

*Centerville Township Annual Meeting of the Electors  
March 27, 2021  
Report from Patricia Soutas-Little, County Commissioner, District #5  
Centerville and Leland Townships*

During 2020 I served on the following County committees: Senior Services Advisory, Building Safety, Boards and Commission Review, Land Bank Fast Track Authority, Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, and Leelanau Family Coordinating Council. In 2021 I look forward to continuing to serve on Building Safety and Boards and Commissions Review, and also am enjoying my new committee assignments as the BOC representative to Networks Northwest and the Benzie-Leelanau District Board of Health.

The report below describes activities undertaken by these committees along with citizen accomplishments and other county activity that may be of interest.

**Resident Initiatives:**

***New Recycling Site in Leland***

Thanks to Jim and Megan Munoz and Beth and Mike Grosvenor, owners of South & North Manitou Islands, LLC, residents of Leland Township have been able bring their recycling to the new temporary site located on the corner of Oak Street and Edward Avenue. The Leland Township Board signed a 5-year contract in 2020 to open a permanent site on Popp Road and work has progressed on launching the new site. Engineering drawings and site plans are almost complete and will be sent soon to the Township Zoning Administrator who will forward them on to the Leland Planning Commission for their review and recommendations to the Township Board.

***Leelanau Internet Future Team (LIFT)***

LIFT, a committee of the Leelanau Peninsula Economic Foundation with participation from government, business and other organizations and stakeholders, is continuing to work with providers to enhance broadband services in Leelanau. The experience this past year with families working from home due to the pandemic has brought recognition of the fact that high-speed internet and quality cellular services are a necessity to our way of life. There are a number of new internet services that will be available in Leelanau County soon, plus funding opportunities to expand internet infrastructure. LIFT is compiling a calendar of new services that will be available this year with timelines and contact information and will make that widely available. In addition, LIFT will continue to partner with the County supporting the County's efforts to enhance internet services throughout Leelanau.

### ***Early Childhood Initiatives***

A contract between the County and the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department was signed March 20<sup>th</sup> of 2020 to establish an early childhood program funded by the millage passed in November of 2019. Amazingly, given the Health Department's responsibilities associated with the pandemic, they still were able to launch the program in April. Although in-home visits and play groups were limited the program served many grateful families in a variety of ways, including delivery of materials to aid parents challenged with keeping their home-bound toddlers engaged and thriving. The also linked families with needed services. This year's program is focused on Expanding existing and establishing new parent, infant and pediatric services which improve health; fostering positive cognitive, social-emotional and physical experiences to promote infant and child development through play groups and other activities; sustaining and strengthening the full constellation of parents and caregivers who support infants and young children and increasing the coordination and integration of services, policies and practices to serve all families, infants and young children aged birth to 6 years old.

The County Early Childhood Committee that recommended the millage, made two sets of recommendations. The first were targeted for the Health Department and were in line with the enabling legislation of the County. The second set addressed the needs of childcare providers and families and were targeted for other organizations and entitles to create and implement solutions. I am working with two groups trying to address the second set of recommendations. The first group is working with our local state legislators to achieve legislative changes benefiting providers and families. The second group is working on a unique initiative, partnering with businesses, in response to the shortage of childcare services available to Leelanau families now when it is so sorely needed. This program, currently in the developmental stages, will recruit and help new childcare providers establish quality home-based childcare programs focusing on services for infants to 36 month old toddlers.

### **County Committee Activity:**

- ***The Senior Services*** Department serves approximately 2,500 residents on an annual basis, ranging from in-home health care assistance, unmet financial needs, and social activities. Since the onset of Covid-19, the staff has been distributing food to the needy on a weekly basis.
- ***The Land Bank Fast Track Authority*** formed a partnership in 2021 with the Habitat for Humanity to build six homes in Maple City for local eligible families.

- ***Building Safety Department*** (formally Construction Codes) at the beginning of 2020 had implemented a web-based application procedure with the existing BS&A software, that streamlined and enhanced the process for contractors and homeowners. This received tremendous support and positive feedback from the contractors, especially when the Pandemic began shortly afterward. While many neighboring jurisdictions were virtually shut down and unable to process applications, the department was able to function. This continues to be helpful with the ongoing Covid restrictions

### **Additional County Activity:**

- ***The Benzie-Leelanau Health Department*** has done an exemplar job of combating the Covid-19 pandemic working with residents, businesses, schools and tourists encouraging them to embrace practices to ensure everyone’s safety and wellbeing. Health Department staff continue to work tirelessly to see that all Leelanau residents are vaccinated that want to be. We need to celebrate their progress toward another clear goal – in most areas of northern Michigan the Health Department is over halfway to the goal of vaccinating 70% of the population with their initial dose!
- ***The Administrator’s Office*** coordinated the MEDC’s Community Development Block Grant/ Covid-19 CARES Act Grant, which resulted in nearly \$300,000.00 in reimbursements being transferred to the County, and select local units of government and non-profits
- ***The Leelanau County Historic Preservation Society*** continued its renovation of the “Poor Farm Barn,” located at the Myles Kimmerly Park, at no cost to taxpayers. This month, the Michigan Barn Preservation Network selected the barn as the “Barn of the Year” for 2021
- ***The Clerk scheduled approximately 30 training seminars*** prior to the November election for township officials to ensure compliance with election laws and Covid-19 protocols
- ***The County is in the process of refinancing the construction bonds*** for the Law Enforcement Center, which will lower the interest rate to 1.36% and save the taxpayers approximately \$120,000.00
- ***Financial stability and a positive bond credit rating*** – for the fourth straight year, the County received a “clean” audit and was recognized as being one of the “best-managed counties” in Michigan by *Bridge Magazine*
- ***The County has been aggressive in dealing with long-term liability issues*** (retirement costs) and was once again recognized as being one of only 20 counties that has positively managed its retirement costs. The County has no post-employment benefits (OPEB) liability, which is a rarity in Michigan

- ***The County's millage rate of 3.53 mills*** is the lowest rate of all Michigan counties
- ***All of the County's meetings have been broadcast live*** on YouTube since last April, and the video recordings of the meetings are available for later viewing by the public
- ***County Clerk Michelle Crocker and Maintenance Director Jerry Culman II*** were honored on their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of service with the County