



MINUTES

St. Clair County Board of Commissioners Judiciary/Public Safety Committee

**Board of Commissioners' Room
County Administrative Office Building, 2nd Floor
200 Grand River Avenue
Port Huron, MI 48060**

May 7, 2026 at 6:00 PM

1. Roll Call/Opening

Commissioner Vandebossche called the meeting to order at 06:00 PM.

Present: Lisa Beedon, Joi Torello, Paul Zeller, Dave Rushing, Dave Vandebossche and Steve Simasko

Absent: Kerry Ange

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Vandebossche.

2. Additions/Deletions/Changes to the Agenda

Moved by Commissioner Rushing, supported by Commissioner Torello, to approve the agenda as presented. Carried - Voice Vote 6-0. Aye: Commissioner Vandebossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Beedon, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: None

3. Citizens to be Heard

- Anthony Ferrell - re: Prayer
- Sherry Mercurio, Clyde Township - re: Dr. Nevin complaints
- Gary Montgomery, Kimball Township - re: Tucker case
- Melissa Miller, Eastpointe - re: Animal Control Ordinance
- Jennifer Raita, Brockway - re: Animal Control Ordinance
- Jay Burgher - re: Animal Control Ordinance
- Rachel Kuffa, St. Clair - re: Animal Control Ordinance
- Joe Pavlov, Kimball Township - re: State Budget and various events
- Kraig Archer, St. Clair - re: Tucker case
- Barbi Stewart, Kimball Township - re: Animal Control Ordinance

- Laura Wilhelm Bruzek, Casco - re: Animal Control and Criminal cases
- Tonya Compton, Port Huron - re: Animal Control Ordinance
- Michael Pratt, Allenton - re: Animal Control Ordinance
- Chavena Hernandez, Columbus - re: Animal Control Ordinance

Written comments submitted are included at the end of the minutes.

A. Written communication

4. Updates

None

5. Conceptual Initiatives

None

6. Old Business

None

7. New Business

A. Marine City Courtroom Renovation

Moved by Commissioner Rushing, supported by Commissioner Beedon, to forward to the Regular Board meeting the recommendation to approve the proposal with DLZ to provide architectural services to modernize the Marine City District Court courtroom with a not-to-exceed amount of \$39,000. Carried - Voice Vote 6-0. Aye: Commissioner Vandenbossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Beedon, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: None

B. Lexipol - Training and Records Management Software Renewal - Sheriff's Department

Moved by Commissioner Torello, supported by Commissioner Beedon, to forward to the Regular Board meeting the recommendation to approve the Lexipol Software Renewal for the Sheriff's Department for a term of 04/01/26 through 03/31/29 in the amount of \$30,738.75. Carried - Voice Vote 6-0. Aye: Commissioner Vandenbossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Beedon, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: None

C. AXON Camera System - Sheriff's Office

Moved by Commissioner Beedon, supported by Commissioner Torello, to forward to the Regular Board meeting the recommendation to approve the purchase of an upgraded Axon camera system including body cameras and in-car cameras in the amount of \$653,199. Carried - Voice Vote 6-0. Aye: Commissioner Vandenbossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Beedon, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: None

D. Juvenile Intervention Unit/Day Treatment Night Watch Security Camera Server Replacement - Conti

Moved by Commissioner Rushing, supported by Commissioner Torello, to forward to the Regular Board meeting the recommendation to approve the purchase with Conti in the amount of \$43,778.19 for the new security camera server located at the Juvenile Intervention Unit/Day Treatment Night Watch building. Carried - Voice Vote 6-0. Aye: Commissioner Vandenbossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Beedon, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: None

E. Intervention Center Kitchen Floor Resurfacing - Michigan Specialty Coatings

Moved by Commissioner Beedon, supported by Commissioner Torello, to forward to the Regular Board meeting the recommendation to approve the quote from Michigan Specialty Coatings for resurfacing of the Intervention Center kitchen floor in the amount of \$43,970.13. Carried - Voice Vote 6-0. Aye: Commissioner Vandenbossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Beedon, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: None

F. Jail Management System Upgrade

Moved by Commissioner Beedon, supported by Commissioner Zeller, to forward to the Regular Board meeting the recommendation to approve the agreement with Core xRM for the Jail Management System upgrade, implementation and support in the amount of \$51,877.50 for a term of May 2026 - April 2027. Carried - Voice Vote 6-0. Aye: Commissioner Vandenbossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Beedon, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: None

G. Resolution 26-13 Animal Control Ordinance

Moved by Commissioner Rushing, supported by Commissioner Torello, to forward to the Regular Board meeting the recommendation to adopt Resolution 26-13 the Animal Control Ordinance. Much discussion continued. Sheriff King discussed the Sheriff's Department role in investigation of criminal cases. Prosecuting Attorney Wendling discussed the role of the Prosecutor's Office. Corporation Counsel Fletcher discussed the legal basis and statutes in place that govern the ordinance. Carried - Voice Vote 5-1. Aye: Commissioner Vandenbossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: Commissioner Beedon

8. Other Judiciary/Public Safety Matters

None

9. Information Only

None

10. Receive and File Packets

Moved by Commissioner Rushing, supported by Commissioner Torello, to receive and file packets and all information presented. Carried - Voice Vote 6-0. Aye: Commissioner Vandenbossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Beedon, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: None

11. Adjournment

Moved by Commissioner Torello, supported by Commissioner Rushing, to adjourn at 07:10 PM. Carried - Voice Vote 6-0. Aye: Commissioner Vandebossche, Commissioner Simasko, Commissioner Beedon, Commissioner Torello, Commissioner Rushing, Commissioner Zeller Nay: None

Statement for the Record

I would like to thank the Chair for reading this letter into the record, as I was unable to attend tonight's meeting.

To be absolutely clear from the outset: I am not speaking on behalf of St. Clair County Animal Control. I am not representing the department, its staff, or its leadership. I am speaking solely in my capacity as a St. Clair County employee and as a resident of Commissioner Simasko's district, exercising my right as a citizen to address the actions of my elected officials.

I am appalled by the actions of this Board. It is abundantly clear that a majority of the commissioners do not understand how Animal Control operates, the education and continuing education required, or the professional judgment necessary to perform this work lawfully and effectively. Even more troubling is the apparent lack of interest in learning. Rather than seeking information, this Board has chosen to undermine the department, its employees, and the professional authority of Director Miller.

If at any point the Board had legitimate questions about Animal Control operations, it could have formally requested a statement, briefing, or presentation. That option has always been available. Animal Control staff and leadership are consistently present and accessible at Commissioner meetings through appropriate and lawful channels. Instead, the Board has chosen to construct and promote a false narrative—painting Animal Control as a liberal, overreaching, failing department. That narrative is not supported by facts, data, law, or operational reality, and it is not something the people of this county should tolerate.

Director Miller is one of the most highly qualified individuals who could serve as Director of St. Clair County Animal Control. She has spoken nationally, responded to cases on a national level, and traveled internationally to assist and advise on federal dog-fighting, hoarding, and animal cruelty cases. She has routinely provided expert guidance to the St. Clair County Prosecutor's Office—guidance that has been specifically requested because animal-related crimes are specialized and distinct from crimes against people.

Contrary to what some commissioners have implied, Director Miller has not done a disservice to this department or this county. She consistently educates staff and citizens on their Fourth Amendment rights, ensures constitutional protections are upheld, and provides guidance when animals have been illegally seized by private individuals.

The ordinance revisions and restructuring efforts being pushed by this Board are an attempt to fix a problem that does not exist. In the last five years, there have been only two families who have repeatedly alleged that Animal Control violated their Fourth Amendment rights or illegally seized animals. Those allegations were unfounded.

What is being ignored is the reality of Animal Control's daily work. There are hundreds of homes in this county where Animal Control has responded without enforcement—providing food, collars, education, and resources so animals can remain in their homes. There are also dozens of farm cases resolved through education and outreach, bringing owners into compliance with the standards of care outlined in Michigan Compiled Law seven-five-zero point five-zero, subsection two, parts E and F, without enforcement action.

Animal Control utilizes corrective action regularly—multiple times each week—by clearly documenting deficiencies, obtaining owner signatures, and allowing reasonable timeframes for compliance. Only when those corrective actions are ignored does the department escalate matters to law enforcement, seek search warrants, and initiate criminal investigations, establishing a clear pattern of opportunity and refusal.

The two cases that appear to be driving the Board's decisions were fundamentally different. Corrective action was not appropriate because animals were actively down, dying, and in critical condition. These were not situations involving minor or correctable deficiencies. In one case, animals had body condition scores of one or less; in the other, two or less, on a nine-point scale. A body condition score of one reflects an animal that is starving, unable to stand, and suffering severe muscle wasting from prolonged deprivation of food and water.

Supplies existed on the properties, but they were not being used. The animals were suffering, the owners showed no remorse, and there was no indication conditions would improve. In those circumstances, corrective action would have been negligent.

I also want to directly address the public comment submitted in the form of a letter from Gary Fletcher.

Animal Control Officers in St. Clair County are members of the AFSCME union. They are not at-will employees and they do not report to or answer to the Board of Commissioners. Director Miller likewise does not report to the Board. She is a member of CANUE and reports directly to County Administrator Thomas Hall.

The Board of Commissioners is overreaching its authority by attempting to impose operational directives, requirements, and expectations on department staff and department leadership. These actions directly conflict with union contracts, established county governance structure, Board of Commissioner guidelines, and longstanding administrative practice. Commissioners do not have the authority to direct staff or micromanage departmental operations.

Additionally, there have been multiple occasions in which members of this Board have made factually inaccurate statements on the public record regarding Animal Control operations and specific cases. These misrepresentations mislead the public and unfairly

undermine the credibility of trained professionals acting within the law, their training, and their contractual obligations.

More troubling still, on multiple occasions members of this Board have engaged in extremely inappropriate ex parte conversations with defense attorneys, judges, and criminal defendants. This raises serious and unavoidable questions. Why are commissioners discussing cases with judges off the record? Why are commissioners communicating with defense counsel and defendants outside public proceedings? And why is this Board inserting itself into judicial matters it has no authority to influence?

These actions are ethically indefensible. They erode public trust, compromise the integrity of the justice system, and create the appearance—if not the reality—of favoritism and interference. Commissioners should not be lobbying judges, engaging defense counsel, or discussing cases outside documented, public processes. That is not governance. It is interference.

Finally, let me be unequivocally clear. Animal Control does not operate under political preference or a single ordinance. The department is legally required to follow the United States Constitution, Michigan Public Acts, Michigan Compiled Laws, and St. Clair County ordinances—all of them, at all times. Any attempt by this Board to selectively reinterpret, limit, or override those legal obligations places staff, leadership, and the county itself at risk.

This Board frequently speaks against government overreach. Yet what we are witnessing is exactly that—overreach into departmental operations that should be handled by qualified, educated professionals. The role of the Board is governance, not micromanagement.

The continued pattern of misinformation, overreach, and ethically questionable conduct is harmful to employees, public safety, lawful enforcement, and public trust. This needs to stop.

This statement is submitted for the public record.



1341 11th St. Marysville, MI 48040

Dear Board of Commissioners,

The local chapter of the St. Clair County Farm Bureau supports the adoption of the proposed St. Clair County animal control ordinance as proposed. Please consider the following comments in support:

- The analysis by Mr. Fletcher appears to be an accurate interpretation of the Michigan Dog Law and how county animal control officers operate within it.
- Re-focusing who takes the lead (in this case, law enforcement) is a good step forward, particularly in the case of criminal investigations.
- The new proposed language encourages law enforcement to involve animal control officers, which is a positive use of those professionals, but maintains control in the hands of the appropriate agency (law enforcement).
- MFB policy (below) calls for more MDARD involvement when livestock are involved in an animal welfare investigation, which this proposal does not include.
 - Although it doesn't meet our specific policy, I don't believe this weakens the proposal, as it clearly defines who would oversee criminal cases involving animals and gives animal control offices clear directions on their duties and authorities.
 - It's worth noting that state law requires animal control officers to receive MDARD training as part of their accreditation.

Main Points

- Animal control officers have a role in ensuring safe environments for animals and the public but are not law enforcement officers.
- Although there is a general animal definition under the Michigan dog law, that does not give animal control officers broad authorities or the ability to conduct criminal investigations (as pointed out in Mr. Fletcher's analysis)
- MFB policy strongly encourages more coordination and communication with MDARD from animal control offices.
 - More training is needed for local law enforcement and animal control to best understand modern livestock production practices and animal handling protocols.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Michael J. Pratt'.

Michael J. Pratt

President

Policy & Development Chair

Formal Complaint Regarding St. Clair County Animal Control Procedures and Lack of Oversight To the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners, I am writing to formally express my deep concerns regarding the current operations of St. Clair County Animal Control and the conduct of its Director, Melissa Miller. As a resident and farm owner in this county, I am alarmed by a recurring pattern of aggressive enforcement actions that appear to bypass standard legal protections and due process. Specifically, there is a troubling reliance on unverified reports from a single informant, Linda Wilhelm-Bruzek, whose repeated claims have targeted multiple local farms, including the Tucker family, the Robert's, and my own operation. The tactics currently being employed represent a significant departure from fair and transparent governance: Circumvention of Due Process: Animal Control has consistently utilized "exigent circumstances" as a justification to skirt the typical warrant requirements, allowing for the immediate seizure of livestock and property without preliminary investigation or prior warning. Lack of Accountability: There appears to be no internal vetting process for the validity of claims made by informants before high-stakes enforcement actions are taken. Coercive Legal Pressure: By seizing all animals immediately and moving straight toward felony charges, the department creates a system where farmers are forced to prove their innocence while their livelihoods are held in the balance. This often leaves individuals with no choice but to accept plea deals simply to resolve the situation, rather than seeking a fair trial. Economic and Emotional Impact: These actions do not just impact the individuals involved; they threaten the stability of our local agricultural community and undermine the trust between citizens and county leadership. The role of Animal Control should be the protection of animals and the support of the community through education and fair enforcement. Instead, under current leadership, it has become an instrument of injustice that disregards the rights of property owners. I respectfully request that the Board of Commissioners launch an immediate review of the policies and procedures within the Animal Control department. We require a system that demands accountability for false claims, respects the necessity of warrants, and ensures that "guilty until proven innocent" does not become the standard for St. Clair County farmers. I look forward to your response and to learning how the Board intends to address these serious grievances. Sincerely, Kevin Tuttle Indian Trail Farm 313-355-4483