

# Allegan County Tourist Council



Allegan County Parks, Recreation &  
Tourism  
3283 122<sup>nd</sup> Ave  
Allegan, MI 49010  
269-686-9088  
[parks@allegancounty.org](mailto:parks@allegancounty.org)  
<http://www.allegancounty.org>

**Chairperson: Rick Burn**  
**Vice Chairperson: Debbie Laraway**

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**Scott Beltman**  
616-292-1414  
Hopkins

**Jenny  
Boerman**  
269-694-6880  
Plainwell

**Melissa  
Brower**  
616-550-3408  
Fennville

**Rick Burn**  
678-296-1409  
Holland

**Matt Helmus**  
616-355-1031  
Holland

**Debbie  
Laraway**  
269-416-0221  
Pullman

**Elizabeth  
Ritsema**  
269-650-0211  
Allegan

## TOURIST COUNCIL MEETING – MINUTES

Tuesday, February 13, 2024, @ 10:00 am

County Services Building – **HR Conference Room** -3283 122<sup>nd</sup> Ave, Allegan, MI 49010

Virtual Connectivity Option: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81847023032>

**CALL TO ORDER:** Meeting was called to order by Gildea at 10:05 am

### **ROLL CALL:**

**Present:** Melissa Brower, Debbie Laraway, Elizabeth Ritsema,  
Matthew Helmus (via ZOOM)

**Absent:** Jenny Boerman, Rick Burn, Scott Beltman

**Also Present:** Brandy Gildea, Jesse Lechner

Introductions were made with new member Elizabeth Ritsema. She is looking forward to supporting the tourism group with an interest in the history in Allegan County.

### **ELECTION OF OFFICERS:**

- **Chairman:** A nomination was made by Laraway, seconded by Brower to name Burn as the Chairman of the Parks Advisory Board. The motion carried.

With no further nominations, a motion was made by Brower, seconded by Laraway to elect Burn as the Tourist Council Chairman for 2024. The motion carried.

- **Vice-Chairman:** A nomination was made by Brower, seconded by Laraway to name Laraway the Vice-Chairman of the Tourist Council.

With no further nominations, a motion was made by Gildea, seconded by Brower to elect Laraway as the Parks Advisory Board Vice-Chairman for 2024. The motion carried.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Motion made by Helmus, seconded by Laraway to approve the November 14, 2023 minutes as presented. The motion carried.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** None.

**ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS:** None.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:** Motion was made by Brower, seconded by Laraway to approve the Action items, seconded by Laraway. The motion carried.

**PRESENTATION:** None

**REVIEW ITEMS:**

1. Financial Review –  
Gildea discussed the budget for 2024; Articles/listings in the WMTA and Shoreline visitor guides, WMTA-promoted social media posts, and the New Buffalo welcome center TV ad. Discussed Z-cards cost.
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**RECOMMENDATION/ACTION ITEMS:**

1. None
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**DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

1. Allegan County Attractions -things to do (review list)
  
2. Tourist Council Vacancies/Appointments
  - a. Gildea discussed needing to fill two vacancies, having a quorum at more meetings.

Gildea went over Discussion items 1 & 2 together. Both items had been put on the agenda at the request of Chair Rick Burn. Gildea went over the meeting that occurred with the County Administrator, Executive Director of Services, Parks Manager, Parks and Tourist Boards chairs, Parks BOC member, and the BOC Chair to discuss what is the best use for the Parks and Tourism Boards. From this meeting it was our understanding that Burn was going to be reaching out to Chambers, Main Streets, and Visitors Centers Directors/Managers would be contacted on the level of interest to create a county-wide tourism initiative with backing by funding (with a Tourist Summit to kick it off). Burn reached out and asked them as preliminary work for our Feb. 13 meeting to list everything they can think of to do in Allegan County excluding the Lake Michigan fishing and beaches and the Saugatuck/Douglas shopping. Burns thought that he needed to strengthen his interest first and then go for funding. Gildea stated that these lists already exist and that she did not think this would strengthen interest in these organizations wanting to help fund a county-wide tourism initiative. These activities can easily be found on Google too. Burns also wanted to review how people are appointed to the Tourist Council Board, because for the Economic Development Commission, they are not randomly appointed, but rather are there because of the work they do. Burn thinks for the Tourist Council should consider having representation based on jobs and business (ie. Small Business, Chamber of Commerce TYPE organization, Casino, Hotel, Tourist Attraction, Dept. of Natural Resources because everyone discusses the game area, restaurant etc.) He also thinks we need a community representative. Gildea stated that all members already represent these different jobs/areas and that this board has always been open for anyone and yet there have always been openings and issues with getting a quorum at each meeting. Gildea feels putting these restrictions would cause there to be even more issues with membership.

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**NOTICE OF APPOINTMENTS:**

Vacancy: TWO (term expires 12/26)

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:** Gildea stated that at the next meeting, we will be discussing the purpose/future of the Tourist Council.

**ROUND TABLE:**

**Gildea:** Discussed returning to work on Heritage Trail plans.

**Brower:** Discussing the purpose statement; making plans with goals that are actionable. Mentioned spotlighting Air-bnb's, other local places.

**Laraway:** Local Business is doing well; Beautify Pullman received grant and is looking into connecting trails.

**Ritsema:** Discussed Geocaching in the parks.

**Helmus:** Holland area is looking to add an ice rink for a new winter attraction next winter. Windmill Island had a record season.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Next Meeting – May 21, 2024 @ 10:00 in County Services Building – Board Conference Room -3283 122<sup>nd</sup> Ave, Allegan, MI 49010

A motion was made by Laraway, seconded by Brower to adjourn the meeting at 11:08 am. The motion carried.