

OTTAWA NOTES

A NON-PARTISAN NEWSLETTER, WRITTEN BY OTTAWA COUNTY RESIDENTS, FOR THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT GOOD GOVERNMENT IN OTTAWA COUNTY, MICHIGAN

A Closer Look - What Is A “Censure”?

One of the newsworthy BOC actions this year (see “Year in Review” in the main section of this newsletter) was the **Board majority’s censure of Commissioner Bonnema**. The New Oxford Dictionary defines a “censure” as “the expression of formal disapproval.”

The BOC majority censured Commissioner Bonnema for “defamatory accusation” against Administrator Gibbs following Mr. Bonnema’s filing of a Human Resources complaint against Mr. Gibbs, which a third party found “did not substantiate the claim of harassment.” The resolution to censure Mr. Bonnema argued that he exhibited an “abuse of power” by making the complaint.

Previous to the BOC majority censure of Mr. Bonnema, **he withdrew from affiliation with the Ottawa Impact board majority, and was censured by the Ottawa County GOP** for “defrauding” constituents by supporting “tyrannical medical mandates” and “eroding the public trust” in the Republican-led Board of Commissioners.



Year In Review: A Recap of Noteworthy Events Involving the Ottawa County BOC

The Ottawa Impact majority on the Board of Commissioners (BOC) took office in January, 2023, and immediately began making headlines across the state and nation. Following is a recap of some of the more noteworthy events.

By The Numbers...

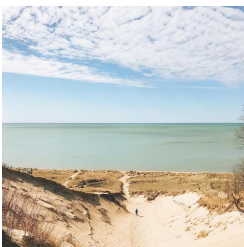
Meetings: The BOC held 22 regular meetings in 2023. The meetings ranged in length from 1 hour and 6 minutes on July 22, to 7 hours and 30 minutes on May 23. **The average length of a regular BOC meeting in 2023 was 4 hours.** For comparison, in 2022 the average length of a BOC meeting was 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Public Comment: Members of the public made **1,228 comments** at Board of Commissioners’ meetings (including committee meetings). Of those, 472 comments were in support of the board and their actions, 676 were opposed, and 80 were neutral. There were 382 unique speakers who made those 1,228

A Closer Look - What Were the Controversial “Cultural” Resolutions?

In 2023, the BOC majority approved **several controversial resolutions** that appeared to be primarily focused on cultural or identity issues. The BOC majority:

1. **Declared Ottawa County a “constitutional” county**, and urged the sheriff and prosecutor to “not enforce any statute, Law, rule, order, or regulation that is contrary to the rights protected by the Constitutions of the United States and the State of Michigan”; and
2. **Required county employees to “protect childhood innocence,”** without any guidance as to what that required or prohibited, viewed as a “trap” for the Health Department; and
3. **Recommended that Health Department vaccination information efforts include information on vaccine waivers and the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS)** as a resource for decision makers. The federal government states that VAERS data is inappropriate for decision making regarding vaccination.



comments, with 121 of them supportive of the board, 222 opposed, and 39 neutral.

News Coverage: There were approximately **300 news items and letters to the editor** about the Ottawa BOC in local, state and national news media during 2023.

In The News and Noteworthy - The Ottawa Impact majority..

- **Gained immediate media attention** at its first meeting when it fired the County Administrator, demoted the Health Officer, abolished the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion office, changed the county motto from “Where You Belong” to “Where Freedom Rings,” and hired a new law firm with ties to the Board Chair. (January)
- Had **5 lawsuits** filed against it. (January - November)
- **Removed Commissioner comments** and discussion from the BOC’s meeting agendas; **removed Commissioner Doug Zylstra** and 2 others from the Housing Commission. (March)
- **Made it difficult** for non-Ottawa Impact-aligned Commissioners to place items on meeting agendas. (ongoing)
- **Censured Commissioner Jacob Bonnema** following his break with the Ottawa Impact Political Action Committee; see the sidebar for a fuller explanation. (March and June)
- Approved **several controversial resolutions** related to cultural and identity differences; see the sidebar for a fuller explanation. (May, June, August)
- **Cut the Health Department General Fund budget by 27%** after an unorthodox 2-month budget development process and a pro-health department rally attended by 300 residents. (August and September)
- Witnessed the **successful recall of Ottawa Impact Commissioner Lucy Ebel**, resulting in a Special Election to be held in May, 2024. (November)
- **Held the “Hearing to Remove Health Officer,”** that began on October 24 and is still not adjourned or decided, and that resulted in additional controversy due to the negotiation that followed, in an attempt to reach a resolution between the Health Officer and the Board. (October - December)