



April 2026 Board of Commissioners Activity Report

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Highlights

- **2026 Equalization Report & Services:** The Board received and approved the 2026 Equalization Report, establishing the combined total of Real and Personal Property for Van Buren County at \$7,325,389,367. Additionally, the Board approved a contract renewal with Assessing Solutions (Tony Meyaard) for equalization services at a cost of \$246,100 for the year.
- **Specialty Court Grant Application:** The Board approved the submission of a federal grant application totaling \$1,850,000. This includes \$1,000,000 to support operations for the Mental Health Court Program and \$850,000 to support the Family Reunification Program.
- **Millage Renewals for the August Ballot:** The Board approved ballot language to place two renewal millages on the August 4, 2026, primary ballot. These include the Public Safety millage at 0.5332 mill and the Ambulance Service millage at 0.9353 mill, both spanning from 2027 to 2030.
- **Parks Millage:** The Board approved the adoption of the Parks and Recreation tax levy of .10 mill, which will be applied to the 2026 winter tax bills. These restricted funds will be used for maintenance, capital improvements, and conservation initiatives.
- **Alternative Fuel Technology Facility Authorization:** The Board approved a Letter of Consistency for Alternative Fuel Technology, LLC. This supports the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) authorization of a new processing and transfer facility in the Village of Lawton that will process waste into alternative fuel.

- **Materials Management Planning:** The Board approved an amendment to the Materials Management Planning Grant, extending the grant through July 31, 2027, to continue the development of the county's Materials Management Plan.
- **Employee Benefits Update:** The Board amended the MERS Health Care Savings Program Participation Agreement, increasing the mandatory employee contribution from \$5 to \$10 per pay period. This change was made to offset a new \$10 monthly administrative fee implemented by MERS.

Committee and Board Appointments/Reappointments

- **Van Buren County Planning Commission:** Reappointed Alyssa Hosbein, Jan Petersen, and Barbara Rose to three-year terms expiring March 31, 2029. Scott Cedarquist was reappointed to a two-year term expiring March 31, 2028.
- **Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC):** Appointed David Havice to fill a vacancy left by Sandy Hanson for a two-year term expiring December 31, 2027.
- **Jury Board:** Reappointed Thomas Palenick to serve another six-year term expiring April 30, 2032.

Scan or click the QR code for updates, news, live Board meetings, agendas, minutes, and more!





Medical Director and Nursing

During the reporting month, two long-term care facilities within the district experienced COVID-19 and RSV outbreaks. Communicable disease nurses supported both locations by providing infection prevention education, resources, and guidance. On March 30, 2026, the district launched the **MIWAIV non-medical exemption hybrid education program**¹ for parents and guardians who choose not to vaccinate their children with required school and childcare immunizations. Hearing and vision technicians delivered a total of 5,523 services during the second quarter of 2026. Medical providers across the district were also asked to include laboratory testing for varicella (chickenpox), in addition to clinical diagnosis, to improve case confirmation and contact follow-up. Kindergarten round-ups have increased staff activity, particularly for hearing and vision screenings, immunization record lookups, and scheduling vaccination appointments.

Measles activity has increased **regionally**², with Washtenaw County reporting seven cases and Monroe County reporting one case. A confirmed measles case was also associated with travel through O'Hare International Airport in late March. **Measles**³ is a highly contagious virus that can cause serious complications such as pneumonia, brain damage, hearing loss, hospitalization, and death, particularly among young children, older adults, pregnant individuals, and those with weakened immune systems. Common symptoms include high fever, a widespread rash, red eyes, runny nose, cough, ear infections, and diarrhea.

Public health officials emphasize the importance of staying up to date with the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine. Children typically receive one dose at 12 months of age and a second dose between 4 and 6 years, with earlier second doses recommended in affected areas. Adults born in 1957 or later without evidence of immunity may need one or two doses depending on risk level, while those born before 1957 are generally considered immune. Additional vaccination recommendations apply for international travelers, including infants as young as 6 months. Individuals are encouraged to consult their health care provider or VBCDHD to review vaccination status and risk.

Dental Clinic and Outreach

Both clinics have been especially busy, with Dowagiac welcoming 17 new patients and seeing 368 total, and Lawrence seeing 54 new patients and 537 patients overall. After fully expending \$50,000 in grant monies, Van Buren County Veterans Services awarded an additional \$30,000 for veterans' dental treatment through September 2026, a valuable expansion of this highly successful program. As winter scheduling challenges ease, we are beginning to return to a more normal schedule heading into spring.

Environmental Health

- 60 septic permits
- 27 septic final inspections
- 45 well permits
- 29 well final inspections
- 68 restaurant inspections
- 14 restaurant reinspections
- 21 septic hauler inspections

Location

Van Buren County

260 South Street, Lawrence, MI 49064

Cass County

302 S. Front Street, Dowagiac, MI 49047

Business Hours

Monday - Thursday · 8:00am to 5:00pm

Friday · 8:00am to 12:00pm

Clinics

Van Buren County

Immunization · Thursdays

STI Testing & Treatment · Wednesdays

Dental · Monday - Thursday

Cass County

Immunization · 1st and 3rd Wednesdays

STI Testing & Treatment · Thursdays

Dental · Monday - Thursday

Newsworthy

Measles Case Reported in Michigan

Boil Water Advisory – Colonial Acres (Cass County)

Bird Flu Alert: Protect Your Birds

Links

¹ <https://vbcassdhd.org/community-health/exemptwaiver-education/>

² <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/adult-child-serv/childrenfamilies/immunizations/measlesupdates>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/signs-symptoms/photos.html>



Van Buren Conservation District

April 2026 Program Update

When it rains, it pours, and it is April! We're excited to be outdoors a lot this month and all over the county with various projects and events.

Grants Received - The Michigan Department of Natural Resources awarded both grants we applied for last fall for invasive species work. We received the highest amount of grant funds for these projects of all of the applications awarded in the state. With these funds, we will provide education; survey for high priority, high impact invasive species; and train more people to find and manage invasive species.

Seasonal Employees Hired - We have hired three seasonal employees who will start mid-May to work on invasive species projects and recycling projects with the rest of the team. We are looking forward to making great impacts and providing services with these folks this summer.

Tree Sale - Leftover seedlings will be available for sale April 10 and 11 in Paw Paw (VBCD office) and South Haven (Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum). Adding these seedlings to your property encourages large scale pollinator and wildlife habitat building and adds to our community's beauty. Profits from the sale go back into our conservation efforts and programs. Shop the sale at VanBurenCD.org/Shop

VBCD Newsletter - Our subscriber newsletter is now available on our website at VanBurenCD.org/News and will be attached to these update emails going forward. We hope this helps you stay connected. As always, reach out anytime with questions, ideas, and concerns.

Emilly Hickmott

Emilly Hickmott, Executive Director

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

- Tree Sale Order Pickup & Leftover Sale | Friday, April 10 & Saturday April, 11 | VanBurenCD.org/shop
- VBCD Board Meeting | April 22 | VanBurenCD.org/About
- Electronics Recycling Event - Porter Township | Tuesday, May 5 | <https://vanburencd.org/van-buren-county-recycling-collections/>
- Electronics Transfer Station Host Drop-off - Decatur | Saturday, May 9 and Saturday, May 16 | <https://vanburencd.org/van-buren-county-recycling-collections/>
- Memorial Day - office closed | Monday, May 25



Van Buren Conservation District

April 2026 Program Update

- VBCD Board Meeting | Wednesday, May 27 | VanBurenCD.org/About
- VBCD at the Decatur Night Market | Friday, May 29
- VBCD Annual Meeting & Director Election | July 17 | details to be announced

Program Updates

Resource Recovery & Recycling (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) – Five communities have worked with us to make their drop-off centers a place that you can bring foam in for recycling year-round. You can learn more about where and how by checking out the announcement at VanBurenCD.org/foam-recycling Our 2026 collection events have been announced. This year's electronic recycling opportunities have been changed to make it easier to keep those valuable materials in the economy. VanBurenCD.org/van-buren-county-recycling-collections

Outreach (*Jacob Diljak*) – Jacob worked hard to wrap up his tree sale and Food, Farm, & Fun Guide assignments. The guides will be distributed in April. He also prepared training materials and notes for the team before his last day mid-March. We wish Jacob well on his next adventure!

Agriculture & Water Quality Team (*Erin Fuller and Colleen Forestieri*) – In February, Colleen Forestieri attended the Underground Innovations Conference in Frankenmuth, MI. Colleen was invited to moderate a farmer forum and panel discussion at the conference, discussing Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) projects. In March, the team held the Farming for the Future Conference and connected with over 100 attendees about conservation practices.

Invasive Species SWxSW Corner CISMA Team (*Alex Florian and Jena Johnson*) – The CISMA team hosted our Annual Meeting, took the first major steps towards hiring our 2026 strike team crew, and attended the MISC Annual Meeting in Gaylord, MI. The CISMA team steadily chipped away at multiple projects with upcoming deadlines, and worked to stay on top of public inquiries. In terms of field work, the team stayed busy doing contracting work for Chikaming Open Lands, and began GLRI shrub management with the help of Van Buren Conservation District conservation technician, Gabe Francisco.

Conservation Technical Assistance Program: MAEAP and Regenerative Agriculture Programs (*Kyle Mead*) – The specialist continues to plug away at farm visits for assessments and verifications. As days get longer and warmer this gets easier. Kyle continues to assist the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) as they need, and is helping to put the final touches on



Van Buren Conservation District April 2026 Program Update

VBCD's annual Farming for the Future Event as well the Regional Envirothon competition which both happened in March.

Natural Resource Technical Assistance (*Gabriel Francisco*) - This month has been dedicated to many national NRCS training, and assisting the CISMA team performing GLRI Shrub Management work. NRCS trainings for the standard Farm Bill Roll out that happens each year in February as well as training in both providing assistance to USDA Organic producers and Soil Health training regarding the new RPP (Regenerative Pilot Program) offered through the Department of Agriculture this year.

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.



ROAD COMMISSION TALKING POINTS

TOWNSHIP SPRING ROAD TOURS BEING SCHEDULED

Road Commission Operations Director, Greg Brucks, offers road tours any time or season; however, Spring Road Tours are beneficial for many reasons. Driving the roads together can help to identify problem areas early, assist in making informed spending decisions and where the township's limited dollars will have the greatest impact, prioritizing projects collaboratively and aligning expectations, and to support better planning for the construction season. In short, Spring Road Tours help to build trust and ensure problems are understood the same way by all parties!

ROAD COMMISSION MAY BOARD MEETING RESCHEDULED

The Road Commission's regular May meeting has been RESCHEDULED to **Tuesday, May 5, 2026 at 5 PM**. Please be sure to mark your calendars and help us to spread the word.

PROJECTS FUNDED BY TOWNSHIPS

The Board amended Policy 2022-01, Projects Funded by Townships, at its April meeting after Road Commission staff identified that the policy did not fully align with the Road Commission's current practice of collecting PASER data every year. PASER data is collected annually not only for asset management purposes, but also to support sealcoat pricing decisions. This data is collected by Road Commission staff and funded through a 3-year rotating cost-sharing program as follows: the Road Commission in one year, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission in the second year, and the townships in the third year. The revision to the Policy will assure that should a township refuse or neglect to sign a Program Sheet authorizing PASER data collection that the data will still be collected within

ROAD COMMISSION PURCHASES NEW TRACTOR MOWERS

The Road Commission recently welcomed two brand-new mowing tractors and cutters to its fleet, bringing the total number of mowing units to four. These additions will help crews maintain roadsides more efficiently and keep our community looking its best throughout the mowing season.

These new tractors also offer an interesting glimpse into how much times—and prices—have changed. **Fun fact:** When we dug into the archives, we found that in 1939, the Road Commission purchased three new mowing tractors for just \$4,300 total. Fast forward to today, and two modern mowing units cost \$312,000, a dramatic reflection of advances in technology, safety, and capability over the past eight decades. And around that same time in 1939, the Road Commission also bought a new pickup truck for \$540, and gasoline cost only 8 cents a gallon!

While today's equipment comes with a much higher price tag, it also delivers greater reliability, efficiency, and safety for both operators and the traveling public. It's a reminder of how far roadway maintenance has come, and how investments in modern equipment continue to support better service for our community.



NOTE: To receive project and complete maintenance & operations updates (Weekly Update) please see visit the Road Commission's website at www.vbcrc.org/projectupdates.