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Report to Laketown Township Board

By Jim Storey, county commissioner, District 1

May 8, 2024

GREETINGS:

Here are some current and future matters affecting Allegan County:

- During last week's Michigan Association of Counties legislative conference, commissioners and the administrator met with the nine state legislators who represent parts of Allegan County. The main issue was the future use of the 50,000 acre state game area by patrons other than hunters and fishing enthusiasts. Game area career civil servants of the Department of Natural Resources are resisting the county's interest in making the expansive area – 20,000 acres larger than Disney World, for example – available to bicycle users, hikers, limited motorized uses, and horses to add another, open venue to county visitors to support our local businesses. The legislators will work to set up a meeting with senior DNR management to try and open serious discussion on game area self-imposed limitations.
- **Road Commission election** – The Board of Commissioners at its May 9 session will elect a third member of the Allegan County Road Commission. The three-member commission is short one member as a result of the passing of commission chair John Kleinheksel. Three individuals have applied. The Kleinheksel seat has traditionally been filled with a person from the western townships in the county, including Laketown.
- **Courthouse, CSB construction** – Progress continues on the addition and renovation of the county courthouse to accommodate the third circuit court judge (there are presently two circuit judges) when that person takes office January 1, 2025. Redevelopment of vacant space at the county services building (CSB) that houses administrative offices and where Commissioners meet is moving along smartly. When completed sometime in August, modern, new offices for the clerk, treasurer, drain commissioner and register of deeds are expected to be move-in ready. That will permit interior renovation of the courthouse to get underway. The CSB boasts plenty of parking near the entrance, doing away with the hike many non-court patrons endure when a jury trial is underway.
- **Lakeshore Drive washout** – Since 1988 Lakeshore Drive in southern Saugatuck Township has been cut-off from the rest of the township because of a washout caused by wind-driven, high waves of Lake Michigan. This and follow-on washouts, have frustrated emergency response agencies, tripling response times to emergency calls. Township Manager Daniel DeFranco is organizing an inspection tour for federal legislators and staff to demonstrate the need for federal funding to relocate the road away from the shore

and restore reasonable emergency response times. For the past year, I have been communicating with federal administrative agencies (Transportation, highway administration) at National Association of County meetings, attempting to interest them in sharing infrastructure money for this project. Pretty much been ignored. Hopefully, the federal legislators can pressure these agencies to help out on this \$5-7 million project while they ponder providing up to a \$1,000,000,000 for the Baltimore Harbor bridge rebuild.

- **Other matters** – Commissioners at the April 25 board meeting voted to confirm the appointment of Jacqueline Billette as the new health department director, succeeding Angelique Joynes who resigned at the end of January. Ms. Billette is a native of Traverse City and most recently was employed at the Central Michigan health department that serves six counties where she concentrated on personal health delivery . . . At the request of the road commission, the board voted to place the renewal of the one mill county road millage on the August primary election ballot. The millage level hasn't changed since 1968 when Allegan County voters approved it the first time, making Allegan County the first county to approve a road millage.
- **Contact** – Happy to respond to questions on these and other issues: jstorey@allegancounty.org; 616-848-9767