
Around the County

*Jeff Bertram of
Paynesville repre-
sents District 3
on the Stearns
County Board of
Commissioners.*



Unfunded Mandates are Unfair to Counties

Welcome to the beginning of a great summer. The weather has been wonderful and has allowed the spring planting to go extremely well. Dad always enjoyed a planting season like this. The recent rains were certainly needed. Several important events have gone by since my last column, so I want to share a Happy Easter to everyone. As I get older, Christmas and Easter become more meaningful to me every year. Had Jesus not been born; he could not have died for us. These events truly are the foundation of our faith. Happy Mother's Day to all our mothers, including my mom, Marlene's mom in heaven, and Marlene herself. Motherhood is also a foundation of a great society. All our best to our new pope, Pope Leo XIV. A very moving process of saying goodbye to Pope Francis and bringing new hope for all of us. Jumping ahead, Happy Father's Day to all fathers, including Dad and Marlene's dad and stepdad in heaven. A strong society has faith, special mothers, and strong fathers in the center of that society. Well wishes to our retired member of the Stearns County board, Leigh Lenzmeier. I have known Leigh for a long time, and after 34 years on the board, he did the right thing by retiring with the realities at hand. We have declared a vacancy, and the special election dates have been set and filings have opened for District 4. If you know someone who would be a good Commissioner from the Waite Park/St. Cloud area, please encourage them to become a candidate. We had three Stearns County Justice Center open houses, bringing the public up to date on our discussions, including one in Cold Spring. I think they were well attended with some good input. These conversations will be ongoing, and I continue to welcome any comments as we decide the direction of this huge project. I am trying to meet our needs and be practical at the same time. The St. Cloud Times just conducted an interesting poll on this subject, which I assume can be found on their website. The Minnesota Legislature has gone into overtime. We at the county are very concerned about the proposed cuts in funding from the state, while still forcing us to provide the unfunded services. That means one thing. We will need to pay for more unfunded mandates with no other way to pay for them other than by having to raise property taxes. I have been pushing for common sense in asking our legislators to go ahead and stop the funding of programs, without forcing us to provide the unfunded mandate. Making us provide the service, without paying for it, isn't fair to anyone. Watch for opportunities to attend and share comments on the development of the Chain of Lakes County Park and the Paynesville park. It's important to learn and share comments as these parks begin being open to the public. Please continue to weigh in with the parks department, and me personally. We will be discussing returning more workers to the office at our Tuesday, June 24, board meeting. Several of us think the time has come to ramp the

return-to-the-office efforts up a few notches. We had our first airport working group meeting with two Benton County commissioners, two of us with Stearns County, and two people from the airport board. Sherburne County chose not to participate. We are discussing changes that need to be made to a Joint Powers Agreement that was approved years ago. Some of us are very concerned about potential levy requests that would be passed on directly to residents, without any say from the county boards. That is extremely problematic, and we are trying to right some wrongs of the past. We are already working on our 2026 budget. The cuts of funding, with continue mandated services, as I shared earlier, both from the state and federal governments, is extremely concerning. The county is where the rubber meets the road, and we can't fund everything other units of governments want to impose. Please help us push that message to the other levels of government. We need to be partners and work together! As we begin to once again use the numerous trails around the county, both as walkers and bicyclists, please use common sense of staying on the correct side, alerting people when you come up behind them, and being very careful around vehicle traffic. Be safe and respect each other. As always, feel free to contact me if you are having any issues with government or if you have thoughts on any issue we are dealing with. You can reach me at Jeff.Bertram@StearnsCountyMN.gov or 320- 250-6999. Thank you for the honor of serving you as your county commissioner. Have a safe summer!