



## January 2026 Board of Commissioners Activity Reports

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### Highlights

- **Organizational Meeting:** On January 6, the Board held its annual Organizational Meeting, electing **Kurt Doroh** as Chairperson and **Paul Schincariol** as Vice-Chairperson for the 2026 legislative year. The Board also adopted the 2026 meeting schedule and approved updated Board Bylaws and Procedures.
- **Facilities Master Plan:** TowerPinkster presented the draft Facilities Master Plan on January 13. The plan proposes consolidating county operations into three primary campuses: a **Judicial and Public Safety Campus**, a **Public Services and Administration Campus**, and a **Support Facilities** location. Key recommendations include constructing a new 911/Emergency Operations Center (Phase 1) and a new Courthouse (Phase 2), as well as renovating existing spaces for administrative use.
- **Parks & Recreation Plan:** The Board officially adopted the *Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan: 2026–2030* (Resolution A4/1-27-2026). This adoption is required to maintain the County’s eligibility for Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) grant funding.
- **Labor Contracts:** The Board approved three-year collective bargaining agreements (2026–2028) containing **3% annual wage increases** for the following units:
  - **POLC Command Unit.**
  - **AFSCME General Unit** (all units excluding Public Transit).
  - **AFSCME Public Transit Unit.**
- **Service Contracts:** Approved FY2026 contracts including **\$80,000** for Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) services with Safe Harbor Children’s Advocacy Center, and agreements for Student Advocacy Michigan and juvenile justice quality assurance.
- **Department Reports:** Received annual reports from **Information Technology**, highlighting the digitization of over 4 million pages, and **Human Resources**, reviewing insurance benefits and paid time off policies.

## Committee and Board Appointments/Reappointments

The following appointments were approved or presented in January:

- **Building Authority:** Appointed **Chad Hunt** for a three-year term expiring December 31, 2028.
- **Land Preservation Board:** Appointed **Kimberly Kiley** for a three-year term expiring December 31, 2028.
- **Parks Commission:** Reappointed **Emilly Hickmott** for a three-year term expiring December 31, 2028.
- **Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC):** Reappointed **Kimberly Sinclair** and **Roger Engle** for two-year terms expiring December 31, 2027.
- **Forwarded for February Approval:**
  - **Community Mental Health (CMH):** Carol Sjoquist and Michael Saenz.
  - **Van Buren District Library:** Sandy Hanson.
  - **Van Buren Cass Community Health Department:** Anne Wendling.

## Road Commission Talking Points

- **Leadership Re-Organization:** At its January 8 meeting, the Road Commission elected **Doug Burleson** as Chairman and **Rick Boze** as Vice-Chairman. Wayne Nelson was appointed to the County Parks Commission.
- **Annual Certification:** The Board certified **1,314.90 miles** of roadway under its jurisdiction, representing an increase of 1.76 miles from the previous year.
- **2026 Budget Projects:** The adopted 2026 Preliminary Budget tentatively includes the **CR 687 project** (CR 372 to CR 376 in Hartford/Bangor Townships), pending state/federal aid.
- **Funding Update:** The Commission is managing a temporary 20% decrease in Michigan Transportation Funds (MTF) but anticipates full funding by year-end. Revenues from the new Transportation Funding Package (e.g., marijuana tax) have not yet been budgeted and will be added as funds are received.
- **Cost Savings:** The Board approved price extensions for **pavement marking** (Michigan Pavement Marking) and **sealcoat emulsion** (Michigan Paving and Materials) to secure favorable pricing for the 2026 season.



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# Van Buren Conservation District February 2026 Program Update

*Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Executive Director*

As we all dive deeper into the new year, we are planning for a year filled with programs, services, and community engagement. Be sure to follow along as we announce events, continue our services, and be your go-to for conservation and natural resources. As always, the VBCD is here for you, our community, and natural resources. Reach out anytime!

**2025 Annual Report** – We are excited to share our 2025 Annual Report with you. Our shared conservation story with many successes will inspire you – as it has inspired me. This easy-to-read report gives a snapshot of who we are, what we do, how we work together, and our impact. We'll be delivering copies but feel free to read online: [VanBurenCD.org/Annual-Reports](https://VanBurenCD.org/Annual-Reports)

**Regular Meeting Schedule** – The VBCD Board of Directors has set our meeting schedule for this year. The meetings are open to the public and give you the opportunity to engage directly with us, our programs, and the board. [VanBurenCD.org/notice-2026-reg/](https://VanBurenCD.org/notice-2026-reg/)

**Tree Sale** – Our annual Tree Sale provides affordable, quality seedlings to our community. The benefit? Large scale pollinator and wildlife habitat building and community beautiful. Profits go back into our conservation efforts and programs further benefiting our communities. Shop the sale at [VanBurenCD.org/Shop](https://VanBurenCD.org/Shop)

*Emily Hickmott*

Emily Hickmott, Executive Director

## **Upcoming Events** (details available on [our website](#))

- SWxSW Corner Annual Meeting | February 11 | Come engage with our invasive species team
- Washington's Birthday | February 16 | Office closed
- VBCD Board Meeting | February 25 | [VanBurenCD.org/About](https://VanBurenCD.org/About)
- Farming for the Future Conference | March 11
- Discover with the District: Kal-Haven Trail | Saturday, March 21 | [VanBurenCD.org/discover-2026](https://VanBurenCD.org/discover-2026)
- VBCD Board Meeting | March 25 | [VanBurenCD.org/About](https://VanBurenCD.org/About)
- Tree Sale Order Pickup & Leftover Sale | Friday, April 10 & Saturday April, 11 | [VanBurenCD.org/shop](https://VanBurenCD.org/shop)
- VBCD Board Meeting | April 22 | [VanBurenCD.org/About](https://VanBurenCD.org/About)



# Van Buren Conservation District February 2026 Program Update

Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Executive Director

## Program Updates

**Resource Recovery & Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) – We are working with five community drop-off centers to bring year-round foam recycling to the county. Look for the upcoming announcement!

**Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) – Three big projects are coming soon or are here: the 2025 Annual Report; the Food, Farm, and Fun Guide; and Tree Sale. Shop affordable, quality seedlings and support local conservation efforts! [VanBurenCD.org/shop](http://VanBurenCD.org/shop)

**Agriculture & Water Quality Team** (*Erin Fuller and Colleen Forestieri*) – Our research, with partners like the University of Notre Dame, on the effectiveness of conservation practices on farm fields continues. Important world class research is happening right here in Van Buren County!

**Invasive Species SWxSW Corner CISMA Team** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) – We've been meeting with partners to discuss future projects funded by grants and contracts. We have started drafting 2026 survey locations and management areas and completing field work. We wish Abbie Bristol, Land Management Project Manager, the very best in her next endeavors!

**Conservation Technical Assistance Program: MAEAP and Regenerative Agriculture Programs** (*Kyle Mead*) – Kyle has been busy reaching out to and visiting with producers about verifications and assessments as well as making connections with NRCS. He has also helped several producers gain access to the new water use reporting site.

**Natural Resource Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman, Gabriel Francisco*) – Many interested landowners from across Van Buren County's diverse agriculture have reached out with various resource concerns. We worked hard to provide landowners opportunities to be involved in programs whose deadlines for the first round were in January. Efforts in education and networks were made at the Great Lakes Exposition and Michigan Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting. We also wish Lucas Hartman, Conservation Technician, well in his next endeavors!

**Forestry Assistance Program** (*Benjamin Savoie, Barry Conservation District*) – Ben is working across nine counties, including Van Buren County, supporting our forests. Working with landowners, Ben works in the Qualified Forest Program to save landowners money and strengthen forest health.

John Faul  
County Administrator



David Krzycki  
Veterans Services Director

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1. **This report covers the reporting period from Dec-Jan FY2026.**
2. **New Hire Casey Somers for our VSO position.**
3. **Statistical information Indicates:**
  - Overall, this year we have seen **886** contacts for FY26. New contacts, **Aid and Attendance, Funerals and Relief**, are the main topics during this period.
  - The dental program has spent **\$41,215.54** in FY26 with **203** visits.
  - Soldiers and Sailors had **0** fully developed relief request for consideration from Dec-Jan FY2026.
  - We had **0** burial relief approved for this reporting period.
4. **Statistics Aug-Sept FY2025**
  - **VA Claims/Actions:** We had **52** claims/actions filed in December and **42** in January. This reflects all the various actions related to additional benefits, DIC, Relief, Aid and Attendance, and requests for DD214's.
  - **Appeals:** We had **1** appeals in December and **3** appeals for January.
  - **Health Care:** Veteran services had **1** veterans signed up for VA Health Care in this reporting period.
  - **Home/Event Visits:** **0** home visits in this reporting period.
  - **Assisted Living Visits:** Conducted a total of **0** Assisted Living Visits this reporting period.
  - **Community Events:** Conducted **6** outreach and County Events since our last report.
5. **Public transportation gave 4 rides in December and 9 rides in January.**
6. **The following events were conducted during this reporting period FY26.**
  - **December 2025**

- Trees for Troops
- Visit VFW (South Haven)
- Christmas Meals
- Veteran Event Kalamazoo Mortgage.
- **January 2025**
  - Bangor American Legion
  - New Hire
- **Upcoming events for Veteran Services:**
  - NACVSO Training for Casey
  - NACVSO Conference in Michigan 20-24 April
  - Memorial Day

#### **Notes: Military Branch Birthdays**

- Army. June 14, 1775.
- Coast Guard. August 4, 1790
- Air Force. September 18, 1947
- Navy. October 13, 1775.
- Marine Corps. November 10, 1775.
- **National Guard December 13, 1636.**
- **Space Force, December 20, 2019.**