



## Administrator's Update 4/5/07


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- ✚ **Grand Traverse Band Request for Trust Status** Much of the last several weeks have been consumed in addressing the request the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians have made to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Interior to have approximately 145 acres of land surrounding the Turtle Creek Casino put into trust.

Primarily, placing land in federal trust takes the land out of local control for issues such as zoning and makes the land tax exempt. The County, along with the townships of Whitewater and Acme, was asked to make comment to the federal government about the request. The County Board held several public hearings and discussed this issue at length with the townships. A letter was drafted on behalf of the County, which in summary states that the County would like to have an opportunity to negotiate a payment in lieu of taxes for the lost revenues that would be associated with the transfer of this property to trust as well as a request to have any development that takes place on site be done using sound principles such as the New Designs for Growth adopted by many local communities and ask that any development be coordinated with the master plans of Whitewater and Acme Townships and Grand Traverse County. The letter has been sent and is available on the County web site at [www.grandtraverse.org](http://www.grandtraverse.org). In addition, the townships will also be considering this issue and sending their own letters in to the Bureau of Indian Affairs soon. We hope to initiate discussions with the Tribe on these issues in the upcoming week.

- ✚ **David Bennett** David Bennett, a consultant who works in the management of jail populations and who has consulted with Grand Traverse County in the past, is working again with Grand Traverse County on evaluating our jail system. Many of you will recall that last year the County expanded our county jail by approximately 43 beds. Very shortly after the jail expansion was opened, the jail was at capacity. Our new beds were filled. While that has tapered for a short time, we are back at capacity once again. Mr. Bennett has been brought in to reanalyze the initial recommendations that were made 5 years ago for jail management. Many of the issues that David raised at that time have been incorporated into our programs. These changes were done in an attempt to better manage the jail population and reduce the number of inmates in our facility. Grand Traverse County currently has about 193 beds in our jail. David is working with the Judges, the Sheriff, the Prosecutor, and all local officials that affect or are affected by jail populations. He will assess the current situation based on his previous recommendations and make new recommendations that will help us to further manage the population. Should there be a determination for new or expanded jail facilities, a millage taking a vote of the taxpayers will be needed. It is essential that every effort is made to efficiently manage the jail population before a millage request is considered.

David will be here over the next 3 months analyzing the situation and preparing his report. We hope that the results of this report will help us maximize the efficiencies in our criminal justice system.


 **Remodeling** Now that the new court building is substantially complete (punch list items and a few other issues still remain), the County has turned its attention to renovating the old courthouse, which houses the Circuit Court, the Friend of the Court, the Law Library, and the County Clerk. District Court has moved out of the facility, and we are now intending to remodel the courthouse so the space can be better utilized and State Probation can move back. This week the County Board will consider hiring an architect to complete the design for the renovation, which will be extensive on the first and second floors with some additional renovation on the third floor. Hopefully, that design will be done by the end of summer to be out to bid this fall for renovation. Following that will be consideration of renovation of the third floor of the Governmental Center. We are doing preliminary work on that project at this time. These projects are made more difficult in that we are trying to fund them within existing revenues. Over the past 5 years we have remodeled a new law enforcement center, built a new court building, and expanded the jail - all within existing revenues and savings.


 **Dams** The transition of oversight for maintenance of the Sabin and Boardman Dams continues. In January, the County signed an agreement with the Board of Light & Power to share in the maintenance and operational control of the Boardman and Sabin Dams. Since the inception of this agreement, our Department of Public Works staff has been rapidly learning the operations of the dams and has been assuming more responsibility and control over those operations. This is with a goal of eliminating the need to contract with the Board of Light & Power staff in the near future.

Last month, a leak was detected at Boardman Dam approximately three weeks ago. The basement was flooded and threatened to flood the upper floors. The source of that leak was determined with the help of the Board of Light & Power and our DPW staff and the problem was corrected. During this event, which occurred over several days, it was determined by the Department of Environmental Quality and the County that it would be prudent as a safety measure to drop the dam by three feet. That was accomplished over a period of two days while monitoring water levels in the dam itself to ensure that the stability of the dam remained. The dam now sits fourteen feet higher than DEQ has determined is necessary -- the new level that must be attained by August 31. The DEQ has held public hearings and will consider the permit to drop the pond an additional 14 feet. We expect an answer to that permit request in the next few weeks.

In addition, the Boardman Rivers Dam Committee has hired ECT, which is the feasibility study consultant on the whole Boardman River Dams Project, to be under contract to monitor and oversee the draw down of the pond at Boardman Dam. It may seem relatively simple, but many issues must be dealt with during the draw down. The rate of draw down is important in maintaining the stability of the dam. The project must be monitored to determine the exact level that is acceptable to protect the integrity of the system. Monitoring of the shorelines is necessary to avoid any unnecessary erosion or loss

of soil. Sediment must be controlled, so this doesn't move too quickly down the river, and the land around the pond must be monitored to lessen the issues that may arise concerning drains and other structures that may become exposed as the pond is dropped. ECT will work with the County, DPW, and the Board of Light & Power during this draw down.

 **Construction** Over the last year we've seen a significant slow down in building development in the County. Building permits are down by approximately 600 permits and septic and well permits are down by several hundred permits. As a result of the slow down in building, a total of 4 employees have been laid off in the Building Code Department. In addition, hours at the Environmental Health Division of the Health Department have been reduced from 40 hours a week to 37.5 hours a week. We are monitoring this situation closely to ensure that we are still able to provide appropriate and fast responses to building requests. We hope this is a short term slow down and look forward to a time when business picks back up and the economy starts to move forward.

 **Finance** I'm pleased to announce that Grand Traverse County has been awarded the Government Finance Officers Association's (GFOA) Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting. This is the highest award that can be given to local municipalities and indicates the highest level of excellence in financial reporting. Congratulations to Dean Bott, our Deputy Administrator/Finance Director, his staff, and all those who worked in this endeavor.