

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS
KEWEENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING
July 16, 2025

The regular meeting of the Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners was held on July 16, 2025, at 6:30 p.m., at the Courthouse in Eagle River, MI and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

The meeting was posted on the door of the Courthouse and on the Website.

Commissioner’s present: Bob DeMarois, Randy Eckloff, Mike LaMotte, Del Rajala and Don Piche

Motion by DeMarois supported by Rajala and unanimously carried to adopt the agenda with two additional items under new business: g) Approve Hiring Steven Tinti as the attorney for Kern v Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners and h) Having Security at all Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals and all Public Hearings.

Motion by Eckloff supported by LaMotte and unanimously carried to approve June 18, 2025, regular monthly meeting minutes and June 30, 2025 special meeting minutes as written.

The following reports were available: Sheriff, Treasurer, Mine Inspector & Maintenance.

Sam Raymond was at the meeting on behalf of the Keweenaw Heartlands. He introduced the draft Articles of Incorporation for Keweenaw Heartlands Recreational & Natural Resources Authority. The draft articles were facilitated by The Nature Conservancy which involved many local and regional community members. A Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was created and many subcommittees also met. The draft Articles align with the Michigan Recreational Authorities Act that is currently proposed to be amended. The draft Articles are a starting point for the County Board based on hours of meetings of community groups and CAC feedback.

Time was allowed for public comment.

Motion by Eckloff supported by Rajala to pay the approved and audited bills in the following amounts: General Fund=\$182,721.17, Construction Codes Fund=\$1,198.40, 911 Fund=\$7,366.91, Child Care Fund=\$1,921.14, Houghton County MCF Fund=\$1 426.14, Veteran’s Affairs=\$3,794.20, FRF Fund=\$2,320.00, Kermit’s Fund=\$3 179.78 Board polled. Ayes: DeMarois, LaMotte, Rajala, Eckloff, Piche. Nays: None. Motion Carried.

The only update regarding the unpaid health insurance claims were that someone for U.P. Heath Systems has reached out and is willing to assist. She has heard from one employee.

There were two bids for the exterior stairs for both buildings.

	Taivalkoski Excavating	Fenty Contracting Co
Courthouse Stairs	\$8,778.00	\$6,000.00
Sheriff Office Stairs	\$7,228.00	\$4,000.00
TOTAL	\$16,006.00	\$10,000.00

Motion by LaMotte supported by DeMarois and unanimously carried to approve Fenty Contracting Co. to do the exterior stairs on both the Courthouse and Sheriff Office buildings.

Motion by Rajala supported by DeMarois and unanimously carried to approve the letter agreement with Gogo Business Aviation LLC and Keweenaw County. This is a one-time payment for \$14,400 during a transition period as they change out equipment. This transition should commence around July 1, 2025 and is expected to be completed around August 31, 2027. This does not change the existing contract.

Motion by Eckloff supported by Rajala and unanimously carried to approve the following resolution concerning Mental Health:

WHEREAS, the State of Michigan currently operates a publicly managed and community-based system for the delivery of specialty behavioral health services through 10 Prepaid Inpatient Health Plans (PIHPs), which are responsible for managing Medicaid mental health, developmental disability, and substance use disorder services; and

WHEREAS, the current PIHP system has consistently demonstrated value, local accountability, and community engagement, while successfully managing costs and improving health outcomes for vulnerable populations; and

WHEREAS, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) recently announced plans to initiate a competitive procurement process for the management of PIHP functions, which may open the door to private, non-profit health plans or managed care organizations (MCOs) assuming control over behavioral health services; and

WHEREAS, such privatization could disrupt longstanding relationships between local mental health authorities, providers, and the communities they serve, and jeopardize the person-centered, recovery-oriented approach that has been cultivated under the public system; and

WHEREAS, many stakeholders, including individuals receiving services, advocates, local officials, and providers have expressed significant concerns about the potential impact of a competitive procurement process on care quality, access, local control, and transparency; and

WHEREAS, counties across Michigan have historically played a vital role in the governance, funding, and oversight of the public behavioral health system, and any change to that structure without meaningful county input undermines the principle of local governance; and

WHEREAS, maintaining a publicly accountable and locally governed behavioral health system is essential to ensuring that individuals with mental health and substance use needs receive timely, appropriate, and high-quality care.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Keweenaw Board of Commissioners formally opposes the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services’ (MDHHS) plan to implement a competitive procurement process for Prepaid Inpatient Health Plans (PIHPs); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board urges Governor Whitmer, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), and the Michigan Legislature to halt any plans for privatization and instead work collaboratively with counties, PIHPs, Community Mental Health Services Programs (CMHSPs), service users, and other stakeholders to strengthen and improve the public behavioral health system, by only allowing public organizations with experience in managing Michigan’s public mental health system to be part of any bid process should one occur; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to Governor Whitmer, MDHHS Director Elizabeth Hertel, members of the Michigan Legislature representing Keweenaw County, and the Michigan Association of Counties (MAC). **(#25-4)**

Motion by Rajala supported by LaMotte to approve the quotes from Integris regarding renewal of the Microsoft Agreement in the amount of \$2,806.00 and for upgrading RAM and Windows 10 to Windows 11 on multiple computers in the amount of \$4,754.36.

The subject of withdrawal fees from commercial forest property was spoken about because the Keweenaw Heartlands property would be subject to penalties when it is removed from commercial forest. Julia Petersen from The Nature Conservancy was present to speak to the situation. There are a few ways not to pay the penalty but if it isn’t paid, the county and the townships could lose money. The Nature Conservancy doesn’t want to pay on this property because they have spent so much already trying to get the Keweenaw Heartlands up and running. The Nature Conservancy bought the property to keep it open for generations to come but they never wanted to be the longtime owner, they are holding title because they had the means to purchase the property in its entirety so that it wouldn’t be split off into smaller pieces and held by private owners.

Motion by DeMarois supported by LaMotte and unanimously carried to approve the Materials Management Planning Program Grant Agreement between the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy and Keweenaw County. The grant is \$63,000 and the end date is 12/7/2026. The Materials Management Plan is being handled by WUPPDR.

Motion by Rajala supported by DeMarois and unanimously carried to allow Mark Aho and Ron Ekdahl to prepare an RFP for a new generator that supplies both county buildings. Keweenaw Power and Lite may be helpful since they have done so much work in both buildings. The Board did not want to spend money on fixing the old generator. This purchase would come from the Courthouse Improvement Fund.

Motion by DeMarois supported by LaMotte and unanimously carried to approve the second quarter Master Plan report.

Motion by Rajala supported by DeMarois and unanimously carried to approve hiring Steven Tinti to represent the Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners in the appeal of Kern v Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners.

Motion by DeMarois supported by Rajala and unanimously carried to have security at all Planning Commission meetings, Zoning Board of Appeals meetings and all public hearings.

Time was allowed for public comment.

There being no further business, motion by Rajala to adjourn at 7:14 P.M. Meeting adjourned.

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Donald Piche, Chairman	Julie A. Carlson, Clerk