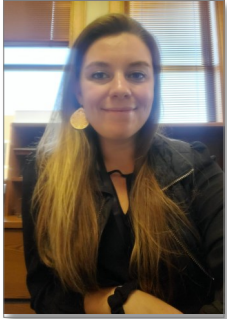




Lauren Kowatch: Juvenile Probation Officer, Family Court



The County's new juvenile probation officer, Lauren Kowatch, started working in our 1905 Courthouse in September.

Previous to her employment in the Family Court, Ms. Kowatch worked for the Dept. of Health and Human Services. She is a Cheboygan Area High School graduate and a graduate of Ferris State University with a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice.

When asked about her new position, Ms. Kowatch said, "All the staff in the office are great people to work with. It's a very positive and supportive work environment." Outside of work, Ms. Kowatch enjoys spending time with her friends and family — and being outside adventuring with her dogs!

Proposed Public Safety Center: Options After Bond Proposal Defeat

The unofficial results of the November 5 Public Safety Center bond proposal were 7,578 Yes votes to 7,801 No votes. The Board of Commissioners is now faced with a difficult decision as the current jail continues to be unsafe, deficient, and non-compliant with Michigan Dept. of Corrections requirements. There are five options:

Option one: continue to repair the existing jail. This is the lowest immediate cost, but as noted above, the jail is non-compliant, deficient, and unsafe. The Board has recently expressed that this is not a viable option.

Option two: another construction bond proposal. A successful bond proposal would assure fiscal stability for the County and would allow the County to obtain the lowest possible interest rates. However, there is a possibility that a new proposal would not be approved by the voters, and a push to a later date will only increase construction costs.

Option three is building a holding facility and transport longer term prisoners to other jails. This option would reduce the County's liability, and construction of a holding facility could be Phase 1 of a full Public Safety Center. However, overall costs to build a phased project are higher and shifting employee resources from enforcement to transporting inmates would increase employee retention/attraction issues. In addition, until a final phase is built, there would be no increased efficiencies from consolidating sheriff's office personnel under one roof, and we would not be able to provide the community benefits that a Public Safety Center would provide.

(Article continues in the column to the right.)

...Options After Bond Proposal Defeat

Option four is building a jail/jail pod only. Similar to option 3, option 4 would reduce the County's liability and its construction could be a Phase 1 for a full Public Safety Center. However, most of the arguments against option 3 also apply to this option, with the additional negative point that the 7,578 voters who supported the concept of a Public Safety Center could feel disenfranchised.

Option five is to finance construction of a Public Safety Center without additional taxes. This could possibly be achieved by extending a bond from 20 to 30 years and reducing expenditures to ensure that the bond payments would not jeopardize the County's fiscal stability. Arguments against are that a longer bond term would increase the total project cost to taxpayers by millions of dollars. Also, moving ahead with a facility that did not win more than 50% of the vote could result in voter dissatisfaction.

"A critical piece to moving forward is knowing what led voters to say no to the bond proposal," said County Administrator Jeremy Scott. "Was it about increased taxes or the project itself? We're committed to learning from the past and moving forward avoiding the same situation as a failed County Building millage from 45 years ago." For more information, please contact the Administration Office at 231-533-6265 or countyadmin@antrimcountymi.gov.

Bellaire Dam Update

With memories of the Alden Highway culvert blowout and the Midland dam failures still fresh in our minds, attention to dam safety is paramount. To that end, Antrim County has received a \$500,000 grant from ELGE's Dam Risk Reduction program to study the Bellaire dam and design improvements, as a previous study found that the dam could overtop its banks during a large rain event.

Engineers will do on site survey work, soil borings, and wetland delineation.

Data collection will begin the week of November 18 and continue through January 2025.

After data has been collected, conceptual designs and alternative options will be identified. Expect to see some flagging and workers wearing high-visibility clothing around the dam.

