



January 2024 Board of Commissioners Activity Reports

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HIGHLIGHTS FOR JANUARY 2024

1. **Proclamation of Hon. David DiStefano** – During the January 23rd, 2024, meeting the Board issued a Proclamation for Honorable Judge DiStefano for his services to the County throughout the years.
2. **DCS Technology – ROBIN Grant Update, MEC Subrecipient Agreement, and Broadband Consultant Agreement** – The Board received an update on the ROBIN Grant, and signed the MEC Subrecipient Agreement, and the DCS Broadband Consultant Agreement during the January 9th, 2024, meeting. The Board allocated \$7 Million of ARPA funding for the Broadband expansion. [Click here to find your current Broadband Parcel Status and ISP Provider!](#) For more information and to stay up to date on updates, visit our [Broadband Expansion Efforts](#) webpage.
3. **December 2023 Claims** – Claims in the amount of \$2,737,873.53 for December 2023 were submitted, reviewed, and approved by the Board of Commissioners during the January 23rd, 2024, Board meeting.
4. **Annual Application Information for MDOT** - There was a request to approve, sign a resolution of intent, and sign for MDOT FY25 Annual Application. This is required by MDOT and due February 1, 2024. This is the portal for Public Transit to receive operating and capital funding. Each year MDOT requires each transit agency to complete and submit an annual application and supporting documents for the next fiscal year. This is the means which MDOT uses to provide operating and capital funding to transit agencies throughout the state of Michigan. The Board approved the MDOT FY25 Annual Application, for the Board Chair to sign the Contract Clauses Certification and provides a Resolution of Intent on the Board's behalf during the January 23rd, 2024, BOC meeting.
5. **FOC/Court Contracts** – There was a request on behalf of the Court's for the Board to authorize the Board Chairperson to sign seven FY24 contracts. The contracts listed below were presented, discussed, and approved by the Board for the Board Chairperson to sign during the January 23rd, 2024, BOC meeting:
 - a. MST Associates Contract FY24
 - b. New Outlook Contract FY24
 - c. VBCMh MST/MST-PSB Contract FY24
 - d. VBCMh Parent Navigator Contract FY24
 - e. Allegan County Juvenile Center Contract FY24
 - f. Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Center Contract FY24
 - g. Court Appointed Special Advocate Contract FY24

Appointment/Reappointment Requests

1. **SWMPC – Appointment of Kimberly Sinclair** – The request to appoint Kimberly Sinclair to the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission for a two-year term set to expire on December 31st, 2025, was approved during the January 9th, 2024, BOC meeting.
2. **Van Buren Cass District Board of Health – Re-appointment – Robert Linderman** – The request to re-appoint Robert Linderman to the Van Buren Cass District Board of Health was approved during the January 9th, 2024, BOC meeting.
3. **Economic Development Corporation (EDC) – Re-appointments** – The Board of Commissioners re-appointed two members, Zachary Morris, and Daywi Cook, to the Economic Development Corporation for a six-year term set to expire on February 13th, 2030, during the January 23rd, 2024, meeting.
4. **Southwest Michigan Planning Commission – Re-appointments** - The Board approved the two re-appointments of Sandra Hanson and Rick Catherman to the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission for a two-year term set to expire on December 21st, 2025, during the January 23rd, 2024, meeting.
5. **Land Bank Authority Appointment – Todd Hackenberg** – The Board of Commissioners approved the appointment of Todd Hackenberg to the Land Bank Authority Board for a two-year term contract with an expiration date of December 31st, 2025, during the January 23rd, 2024, meeting.
6. **Re-appointment to the Public Transit Local Advisory Council – Julie Pioch** – The Board approved the re-appointment of Julie Pioch to the Public Transit Local Advisory Council with a term set to expire on December 31st, 2027, during the January 23rd, 2024, BOC meeting.

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All board meeting agendas and minutes can be found on the county website:

<https://www.vanburencountymi.gov/129/Agendas-Minutes>



Van Buren County
MICHIGAN

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January 24, 2024

Joint Press Release - For Immediate Release

STATE GRANT TO MAKE VAN BUREN ONE OF THE MOST CONNECTED RURAL COUNTIES IN MICHIGAN

PAW PAW, Mich.- With technology growing at rapid pace, the teams at Market Van Buren and Van Buren County saw an opportunity that would advance their community and ensure it remains competitive. High-speed fiber internet is coming to 3,734 unserved and underserved rural residents and businesses in Van Buren County, as result of the State of Michigan’s Realizing Opportunity with Broadband Infrastructure Networks grant program (ROBIN).

The grant was awarded to Midwest Energy & Communications, a Michigan-based internet service provider, for a project that will bring fiber service to nearly 7,000 unserved and underserved addresses in Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph (MI), and Van Buren Counties. The State defines “unserved and underserved” as addresses that do not currently have access to internet speeds of at least 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload.

As part of the grant, Market Van Buren, Van Buren County, 13 Van Buren County townships, DCS Technology Design, and Midwest Energy & Communications came together in a historic collaboration to address the needs of rural Van Buren County residents who have lacked access to high-speed, reliable broadband.

“Van Buren County is proud to announce this transformational event. As stated in the past, we are grateful for the partnerships that have made this opportunity possible. Those responsible for this development are many and include County staff, DCS Technology Design, Market Van Buren, MEC, State representatives, local units of government, and the leadership of the County Commissioners,” said Randall Peat, Chair of the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners. “The establishment of a county-wide high-speed broadband system will enhance the health, safety, and well-being of County residents, guests, and the business community. This was truly a team effort for the betterment of Van Buren County as a whole.”

MEC will invest \$15.8 million, and the State will contribute roughly \$25.3 million to the overall project serving the four counties. Meanwhile, in Van Buren County, the County will contribute over \$4.1 million and 13 townships nearly \$1.4 million. The 13 townships include: Alma, Antwerp, Bangor, Covert, Decatur, Hamilton, Hartford, Keeler, Lawrence, Paw Paw, Pine Grove, Porter, and South Haven.

The project will reach an additional 1,995 addresses considered served by the State, bringing the total number of addresses that will benefit from this project to 5,729.

“Six years ago, the Market Van Buren Board of Directors adopted a seven-point plan. The top priority identified was broadband internet for every home and business in the county. Through the leadership of the County Commissioners, along with the expertise of MEC and DCS Technology Design, we are now in a position to be the most connected rural county in the State of Michigan,” stated Zach Morris, Executive Director of Market Van Buren.

Construction has already begun in some areas within Van Buren County and will continue through 2026 due to the amount of new infrastructure required for the project. Interested individuals can visit <http://www.teammidwest.com/internet/> to check their eligibility.

About Market Van Buren

Market Van Buren is a nonprofit focused on connecting people, investments, and organizations with strategies and services that improve the quality of life and economic conditions in Cass and Van Buren counties. Our staff focuses on developing strategies that will allow our communities to thrive by addressing needs related to workforce, community, and business development. For more information, visit www.marketvanburen.org, follow us on Twitter @MarketVanBuren, or “like” us on Facebook @MarketVanBuren.

About Van Buren County

Van Buren County, a rural county in Southwest Michigan, boasts fourteen miles of beautiful Lake Michigan shoreline, 300 in-land lakes, two scenic rivers, a strong agricultural heritage, two interstate corridors and a diverse business community. Its government leadership is comprised of a governing body of County Commissioners, Elected Officials, Courts and an appointed Administrator/Contoller. For more information, visit www.vanburencountymi.gov, “like” us on Facebook @VanBurenCountyMI, follow on Twitter @VanBurenCoMI.

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Hours of Operation:

Monday - Thursday 8am - 5pm
Friday 8am - 2pm

Cass County

Immunizations
1st & 3rd Wednesdays

STD testing & treatment
Thursdays

Dental
Monday - Friday

Van Buren County

Immunizations
Thursdays

STD testing & treatment
Wednesdays

Dental
Monday - Friday

**Newsworthy
visit vbcassdhd.org/news**

As of December 14, 2023 there have been 14 influenza-associated pediatric deaths reported nationally. No pediatric deaths have been confirmed by MDHHS (in Michigan) for the 2023-24 flu season as of 12/14/2023.

Visit michigan.gov/flu for more information.

Medical Director/Nursing

- There have been multiple COVID-19 outbreaks reported in our long-term care facilities throughout Cass and Van Buren County. Our public health nurses are busy providing resources and guidance to the facilities.
- COVID-19 and Influenza is on the rise in our district as reported by our Healthcare Providers, schools and daycares. It's not too late to get your flu and COVID-19 shots. Visit your healthcare provider, a local pharmacy or call us at (269) 621-3143 to schedule an appointment.
- Our nursing and community health team hosted a flu and COVID-19 vaccination clinic at the Covert Fire Department on Wednesday, December 13.

Community Health

- Focused on quality improvement, the community health and nursing team led a "hotwash" following the Covert flu and COVID-19 vaccination clinic, where we learned that 100% of all survey takers said they would recommend our services to others and 100% rated the quality of the clinic as excellent.
- Presented to the Van Buren County Library Branch Managers on health department services, discussing the potential for future partnerships.
- Community Health and Dental Outreach will host a dental-themed story time at all VB Library branches for National Children's Dental Health month in February.
- Received a grant through the Cribs for Kids program that allowed us to donate safe sleep books in Spanish and English to HOPE Parent Resource Center to be provided in their safety bundle bags for new parents
- Preparing nutrition education programs for implementation in summer 2024.
- Participated in the Covert Feeding America Southwest MI mobile food pantry and will be attending more mobile food pantries across the counties throughout January.

Environmental Health

- In the month of October, the department reports:
 - 19 septic permits
 - 26 septic final inspections
 - 42 well permits
 - 31 final well inspections
 - 40 routine restaurant inspections
 - 13 restaurant follow-up inspections
 - 2 temporary food license inspections
 - 6 body art facility routine inspections
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Dental Clinic & Outreach

- Dowagiac Dental Clinic
 - served 328 patients in the month of December
 - booked through September 2024 for treatment
 - booked through January 2025 for regular hygiene (cleanings)
- Lawrence Dental Clinic
 - served 438 patients in the month of December
 - booked through mid-September 2024 for treatment
 - booked through March 2025 for regular hygiene (cleanings)
- Thanks to a grant from Delta Dental Foundation, our Dental Outreach program servicing youth throughout Cass, Van Buren and Berrien counties will be purchasing a new outreach van! Keep your eyes peeled for the Community Dental Program van throughout the community.
- SB 280 was submitted to Governor Whitmire on December 6, 2023 to be signed into law. The signed senate bill is effective January 1, 2024. Implementation of required Kindergarten dental screenings will be effective for the 2024-2025 school year. Students enrolling Kindergarten next fall, should aim to be screened summer 2024.
- Dental Outreach held 11 events this month at schools throughout the tri-county area, seeing a total of 427 students in Cass and Van Buren counties and 105 in Berrien county.



Van Buren Conservation District January 2024 Program Update

Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Executive Director

Happy New Year! In 2024, the VBCD celebrates its 80th anniversary, so we have updated our logo and will be celebrating throughout the year with historical photos in our social media, publications, and more! We hope you enjoy looking back with us and will also join us in looking forward to what more we can do together to care for our water, soil, and air in Van Buren County.

Our annual Tree Seedling Sale has started; pre-orders will be accepted **January 1st through March 31st** with early April pick up. Find more details on our website: www.VanBurenCD.org/Shop Additionally, have our Backyard Symposium webinar series coming up during the lunch hour **February 5-8**. More details can be found here: <https://VanBurenCd.org/2024-backyard-symposium/> The SWxSW Corner Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, **February 16** at 1:00 PM at the Pokagon Band Community Center in Dowagiac. Please RSVP by contacting CISMA Coordinator Alex Florian at invasivesed@vanburencd.org or calling 269-633-9044. This will be a great opportunity to learn more about invasive species work and specifically Spotted Lanternfly.

As always, if there is a service, information, or event that you're hoping to see from the District, please don't hesitate to reach out and share your ideas and questions. Have a great February!

Program Updates:

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Carlie Southland*) - In December, Van Buren Conservation District staff participated in a round table meeting with local Van Buren County farmers. This meeting was hosted by Michigan Agriculture Advancement. The purpose of this meeting was to get a producer perspective on conservation programs and practices and what new efforts might be needed, and to have conversations with farmers to brainstorm new ideas for better policies going forward.
- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) Team** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) - This month, the team primarily looked to the future. We spent much of our time planning annual meetings, writing grants, and updating our list of priority species. With greater organization and communication across the CISMA team as a whole, our grip on funding and grant goals has become more tangible and better understood. We are entering 2024 with a readiness and excitement like never before!
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)** (*Kyle Mead*) - FY24 has MAEAP administrators challenging the techs to get all lapsed farmers contacted for re-verification, to re-verify as many farms as we can to keep our retention percentage up, as well as for every tech to get 12 new verifications. With 12 new and 59 reverifications from 5 years ago, Van Buren's verification goal is 71. With the help of Gabe and Lucas, the new verification goal should go smoothly. To hit the ground running, the specialist completed 8 Verifications (5 new and 3 Re) at the start of November.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman*) - Van Buren Conservation District has been awarded 12 additional months of funding for two conservation technicians to assist NRCS staff with Farm Bill Programs. This award comes from the



Van Buren Conservation District January 2024 Program Update

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Technical Assistance and Outreach grant administered by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

- **Natural Resource Conservation Service Technical Assistance** (*Gabe Francisco*) - I along with the rest of the Conservation District staff have been hard at work getting things together to start this next year on the right foot. Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) clients are getting paid, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)/ ACT NOW clients are rapidly getting signed up. Conservation planning and assistance is on track to be at an all time high this year for Van Buren County! Our submission to the Climate Smart Commodities grant has officially made it to the second application round, with a final due date of March 15.
- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - Calendars were delivered to partners and the public. 2024 Food, Farm, & Fun Guide is nearing its first draft. Fundraising and donation opportunities were expanded through website work and Tree Sale updates.
- **Resource Recovery & Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) - Resource Recovery slowed down as collection season planning wrapped and the holiday season commenced. December focused on education and planning for the exciting Recycling Infrastructure grants to come that will make improvements to several transfer stations in Van Buren County.