

LEELANAU COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Building Safety Committee – Monday, June 23, 2025
Tentative minutes.

Proceedings of the meeting are being recorded (audio and video) and can be found at the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gfvdc8oBKjE>

Meeting called to order by County Clerk Michelle L. Crocker at 10:00 a.m.

Today's meeting was being held at the Government Center, 8527 E. Government Center Drive, Suttons Bay.

Roll Call:	District #3	Will Bunek	PRESENT
	#7	Steve Yoder	PRESENT

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America was dispensed with as it was previously recited.

Staff Present: Administrator James Dyer and Building Safety Building Official Amber Weber.

Approval of Agenda / Late Additions or Deletions:

MOTION BY YODER TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS WRITTEN. SECONDED BY BUNEK.

Discussion – none.

AYES – 2 (Yoder, Bunek)

NO – 0

MOTION CARRIED.

Public Comment:

None.

Election of Chairman:

MOTION BY YODER TO ELECT/NOMINATE COMMISSIONER BUNEK AS BUILDING SAFETY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN. SECONDED BY BUNEK.

Discussion – none.

AYES – 2 (Yoder, Bunek)

NO – 0

MOTION CARRIED.

County Clerk Michelle L. Crocker turned the meeting over to Committee Chairman Bunek for the remainder of the meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes – Tuesday, July 11, 2023:

MOTION BY YODER TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF TUESDAY, JULY 11, 2023, AS WRITTEN. SECONDED BY BUNEK.

Discussion – none.

AYES – 2 (Yoder, Bunek)

NO – 0

MOTION CARRIED.

Vehicle Purchase as Part of 2026 Budget Process:

Building Official Amber Weber was present for the Agenda Item and stated she is looking to revisit this. Weber continued that she was told prior that to purchase vehicles for her department, that she needs to come before the committee to approve the request then that request is forward to the full Board. She stated that since she is currently preparing her requests for the 2026 Budget, she is looking to receive permission to purchase two vehicles. Weber commented that she has two 2022 Ford Ranger's that are in need of constant repair and she would like to replace them with two 2026 Toyota Tacoma's.

Commissioner Bunek asked if this request is to add an additional vehicle as well or just replace?

Building Official Weber replied that her request is to replace. She said the two Ford Ranger's are higher in mileage and that one of them is currently getting a new transmission at Cedar Auto Repair. She commented that she would like to stay proactive and stay ahead of the repairs by replacing vehicles when the maintenance is more expensive than normal wear and tear.

Commissioner Bunek said he doesn't think 100,000 miles seems that much and asked if it is because it is the type of vehicle?

Building Official Weber replied that she can wait to purchase but that the closer you get to that 100,000 miles on this type of vehicle there appears to be increase in repairs.

Commissioner Bunek asked if there are enough funds within the budget for new vehicles.

Building Official Weber replied that there are enough funds.

Commissioner Bunek asked that it doesn't go into the motor pool, right? Weber replied correct, the vehicles purchased by Building Safety belong to the Building Safety fund.

Commissioner Yoder asked how many miles are on the vehicles before they are swapped out?

Building Official Weber replied that she hasn't looked into having a procedure of swapping out yet since this is her first go around with owning vehicles and having to replace them like this. She explained that before the purchase of the Ford Ranger's and the Toyota Tacoma's the department was leasing a few and then moved by direction of the previous County Administrator (Janik) to utilize the Sheriff's Office vehicles that would go up for auction; however, those types of vehicles really didn't end up working out very well in the field. She further explained that the 2022 Ford Ranger's were the first vehicles purchased and that today she is just looking for guidance on how to move forward. She knows she will need to move forward with one vehicle for sure because the new part-time inspector will have the only spare vehicle in the fleet, which is a 2016 Ford Escape.

Commissioner Bunek asked Weber if she will be looking to acquire Ford Ranger's again and Weber replied that she will not. She stated the staff does like the Toyota and the pricing is better than the Ford option.

Commissioner Bunek commented he would like to go with one vehicle to be purchased at this time, and Commissioner Yoder agreed. Commissioner Bunek stated he would like to see the Ford Ranger's be used past the 100,000 miles, if possible.

Building Official Weber stated she will be keeping the Ford Escape as a spare, and asked how she would put the numbers in the budget and does she come back to the committee for approval before submission of the 2026 Budget?

Chief Deputy Jennifer Zywicki explained that the approval process for the purchase of the vehicle will be what the full Board approves during the 2026 Budget process.

MOTION BY YODER TO RECOMMEND TO THE LEELANAU BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS TO APPROVE BUILDING SAFETY BUILDING OFFICIAL WEBER TO LOOK INTO THE PURCHASE OF ONE (1) VEHICLE THROUGH THE 2026 BUDGET PROCESS. SECONDED BY BUNEK.

Discussion – none.

AYES – 2 (Yoder, Bunek)

NO – 0

RECOMMENDATION PASSES.

Vehicle Use by New Employee and Potential of Taking Vehicle Home:

Building Official Amber Weber explained that she has recently hired a new part-time inspector and he is a great fit for her team. She said he has a lot of experience but he does not live locally. Weber stated his main residence is located in Wayland, Michigan and he has a cabin in Mancelona that he will be driving from the three (3) days he will be working within the County. She commented that he has made a request to her that he would like to take a County vehicle home on those days that he is driving in from Mancelona. Weber said that he is a one income and one vehicle family and that he understands that it is not the County's problem and that it is his problem. She continued that she spoke with Administrator Jim Dyer and Human Resources Manager Jennifer Kain and Kain explained that in Grand Traverse County there is a policy that every mile driven outside of the county there is an amount that you pay the county back. Weber distributed a handout with calculations that she produced according to the Grand Traverse County policy.

The Handout can be found at the following link:

https://www.leelanau.gov/agenda_detail_T16_R8007.php

Building Official Weber explained the handout to the committee members. She said that she did not get a chance to ask Finance Director Cathy Hartesvelt before the meeting today in regards to any County Policy currently in place as to how an employee pays for usage of a county vehicle for personal use. The employee would like to forfeit the health insurance buyout he would receive for the personal vehicle use miles. Weber explained that the figures within the chart are too high for the employee to afford and that he is already an asset to her department and how well he is fitting in. She commented that her bottom line is that she told him she would ask and she would like to find a way that this could work and be acceptable. Weber stated she fully understands that this could be opening a can of worms because it would be policy that she would be implementing.

Commissioner Bunek asked what the amount is the County pays for mileage and Weber replied it is \$.70 per mile. Bunek referenced the handout and stated the \$.70 per mile isn't even close to what the handout shows, which is expensive.

Chief Deputy Zywicki explained to the committee that when a vehicle is used for personal mileage, other than the Sheriff's Office vehicles, the employee and the employer pay FICA and it is considered a wage/benefit to the employee. She clarified there will probably need to be more investigation on how the Finance Department would handle something like this and she understands where Human Resources is coming from; however, it is treated as a benefit for personal use. Zywicki commented there should be more investigation into the process.

Commissioner Bunek commented he wasn't sure about the liability of the vehicle for personal use and insurance, and as much as he would like to see something like this happen that he just isn't sure.

Commissioner Yoder stated he would like to see a policy in place if the County was going to move to something like that.

Commissioner Bunek asked Weber if she had the Grand Traverse County policy and Weber replied that she does not and that she went from what Human Resources Manager Jennfier Kain had told her about. Weber continued that this is the second week this employee is on the job and that she informed him all she could do was propose this option and see where it would go.

Commissioner Bunek requested from Weber a copy of the Grand Traverse County Vehicle Policy and that Commissioner Yoder is correct in that the County would need to create a policy before the committee recommends something.

Building Official Weber commented she was prepared that this option wouldn't be for just the one employee.

Commissioner Bunek thanked Weber for bringing this forward.

Commissioner Yoder agreed with Commissioner Bunek and reiterated there should be a policy/procedure developed before the committee can recommend anything.

Commissioner Bunek suggested that another meeting can be scheduled to cover this and look into a policy/procedure for everyone versus just one person. He commented that if a meeting is scheduled rather soon it could get onto the July agenda.

Building Official Weber stated she could get with the other offices to meet on getting a policy together and get with the Clerk's Office for scheduling to bring it back before the committee.

Commissioner Bunek commented that he hopes it works out for him and that he knows it is hard to get an inspector. Weber stated that the employee's argument was that the numbers might be too high, which she said could even not be correct.

Chief Deputy Zywicki explained that the policy would be different from the Sheriff's Office vehicle take home policy because it would be subject to only the Building Safety Department vehicles, which Administrator Dyer and Weber oversee.

Building Official Weber asked Zywicki if it would be specific to just the Building Safety Department and Zywicki replied, yes, and that wouldn't be a bad thing. Zywicki explained that the vehicles purchased are an asset to the Building Safety Department and do not belong to the County's Motor Pool Fund. Zywicki further explained how the Motor Pool Fund is a cost allocation fund based on the usage of the vehicles purchased within it. She said that since the vehicles are purchased from the proceeds and revenues from permit fees and other revenue sources it would be handled differently, which did start a few years ago under a different Building Official. She commented that Weber could write a policy/procedure regarding the Building Safety fleet by being able to utilize the surrounding counties for information regarding how those departments manage vehicles. Zywicki said she is aware that Grand Traverse County does lease some vehicles but not all are and that Weber could contact them to help her.

Commissioner Bunek stated he is wondering if there is a difference in cost to have the vehicles used for personal mileage and how that income would work. What the rate would be, fuel charges and would they be responsible for anything else?

Commissioner Yoder commented there needs to be something or a plan in place to move forward with first.

Building Official Weber asked the committee if she needs to create a policy/procedure?

Commissioner Bunek stated he would prefer that Weber reach out to the other nearby Counties before trying to write one.

Commissioner Yoder said he agrees with Commissioner Bunek, especially if there is something out there that already works.

Administrator Jim Dyer said he wanted to point out that this is a real indicator of why the housing issue in Leelanau County is important to the county. He stated the department hasn't been able to find somebody that is a resident of the county and it is interesting because this is the first time he has heard that the new employee lives in Wayland, which is south of Grand Rapids by a considerable distance. Dyer said he understands he has a cottage up here but that is how far of a field the County has to go to find employees. He continued that the County will need to start to getting very creative to actually recruit people to come to work here because of the cost of living here if you are to get them from out of County. If it turns out that you need someone from out the County, you will have to get creative. Dyer stated that in fact the better thing maybe to do is just to pay him a car allowance and let him lease a car on his own or buy one. He said someone can lease a car for \$200.00 a month and it might not be much of a car, but they would be able to get something like that. He commented that the car allowance payment would be income and could be one solution just like it is for any other employee who has a car allowance, like the County Administrator, because it is income and it solves the problem as well.

Consensus for Building Official Weber to gather vehicle policies from surrounding counties and to work with Administration and Finance to compile and propose a Building Safety Vehicle Policy.

Affordable Housing and Permit Fees:

Building Official Amber Weber stated she doesn't have anything on this agenda item, only that the Board wants a discussion.

Commissioner Yoder said he thinks the Board is looking for an outline of what some of the permit fees are to look at and to pass onto the full board and have discussion there. He commented that he has spoken previously to Weber and the fees itself are not going to be a big game changer in regards to the housing stuff. If the committee can look over the numbers, then maybe there are some adjustments that can be made to be recommended or waived. Yoder said he isn't sure if the Board can make a dent into anything, but it is worth a look. He is looking for some form of information that says this is what we have and these are the options to make changes.

Building Official Weber stated for clarification that the fee chart is specific to the building as a whole or the trade side of the permit fees, and further explained the differences.

Administrator Dyer said that the Board is looking for the permit fee structure to be broken down. He stated he would like to expand the chart to include the other fees that property owners have with construction like the Health Department and Soil Erosion. Dyer commented that the Board would have no control over those specific fees, but at least they would have the knowledge of what those are costs and would be helpful.

Building Official Weber stated she could gather all of those for the Board to review.

Commissioner Yoder said it would be helpful to see what those actual costs are and work off of that break down.

Administrator Dyer commented that originally there had been discussion among some developers regarding affordable housing that were in the neighborhood of \$50,000.00 in building costs for regulatory requirements, but that included things like a sewer connection fee. Those costs alone can be astronomical because it depends on the nature of the sewer, so at least having an idea of what those numbers are beyond the costs of labor and material. Dyer said the County could influence those that charge fees and have a discussion on maybe there is a way to reduce those costs for affordable housing, even though they are not costs the county directly impact.

Commissioner Bunek said he thinks we are really only talking about building, electrical, mechanical, and plumbing permit fees and that if the house is 900 sq ft or less than there would be a maximum fee of \$1,000.00. He continued that usually a house that size runs between \$1,500.00 to \$1,700.00, so we would be giving people who build small homes, not including a garage, the ability to be paying less. Bunek explained that he would want to see the fees be for homes that fall in the square footage of 999 sq ft and below. By keeping the fee under \$1,000.00 that would be the County's effort toward affordable housing and to encourage others to reduce their fees for houses of that size. He stated we can't do much more than that,

and we can't make other government entities make a difference. Bunek asked Weber how would reducing permit fees affect the income to the department?

Building Official Weber stated it wouldn't change the number of inspections. She said she could prepare a sample to see what the breakdown looks like.

Commissioner Bunek asked how many houses are built that are under 999 sq ft and Weber replied there are not very many.

Building Official Weber answered committee questions regarding construction of homes under 999 sq ft and the townships that have requirements or restrictions of minimum sq ft home construction. Weber stated she would investigate and get some numbers together for the next meeting.

Administrator Dyer stated the Board may want to consider whether the Building Safety department really needs to bear the cost of this program or perhaps create a separate fund that Building Safety draws the difference from the amount of the reduced permit fee and what the fee might have been, so that they really don't lose anything in this process. He commented that the other thing he would look at is the idea that small housing is not always affordable. Dyer said you will want to look at these incentives to developers who are actually doing something to provide for a longer term for affordable housing. He stated an example is there are entities that are community land trusts or entities that are creating rental units and that sort of thing that are committed for a period of time to remain in affordable housing.

Commissioner Yoder expressed that townships should be held accountable with lowering fees if the County moves forward to do so.

Administrator Dyer stated that he could ask the Planning Department to do a survey regarding township land use fees.

Building Official Weber stated she had called other counties and only heard back from two of them. She said the advice she received was that the County should set a mark of what is affordable housing and stick to it to create a procedure. They also stated that there are many entities and non-profit organizations that the County could use as resources. Weber commented that she would suggest the value be set where the home has the bare necessities.

Consensus for Building Official Weber to create a chart of permit fees for review by the Board of Commissioners.

Discussion Items:

Building Official Weber answered Commissioner Bunek's question regarding enforcement of occupancy permits.

Public Comment:

None.

Board Member Comment:

Commissioner Bunek and Commissioner Yoder thanked Weber.

Motion to Adjourn:

Meeting adjourned by Committee Chairman Bunek at 10:40 a.m.

William Bunek, Committee Chairman
Building Safety Committee

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