Bi-Weekly Update from County Administrator/Controller Kelli Scott, 8/28/14:

*County offices will be closed on Monday, September 1, in observance of Labor Day. Have a safe and memorable holiday!*

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**FLRSB Grant Applications Due 9/5:**
There is still time to apply for grant funding through the FireKeepers Local Revenue Sharing Board ("FLRSB")! There is $185,000.00 in funding set aside for discretionary grants in 2014, with the only requirement that it be used for a lawful governmental purpose. Grants can be made only to local units of government located in Calhoun County; however, creative partnerships with local non-profits are encouraged. A list of grants issued in 2013 can be found at: [http://www.calhouncountymi.gov/assets/1/15/2013_FLRSB_Grant_Awards.pdf](http://www.calhouncountymi.gov/assets/1/15/2013_FLRSB_Grant_Awards.pdf). Grant applications were mailed to each governmental unit in Calhoun County and can also be obtained by e-mail from rlindsey@calhouncountymi.gov. Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. on September 5, 2014, and should be sent to Richard Lindsey: by mail at 315 W. Green Street, Marshall, MI 49068; faxed to 269.781.0140, or sent via e-mail. The FLRSB will meet to consider the applications on September 19, 2014, at 9:00 a.m. in the County Building in Marshall, Michigan.

**Road Department Updates:**

**Brembo Expansion**
Managing Director Jerry Peterson and Administrator/Controller Kelli Scott attended on August 25 a meeting to discuss road improvements that will be needed to facilitate the expansion of Brembo North America, Inc.’s manufacturing facilities in Homer. Peggy Sindt, CEO of Albion’s Economic Development Corporation, and Tom Frank, Albion Township’s Supervisor, attended, along with officials from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Brembo North America CEO Dan Sandberg, and other key officials including architects and engineers. The County and State will be working together on grant applications to seek funding to support the proposed road improvement projects to ensure safety and adequate load capacity near the corner of M-60 and 30 Mile Road, where the company’s brake system manufacturing facility is located and a new foundry is being planned. This is an exciting economic development project for Calhoun County, with the new $78 million investment in an 80,000 square foot facility expected to create more than 250 new jobs over the next few years.

**Sign Shop Enhancements**
The Road Department’s sign shop is undergoing a transformation to create efficiencies and cost savings, with the addition of a new sign cutting machine to be up and running soon. The new sign cutter will allow the department to build most signs in-house instead of purchasing pre-made signs, while **slashing sign costs by nearly 50%**. A new sign truck is also scheduled for purchase through MiDEAL, an extended purchasing program which allows Michigan local units of government to use state contracts to buy goods and services in order to save costs and time spent on processing bids. When the new sign cutter and truck are in place, the Road Department will be seen completing more sign replacement work that has been backlogged for some time.

**Summer Maintenance Winding Down**
At this month’s Road Department’s Township Supervisors meeting on 8/27, Managing Director Peterson and Highway Engineer Angela Kline reported the following regarding operations:

- **Seal coating** on approximately 40 miles of primary roads is wrapping up over the next couple of weeks. This year’s investment of $700,000 was aimed at the primaries rated 7, or “good”, on the PASER road rating scale, with a first attempt in a long time to do preventative maintenance and avoid more costly fixes later.
- The contracted **paver patching** program is complete as well, and was focused mostly on bad stretches of primary roads within each of our 19 townships.
- The **local road match program** is now 90% complete, with a few paving projects still to be done over the remainder of the summer.
- **Gravel roads** within the county will be graded and brined twice this year, with the second round taking place currently.
- **Service requests have slowed** down drastically, with only 200 or so pothole requests now outstanding, compared to the approximately 2,000 inventoried in the spring.
- During **September and October** the public should see road workers trimming trees, mowing, culvert work, shouldering and de-berming sides of roads, while gearing up for winter operations.
- A couple of process improvements in the works for this coming winter include **more efficient snow routes** and the addition of **organic materials for de-icing**.

**Unofficial Poll Indicates Roads are Improving!**

Township supervisors gave mostly **positive feedback** when asked this week whether they have seen improvements in the County’s roads over the past year, or not. Comments that were echoed by several included “marked improvement,” “not getting complaints from residents like we used to,” “paver patching on primary roads helped a lot,” and “you’ve done a good job better educating us so that we can better educate residents [about road issues].”

**August County-Wide Leadership Meeting**

**2015 Budget Planning**

The County's judicial administrators, elected officials and department heads met on August 19 for our regular monthly county-wide leadership meeting. County Administrator/Controller Kelli Scott highlighted the 2015 budget planning process and the key financial issues facing the County over the next 5-year forecast period. The County is facing a smaller deficit for 2015 than what was experienced for the past several years, due to real property value increases and restored state revenue sharing. If the 30 or so vacant unfunded positions are left unfilled next year, we will still need to trim approximately $1 million from the projected 2015 General Fund Budget. But even though the County’s current budget remains $2 million and 31 employees below the 2012 level, our long-term forecast shows the gap narrowing for future years.

Budget requests for 2015 are due by September 6, and budget hearings with the Board of Commissioners’ Budget Committee will be scheduled later that month and into October. The Budget Committee is chaired by Commissioner Art Kale, and includes Commissioners Jim Haadsma and Steve Frisbie.

**Departmental Reports**
Here are just a few highlights of current happenings within county departments:

- **Probate Court** Administrator Cindy Rude and District Court Administrator Kate Ambrose both reported that the new video conferencing system continues to create significant savings in docket and travel time and cost for judges, court recorders, and prosecuting attorneys.

- **Circuit Court** Administrator Jeff Albaugh discussed their emphasis on succession planning for future judge retirements and changes in case load likely to take place following this November’s election. He also announced on behalf of the Judicial Council that the customer service satisfaction survey conducted last year within the Justice Center will be done again this year during September and October.

- **Veterans Affairs** Office Director Scott Losey mentioned several enhancements to their services, including office renovations and the implementation of a new strategic plan that will focus on better public outreach and referrals.

- **Sheriff** Matt Saxton discussed continued staffing changes, mainly related to retirements and the addition of new public safety services agreements with local units of government. He also reported that the new Marshall Regional Law Enforcement Center (MRLEC) is scheduled to open in September 2015.

- **Juvenile Home** Director Mike Gillum reported that some of the youth within the Juvenile Home’s programs continue to do community service projects and are able to do gardening work at the facility. He also noted that increased training opportunities for staff seems to have helped significantly lower occurrences of restraints needed within the Juvenile Home.

- **Senior Services** Manager Carl Gibson reported that he was happy to see that in the August 5 election, all 13 senior millage ballot initiatives in Michigan counties passed, and that this was the only type of special voted millage that had 100% success.

- **Prosecutor** David Gilbert said that he appreciates his new canine advocate dog, Holly, and added that plans are for her to also begin work within the County’s specialty courts.

- **Health Officer** Jim Rutherford announced a $3 million block grant from the Kellogg Foundation that will fund major programs for the next three years. He also noted that the Health Department is discussing shared services possibilities with The Haven of Rest regarding needs for additional nursing staff.

**Workforce Development Program Regionalization:**

The Governor’s Regional Prosperity Initiative and the resignation of the Calhoun Intermediate School District (CISD) as grant recipient and administrative agent for the County’s Workforce Development activities provided the opportunity for regionalization. Commissioners Kathy-Sue Dunn, Steve Frisbie and Derek King served on a transition committee of the local Workforce Development Board (WDB), along with County Administrator/Controller Kelli Scott and Corporation Counsel Richard Lindsey, and representatives from Branch County. The Upjohn Institute was selected to take over the administrative and fiduciary duties for the next year, and the decision was made to pursue a new Workforce Development Michigan Works! Area that includes Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo and St. Joseph Counties—all members of Regional Prosperity District 8. County administration from all four counties have been working with Ben Damerow of the Upjohn Institute to draft a new Intergovernmental Agreement and Bylaws for the new four-county regional Michigan Works! Area and to define membership for the new Workforce Development Board. We expect to present both agreements to the County Board of Commissioners in September so that the new regionalized program can begin on October 1 of this year.
**Employee Benefits Renewal for 2015:**
The County’s benefits committee, led by HR/Labor Relations Director Kim Archambault and including officials representing various county departments, met today with our consultants, AON Hewitt, to preview the estimated 2015 premium rates for employee health and other insurance coverage. We received good news on the health insurance side, with our expected overall average annual cost per employee **decreasing by 5.6%** from 2014 to in 2015! The rates are actuarially calculated based on actual claims costs since the County is self-insured, and so this continued downward trend reflects success in the strategies we’ve been employing over the past several years to control costs. AON reported that the national health care inflation trend for 2015 is approximately 9%, and that our decrease is not something they are seeing with most of their public employers. Our rates with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and other providers are not final yet, and we’ve asked AON to help price some options for benefit plan design changes over the next couple of months so that we can ensure Public Act 152 compliance and prepare for employee open enrollment in November. Calhoun County’s operating budget includes approximately $5 million in employee insurance benefits for our 600+ employees.

**Solid Waste / Recycling Program:**
The County’s solid waste and recycling programs are now under the leadership of our Environmental Health staff within the Health Department. County administration has been working with Health Officer Jim Rutherford and staff Paul Makoski and Sarah Kelly, to evaluate ways to enhance our free recycling and composting options for residents of the county in an affordable way. Currently around-the-clock recycling bins are in place at the Road Department in Marshall and on City-owned property in Albion. Our current arrangements with material haulers is not sustainable, even with the dedicated Solid Waste Fund revenue stream from the County’s agreement with Republic Services. To continue just the City of Albion’s recycling site, for example, the current contract could cost up to $96,000 per year. We will be visiting recycling sites within other counties and are contemplating a new system that is much more sustainable and may allow for additional sites to be offered. It is hoped that a new proposal can be discussed with the County’s Solid Waste Committee and the Board of Commissioners yet this year so that a solution can be implemented by the first of 2015 or before.

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