

# The Ottawa Way

## NEWSLETTER

SEMIANNUAL NEWSLETTER | SUMMER 2022

## Six things to know about Ottawa County

- 1** Ottawa County has a AAA Bond Rating, the top score available. Bond Ratings are akin to credit scores. When the County embarks on projects like the courthouse, it borrows money. Top bond ratings means lower interest rates **saving your tax dollars.**
- 2** Ottawa has 28 county parks totaling 7,257 acres for **your health and enjoyment.**
- 3** The county's property tax rate is not only lower than our neighboring counties, it is the **sixth lowest among the state's 83 counties.** You keep more of your hard-earned money.
- 4** 99% of County residents feel **safe in their neighborhoods.** Over the past decade, felonies have decreased by 13% in Ottawa.
- 5** At 3%, Ottawa County boasts the **lowest unemployment rate in the state** for March 2022, the most recent measure available.
- 6** The **construction of affordable housing**, such as multi-family residences and mixed use developments, **rose 40% last year.** Single-family home builds also remained strong inching up 6% to their highest level since 2005.

## Meet John Shay, Ottawa's new county administrator

The Ottawa County Board of Commissioners appointed John Shay on March 24 to serve as the County Administrator. Under Shay's leadership, residents can expect public services to remain efficient and effective. He also will continue the County's history of partnering with local government, nonprofit organizations and other groups to cultivate innovative solutions to problems. Pressing challenges Shay recognizes going forward include extending broadband coverage to underserved areas, alleviating the shortage of affordable homes and supporting mental health.

Along with overseeing daily operations, his first months on the job have included meeting more employees, local government officials and members of the public to learn additional obstacles people are facing.

Outside of his work for Ottawa County, Shay governs on the football field as a referee for the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. "Officiating, I have learned to be prepared, objective and fair to all parties even amidst disagreement. I apply these qualities in my job where it is impossible to please everyone, but I treat everyone with respect and make the best decision for the benefit of Ottawa County residents," said Shay.

Shay began his service to Ottawa County as Deputy County Administrator in July of 2018. Before that, Shay served 15 years as the Ludington City Manager and as Village Manager of Almont for the five-years prior. He earned his bachelor's degree from Boston College and Master of Public Administration from Oakland University. John and his wife, Carla, have three children.





# Preparations underway for 2022 elections

Voters will have the opportunity to cast a ballot in the August 2nd Primary Election and the November 8th General Election. Federal, state and local voting districts may have changed after the release of census data. Affected residents will receive an updated voter information card in the mail. Ahead of each election, any voter can request an absentee ballot by submitting an application to their city or township clerk. Voters can also view a sample ballot and find their precinct location to vote in-person at [www.OttawaVotes.org](http://www.OttawaVotes.org) or by calling the Ottawa County Clerk's Office at 616-994-4535.

Election security remains a priority. Residents can be confident in the many ways our voting process is secure.

1. To run for office, candidates must meet all eligibility requirements and be registered to vote. This is verified by the filing official for the office.
2. Ballots and equipment are programmed using computers that are never connected to the internet. Programming software has also been certified at the state and federal levels.
3. Equipment is tested in public meetings prior to each election using paper ballots that follow a predetermined set of votes and common marking errors. Results are compared to the predetermined set of votes to ensure tabulators counted votes accurately.
4. Voters can request a ballot by mail. Signatures on applications are compared to voter profiles and ballots are issued if signatures match.
5. Election inspectors of opposite political parties work together to help voters and issue ballots in precincts on Election Day. Election inspectors of opposite political parties also tabulate absentee ballots in Absent Voter Counting Boards.
6. The Ottawa County Clerk's Office compiles unofficial results on election night from encrypted USB flash drives in each tabulator and releases unofficial vote totals to the public.
7. A four-person, bi-partisan Board of County Canvassers is responsible for certifying election results. Following each election, the Board of County Canvassers reviews and verifies the list of voters and number of ballots tabulated in every precinct. Upon completion, results become official.
8. The Ottawa County Clerk's office conducts a post-election audit using a 77-point checklist which includes hand counting ballots, verifying applications to vote and reviewing the chain of custody.

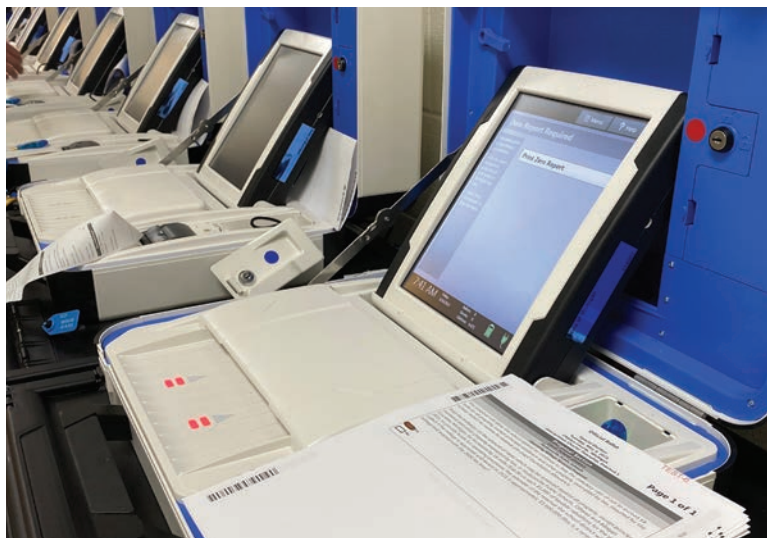


For more information on election security, visit [www.miOttawa.org/SecuringTheVote](http://www.miOttawa.org/SecuringTheVote) or call 616-994-4535.

*Below, left. The four-person, bi-partisan Board of County Canvassers is certifying election results from the August 2018 election. The documents in the front of the photo are collected from each precinct and are used to verify the number of ballots tabulated matches the number of voters. On the screen, the board is working together to determine if a write-in vote is valid.*



*Below. Tabulators during a Logic & Accuracy test ahead of the May 2021 election. Tabulators are tested in public meetings using correctly and incorrectly marked ballots to ensure they are counting votes accurately.*





# Explore the grand wonders of Ottawa County

The grand wonders of Ottawa County will soon be connected by a 36.5-mile, non-motorized, multi-use paved trail. Construction of this pathway, the Idema Explorers Trail, is well underway with many segments already in use. Thoughtfully designed, the pathway meanders along the Grand River to connect Grand Haven to Grand Rapids. Along the way, it greets communities and passes through eight county and state parks.

A detour north off of the Idema Explorers Trail on to the scenic 4.2-mile Spoonville Trail will take you to the quaint town of Nunica and unite you with the North Bank Trail. Traversing over the Grand River and across rural countryside, the Spoonville Trail was quietly completed in 2021 and is considered a key link in Ottawa County's non-motorized pathway network.

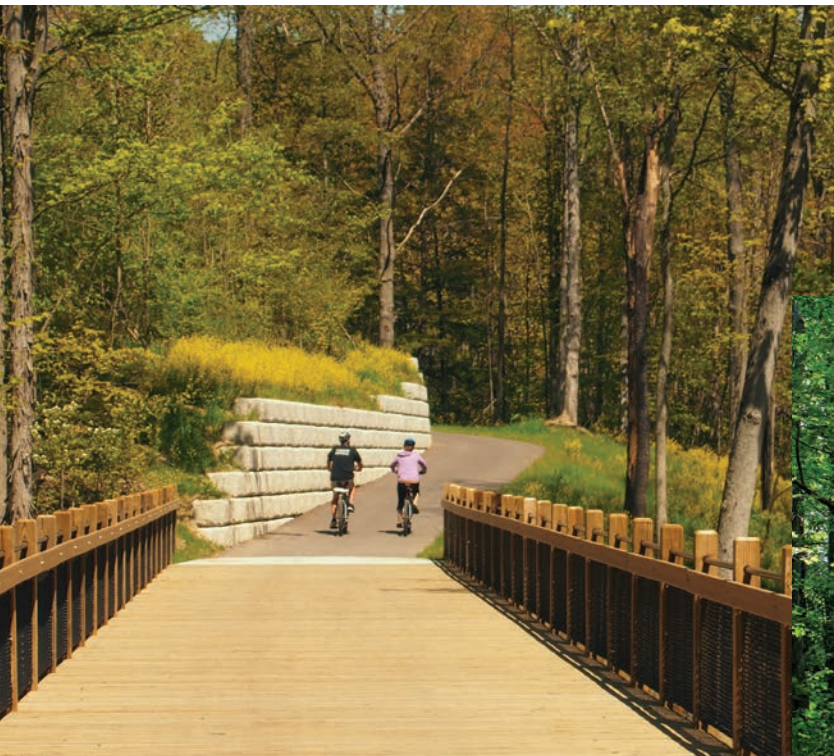
Explore the grand wonders of Ottawa County's paved trails for yourself!

Popular access points for the completed phases of the Idema Explorers Trail include:

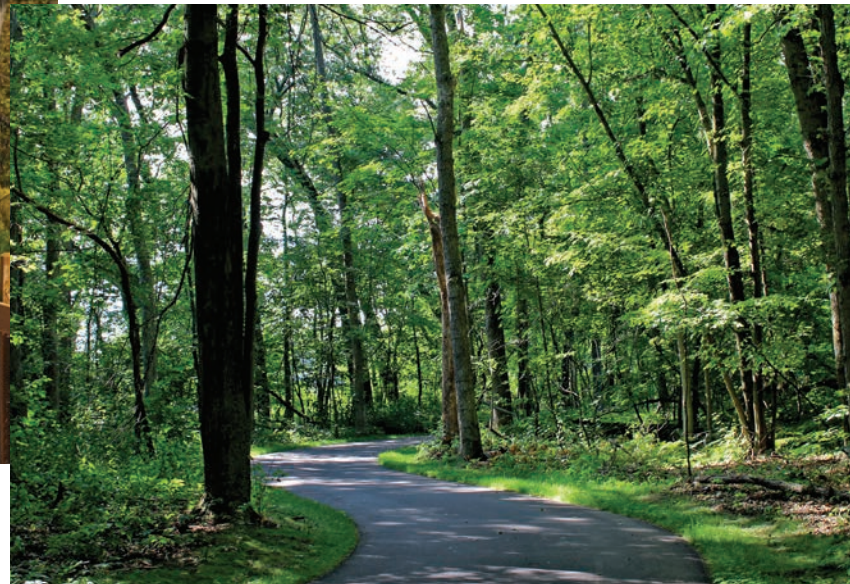
- Connor Bayou: 12945 North Cedar Drive, Grand Haven
- Bend Area Trailhead: 9500 12th Avenue, Jenison
- Grand Ravines Park, 9920 42nd Avenue, Jenison

Popular access point for the Spoonville Trail:

- M-231 Trailhead: 12250 North Cedar Drive, Grand Haven



*Above. Bikers cross one of five 14-foot boardwalks constructed in order to traverse the ravines and wetland areas along the Spoonville Trail.*



*Above. The Idema Explorers Trail curls through the forest of Connor Bayou Park just a mile from its junction with the Spoonville Trail.*

*Below. The Idema Explorers Trail, dressed for fall, hugs the river within Grand Ravines Park.*





# Transforming mental health crisis response

Responding to mental illness related emergency calls can be challenging for all parties involved. To assist local police agencies and provide the proper support for individuals suffering from a mental health crisis, the Ottawa County Sheriff's Office, Holland Department of Public Safety, Grand Haven Department of Public Safety, and the Zeeland Police Department have collaborated with Ottawa County Community Mental Health (OCCMH) to create a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT).

Consisting of one member from the police agency and a trained clinician from OCCMH, the goal of CIT is to de-escalate, redirect and provide overall support and community-specific resources for individuals in a mental health crisis. Clinicians are completing ride-a-longs with CIT-trained officers to aid with safety planning, suicide risk assessments and determining whether hospitalization may be appropriate.

Since its creation in fall 2021, the County's CIT alone has responded to 230 calls for service. The calls consist of primary responses and follow-up contacts referred to the team when not on duty. Partner law enforcement agencies have also been active with their CIT responses though precise numbers are unavailable.

## Assisting the wider community

A team of CIT-trainers are equipping additional first responders and coordinating with community partners to meet the shared goals of:

- Empowering first responders with enhanced skills and techniques for addressing public safety and mental health-related crises
- Reducing unnecessary criminal justice involvement and hospitalizations
- Improving access to mental health services and community resources

Additional CIT team members are further certified to train future trainers in both Mental Health First Aid and CIT duties.

## Mental Health First Aid Training

CIT hosted its first 8-hour Mental Health First Aid Training this spring, priming 20 officers on topics including defusing crises, promoting mental health literacy, combating the stigma of mental illness, enabling early intervention through recognition of symptoms, and connecting people to resources. The students included Ottawa County Sheriff's Office Road Patrol and Corrections Deputies, and Holland Department of Public Safety Officers.

## Crisis Intervention Training planned for June

The CIT will be hosting a 40-hour Crisis Intervention Training in June to prepare an additional 20 Ottawa County Deputies and Holland Department of Public Safety Officers for CIT duty.

Ottawa County hopes to equip all of its road patrol and community policing officers with Mental Health First Aid and Crisis Intervention Team training in the future.



*Above. Pictured left to right: Amanda Sheffield (OCCMH Clinician), Deputy Michele Sampson, Frankie Badur (OCCMH Clinician)*

# Seeking a career change? Ottawa County is where you belong

Ottawa County is hiring and we want you to join our team. With more than 33 departments and over 400 job positions, there is a role for you. Along with a culture that embraces customer service, innovation and technology, you will find:

- Growth & advancement opportunities
- Excellent retirement plans
- Generous health care benefits
- Competitive wages
- Work-life balance
- Tuition reimbursement & professional development perks

To view all of our open positions, visit [miOttawa.org/apply](https://miOttawa.org/apply) or scan the QR code to the right.



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# Superhero vision thanks to public health

Eli King was nine years old when he went for a routine school vision screening at Grand Haven Public Schools. His mother, Kali, described the then-3rd grader as fun-loving and active. At the time, she said he showed no signs of vision loss, so she was surprised when Eli failed his vision screening and was recommended for follow up care. Further examination revealed Eli had moderate vision loss at just 20/100 vision, meaning that what Eli could see at 20 feet should have been clearly visible at 100 feet.

Between 2016 and 2020, the Ottawa County Department of Public Health performed an average of 30,000 vision and hearing screenings each year. About 9% of vision screenings and 3% of hearing tests result in a referral to a specialist for diagnosis and care. These State of Michigan mandated programs are provided free of charge to ensure that undiagnosed issues don't result in a child failing to meet their full potential. Although the screenings can be done by appointment at the health department, providing checks in school removes some of the barriers families can experience in accessing these necessary and required services.

Remarkably, Eli never struggled in school because of his vision loss. However, when he received his new glasses in 2020, his world opened and he could see details he was never able to notice before, like flowers on the trees and details on buildings. Eli described those first moments like being a superhero with x-ray vision.

"I was shocked when they told me I needed glasses, but when I put them on, it all made sense. My favorite was when I put them on for the first time and everything was so different," Eli said.

Kali shared that without the school screening, she wouldn't have been alerted to his vision problem.

"It really does take a village to raise kids," Kali said. "Seeing his world with glasses has given me a new perspective too. I enjoy watching his joy at seeing all the things he missed for so long. Seeing him enjoy the world around him is a joy for me too."

Eli, now 11 years old, recently had to get a stronger prescription for his glasses. His eye care specialist is not concerned about his eye health at this time but does anticipate his prescription for glasses continuing to change as he grows. Without the Hearing and Vision program, Eli's vision loss may have gone undetected, causing difficulty in school and in his everyday activities.

"A child's ability to see and hear are vital to learning. Screenings are an important tool to obtain information about hearing and vision loss and can contribute to a child's overall health and well-being," said Leslie VerDuin, BSN, RN, Hearing and Vision Services Program Supervisor.

Hearing and vision screening is required for any child entering kindergarten in the 2022-2023 school year, but all children ages 3 to 6 are eligible for screening. If your child is preparing for school, or if you have a concern, call (616) 396-5266 to schedule a free screening today.

*Below. 11-year-old Eli King models his new glasses.*



## Public defenders brighten futures with clean slates

The Ottawa County Public Defender's Office, partnering with Safe & Just Michigan, West Michigan Works! and many volunteers, recently hosted an expungement clinic helping 61 residents initiate the process of setting aside criminal convictions under the Michigan Clean Slate law.

Understanding that some residents have made mistakes in their pasts, have served their sentences, and are on roads to better lives, Ottawa County wanted to help. Criminal records can put obstacles in the paths for these residents and their families. The expungement clinic cleared the way so these residents can more easily find jobs, housing and other opportunities for brighter

futures. The Public Defender's Office, pictured below, hopes to offer more expungement clinics in the future.





# Safe on the water with marine patrol

With 24 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, over 30 miles of the Grand River, and numerous inland lakes and streams, Ottawa County is a haven for aquatic recreation. Citizens and visitors alike can rest assured the County Sheriff's Office Marine Patrol Unit is out on the water to serve and protect the seafaring public. Comprised of 25 seasonal deputies and a supervisor, the unit enforces marine laws and ordinances, provides high-visibility patrols and investigates boating accidents.

Marine Patrol Deputies also ensure safe and enjoyable water recreation. Partnering with the public, property owners and local units of government, deputies identify and resolve problems and educate by conducting vessel safety checks; livery inspections; and assisting with patrolling a variety of special events such as triathlons, sailing and rowing regattas, and community fireworks displays.

Not all trouble happens on the surface. That's where the Sheriff's Office Dive Rescue Team comes in. Made up of Road Patrol and Corrections Deputies, the 12-member Dive Rescue Team is called upon in emergency situations when life is threatened in any body of water. Additionally, they provide underwater recovery efforts for fatalities and submerged vehicles. Team members are also responsible for investigating, locating and securing evidence in criminal investigations.

*Below: The Marine Patrol Unit and Dive Rescue Team training in Holland.*



## Work flows in the water resources office

When many people think of a "drain" they think of curb inlet grates and similar urban sights. In Ottawa County, many drains resemble streams, creeks or ditches. To learn if the runnel at the rear of your property is actually a drain, hop online. A new, interactive map of all the county drains is available at [miOttawa.org/drains](http://miOttawa.org/drains). Alternatively, call the Water Resources Office at 616-994-4526 to inquire about a location.

With over 1,000 drains in Ottawa County, the Water Resources Office is a bustling operation, particularly during the rainy spring season and stormy summer months. Keeping drains free flowing and cleared from debris is an ongoing task.

The office also manages the soil erosion control and assists local governments in storm water development reviews. In growing Ottawa County, this work is at an all-time high.

*Below: Keeping drains free flowing and cleared from debris is an ongoing task. This drain in Zeeland received routine maintenance.*



# Your County Commissioners

What does the Board of Commissioners do?

**Set policy:** Commissioners pass resolutions which establish policies for internal matters like budgets, services, capital improvements and other matters. While commissioners may pass county ordinances, they are few due to the limited power of boards.

**Serve constituents:** Commissioners are available to connect with county residents and find them the information or service they need.

**Provide leadership:** Commissioners participate in countless county, regional and state committees giving them unique perspectives of their communities. The board engages in an annual strategic planning process, anticipating changes and needs for the future.

**Add oversight:** While commissioners only make the hiring decisions of one employee, the county administrator, they spend time monitoring and evaluating the work of many department officials. Doing so assures that county-funded services are effective and efficient.



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# The Ottawa May

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Photo: Tunnel Park  
Submit a photo for consideration in a future publication to [stegner@mtottawa.org](mailto:stegner@mtottawa.org)



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