluded then the Board can ask the Commissioners-Elect their opinion.

Interim Administrator Lewis said that if anyone does have a comment that his seat will be vacant, so the Commissioners-Elect could come up to that seat and make their comments for the record.

MLI Consultant Janik commented that if there are specific questions the Commissioners-Elect wish to ask that they could give them to Chairman Wessell to be asked within the interview process. This time the Board chose a one (1) hour time period for questions, so it is not as long as the first round.

Commissioner Rexroat stated he is more concerned, not about the questions, but their opinion once the questions are done.

MLI Consultant Janik commented that the Board doesn't need to get too hung up on the one (1) hour time period because you only have two candidates. If you need to take an hour and 10 minutes, you can, just make sure you ask your questions or if you have any concerns up front because this is, as you know, one of the most major decisions that you will make here. Janik continued that this process should be wrapped up by December 31<sup>st</sup>.

Commissioner Rexroat said that he likes the format that Janik described and that in the end the Commissioners-Elect can come up to the presentation table and then tell us what you think and

have your opinion known. Rexroat looked to the audience and asked if the Commissioners–Elect would be happy with that?

Interim Administrator Lewis said the Commissioners–Elect would also have the opportunity to ask the question themselves.

Commissioner Rexroat said exactly and that the interview part is a big thing, but then when we are done there would be input. Rexroat continued and stated he doesn't know what use it is to him to have the Commissioners–Elect ask interview questions and then not tell the Board their opinion on who to choose and what you think. Rexroat commented then you might as well not do the one without the other because that should be the whole purpose of having the Commissioners–Elect involved in this process.

Chairman Wessell stated that he thinks we have room behind the Commissioners table since Interim Administrator Lewis won't be sitting there and there is an empty commission seat. Wessell asked Commissioner Lautner if she is shaking her head no?

Commissioner Lautner replied that it is the right idea but the wrong execution. She said like Interim Administrator Lewis said there could perhaps be a little table out here (Using her right hand, she gestured out front of where she is sitting) as an extension of, so that the Commissioners-Elect can see facial expressions. She said she likes everything she has heard so far and we are on the right track, but there has to be that separation of deliberation but with input.

Chairman Wessell stated he just doesn't want the Commissioners–Elect sitting behind the County Administrator Candidates during the interviews.

Commissioner Lautner commented she agrees with Chairman Wessell, but you could push the presentation table back for some additional room up front.

MLI Consultant Janik said that if all five (5) Commissioners–Elect will be present that the Board could put two tables on each end as an extension.

Interim Administrator Lewis stated he can get the room set up. If you prefer to have them up front here (pointing in front of his seating arrangement) with you in some form or fashion, either on the side, so that the candidate can be looking straight at them as well.

Commissioner Allgaier asked (while pointing in front of her seating arrangement and to the sides of where the County Clerk and County Administrator sit) if you could just put chairs up there because there isn't room for five (5) new people up here?

Interim Administrator Lewis replied, no there won't be.

Commissioner Allgaier continued that you could have a couple on one side and the rest on the other.

MLI Consultant Janik restated that you could put two chairs on each side to extend the Commissioners area seating arrangements.

Interim Administrator Lewis said he will get this all worked out if that is your desire to do so, then he will make it work.

Commissioner Rexroat said he agrees with Commissioner Lautner because this really is the responsibility of this current Board to do this and it could really create some confusion to the Public to watch all of us sitting together, which we are not doing.

Interim Administrator Lewis said he can do an introduction to all that before we get started.

Commissioner Allgaier said, but let's have the five (5) chairs outside (of the Commissioner area).

MLI Consultant Janik said he agrees with Commissioner Lautner that it is important for the Commissioners–Elect to view the body language and facial expressions of the County Administrator candidates.

Commissioner Allgaier restated that if they are sitting at chairs up here (pointing to the sides of the Commissioner seating) then they can see.

Interim Administrator Lewis stated he will get it worked out for you.

Chairman Wessell stated that the last time we did this we had the Board put their first and second choice down on a piece of paper at the first round of interviews and that we also had Commissioners-Elect do that. Would it make sense to do a straw poll and it can't be an official vote but it is significant if five (5) new commissioners all supported one candidate?

Commissioner Rexroat said he is fine with that and there has to be some process to get your opinion or else we are wasting our time having you here.

MLI Consultant Janik confirmed that you can ask the Commissioners–Elect opinions prior to the full Board deliberating on a decision.

Chairman Wessell verified with Interim Administrator Lewis that he will be in attendance to handle the vote.

MLI Consultant Janik commented that both candidates have indicated to him that they would like to hear the input from the Commissioners-Elect regarding their selection.

Commissioner Allgaier asked if the Commissioners–Elect will be filling out a number one and number two choice and will give them to Richard (Interim Administrator Lewis) for who their choice is?

Interim Administrator Lewis replied, yes, their choices will be given to him and he will report out the candidate chosen.

Chairman Wessell stated he thinks we have the process and he doesn't think there needs to be a motion and do this by consensus. Wessell stated he would like to hear from the audience members (Commissioners-Elect).

Commissioner-Elect Mark Walters, Commissioner-Elect Alan Campbell, Commissioner-Elect Steve Yoder and Commissioner-Elect Rick Robbins spoke to the Board of Commissioners.

Commissioner Rexroat stated he likes the idea of all of the Commissioners–Elect being able to see all the facial expressions to the Board’s questions and the Commissioners-Elect questions.

Commissioner Allgaier reminded everyone the interview is only an hour.

MLI Consultant Janik reminded the Board that by law this Board can only do a one-year contract and there is within the negotiated contract a 90 day opt-out clause. He said that both candidates are aware of that and know that the contract can only go through December of 2025. Janik continued that next year the Board can negotiate a three-year contract and place a 90 day opt-out to protect Commissioners.

Chairman Wessell asked Janik when he will return from Marquette and Janik replied Friday morning. Wessell asked Janik that this Board could agree to have he and Commissioner Rexroat work with him on negotiating a contract? Janik replied yes, and that they could even get started on Thursday afternoon.

Commissioner Rexroat stated he just needs to work out a time.

MLI Consultant Janik commented that he has discussed with each candidate the basic terms of the contract so he doesn’t think it will be any major issues with either candidate.

Interim Administrator Lewis stated he will have a proposed motion ready for the Board to just fill in the blanks.

Chairman Wessell asked, “Do we agree by consensus about how we want to operate?”

Chairman Wessell received no objections and stated that Janik will be participating via Zoom on Thursday.

Public Comment:

The following individuals spoke: Rick Robbins and Alan Campbell.

Commissioner Comments:

None.

Adjournment:

Chairman Wessell adjourned the meeting at 1:28 p.m.

---

Ty Wessell, Chairman  
Leelanau County Board of Commissioners

---

Jennifer L. Zywicki, Chief Deputy Clerk for  
Michelle L. Crocker, Leelanau County Clerk