

Daily News

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Paving the way

Montcalm County board recommend \$2.5 million of ARPA money go to roads

By [Elisabeth Waldon](#) | on March 21, 2022



Montcalm County commissioners last Monday recommended the full board approve a request from Road Commission Superintendent-Manager Mark Christensen to use \$2.5 million of the county's ARPA money for the Road Commission, including \$1.3 million for lost revenue related to the COVID-19 pandemic, \$750,000 for township road work and \$500,000 toward a new truck storage building. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

STANTON — Montcalm County commissioners are recommending spending another \$2.7 million of their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money on the Road Commission, the Prosecutor's Office and the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

Meanwhile, a nearly \$800,000 request from Montcalm Community College was tabled.

Montcalm County's Committee-of-the-Whole voted 7-0 last Monday (with commissioners Ron Baker and Scott Painter absent) to recommend the full board approve \$2.5 million in ARPA money for the Road Commission, \$230,450 for the Prosecutor's Office and \$41,000 for the health department.

Montcalm County has about \$12.4 million total in ARPA money. The full board will meet at 4 p.m. on March 28 to vote on the requests.

ROAD COMMISSION

Road Commission Superintendent-Manager Mark Christensen requested \$2.5 million for his department as follows: \$1.3 million for lost revenue related to the COVID-19 pandemic, \$750,000 for upcoming township road work and \$500,000 for a new truck storage building.

Christensen said the \$750,000 will go toward a township road work matching program the Road Commission has implemented in which it is matching the cost of certain road projects by 15% to 20% in Montcalm County's 20 townships.

"That matching program for 2023, that will just get more bang for our buck out on our local system — the Colby Road, the Satterlee Road, the Peck Road, the Fitzner Road — we've all got them in our townships and that's where we're struggling is the surface conditions of the blacktops in our townships," Christensen said.

"I think one of the No. 1 concerns of constituents is our road quality," Commissioner Adam Petersen of Montcalm Township noted.

Regarding the truck storage building, the Road Commission is planning to construct a new facility to replace the current building which was constructed in 1926. The new building's cost is estimated at \$3.7 million (up from a previous estimate of \$3.2 million due to increased construction costs) which the Road Commission will cover by taking out a loan via Public Act 289. Christensen said if the county will provide \$500,000 toward the cost, it will help decrease that loan payment and term.

"I think that the Road Commission does an awesome job," Chairman Patrick Q. Carr of Lakeview noted. "They've got a lot of miles of road to maintain without a lot of funding. These things at the Road Commission have been on all of our radar for a long time. The Road Commission has partnered with the county on every effort we've ever needed. We're going to have roughly \$12.5 in ARPA money and for the Road Commission to be asking for \$2.5 million, that is a realistic share that in my opinion we should spend in their direction."

Carr was in support of the committee voting to make the recommendation to the full board in order to get the money moved from the county's financial books to the Road Commission's books.

"The Road Commission could very well be under our purview, they do that in Ionia County," Carr noted.

"Yeah, that looks like it's going great down there," Petersen interjected to laughter from those present.

"There's a reason why it's not," Carr observed.

The committee voted to recommend the full board approve the Road Commission's ARPA money request.

"We work hard to be good partners with our townships," Christensen said. "The relationships between the townships and the Road Commission are better than I've ever seen it and we work hard to keep it that way."

PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

The committee also recommended the full board approve a request from Prosecutor Andrea Krause to use \$230,750 in ARPA money for the prosecutor's office to switch over to a paperless system. Karpel Solutions is the recommended low bidder, with an additional bid submitted by ImageSoft for \$622,186.



Montcalm County commissioners last Monday recommended the full board approve a request from Prosecutor Andrea Krause to use \$230,750 of the county's ARPA money for her office to switch over to a paperless system. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

“This paperless system would bring us into this century's technology,” Krause said. “Our current system is literally held together by shoestring — it's so tenuous right now we've told IT Right please don't upgrade Windows or we could lose our system which generated all our warrants. If that happens we are going to really be in trouble if we don't have something else in place.

“It would definitely make us more efficient,” she added. “My staff will be more efficient, all of us will be more efficient. I can't tell you the number of times we've tried to look for a file and we can't find it because it could be here or there, it could be on somebody's desk. With this system, the file's right there.”

Krause noted the new system will take up to one year to get installed as she is currently on a waiting list.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

The committee also recommended the full board approve a request from Health Office Liz Braddock to use \$41,000 in ARPA money to install new flooring in the health department's Stanton office.

The current carpeting would be replaced by vinyl plank. The health department will pay the other half of the estimated \$81,971 total cost.

COLLEGE HVAC UPGRADE

The committee tabled a request from Montcalm Community College Vice President for Administrative Services Connie Stewart, who asked for nearly \$800,000 in ARPA money to upgrade the HVAC system in the college's Smith Building.



Montcalm County commissioners tabled a request last Monday from Montcalm Community College Vice President for Administrative Services Connie Stewart, who asked for nearly \$800,000 of the county's ARPA money to upgrade the HVAC system and air quality in the college's Smith Building on the Sidney campus. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

Stewart said the college is in the process of updating the entire building on the Sidney campus, which houses nursing and health occupation programs, as well as natural and physical science programs. The facility, which was built in the 1960s, is home to the most classrooms of any building on the college's Sidney or Greenville campuses.

While MCC has received some of its own COVID-related money, the college can't use any on the HVAC project as the building upgrade was already underway before the pandemic started. A new HVAC system is estimated to cost \$796,981 according to architectural and engineering firms that did pricing for the college nearly a year ago.

In response to questions from Petersen, Stewart said the college brings in more than \$3 million per year in student tuition and about \$3.5 million in state appropriations. Stewart said the college's budget is around \$16 million.

"So you have a higher budget than the county," Petersen observed.

"The big sticking point for me is if we were to grant you \$800,000, I feel like we would be opening a door for every other school district in the county to say, well, can we have \$800,000 too?" Petersen continued. "I think all things being equal they would have a legitimate ask if they came and say, well, you gave the college 800 grand, can we have 100 for basketball hoops?"

"My thought to that would be, I thought that this was COVID-related. Basketball hoops wouldn't be COVID-related," Stewart responded.

"It gets people outside," Petersen pointed out.

Commissioner Phil Kohn of Edmore asked for details about the current HVAC system's cubic feet per minute versus what the college would like to see that improved to, but Stewart didn't know the answers to those questions.

"So you don't know what it is and you don't know what it would be, but you know you need it have it done?" Kohn asked. "I'm confused."

"It is inadequate. It's an antiquated system," Stewart explained. "The air quality in the building has not been good. If you walk into the building, it stinks when you go into the building. There's not enough air movement that occurs in there. It needs to be upgraded."

Kohn said he looked on the college's website and found the HVAC system in the Smith Building was assessed last year with "no changes reported and no reported problems."

"That would be for the functioning of the system, probably," Stewart responded.

"So the system is functioning properly?" Kohn asked. "I'm just not understanding the air flow issue. If you don't know what the air flow is now and you don't know what you want it to be ..."

"I would have a hard time telling Lakeview Community Schools that they're not in line for this much money if we're going to give it to the college," added Carr, referring to concerns voiced by Petersen earlier. "That's a problem I've got."

Stewart said the college will proceed with the HVAC upgrade either way.

"We were encouraged to apply (for the county's ARPA money)," she noted. "If you don't ask, you don't know. We are prepared to go it alone as it stands. This would just be helpful. The college would be happy with any amount that the commission would see fit to help us out with."

The committee voted to table the request for now.

"I like the idea of tabling it and maybe looking at it down the road again," Commissioner Chris Johnston of Crystal Township said.