

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING

Date: February 4, 2026

6:00 p.m.

Place: Commissioners Room, Courthouse, Caledonia, MN

Members Present: Cindy Wright, Eric Johnson, Kurt Zehnder, Robert Schuldt (attended virtually), and Greg Myhre

Others Present: Interim Auditor/Treasurer Polly Heberlein, The Caledonia Argus Reporter Kim Nielson, Coordinator Brent Parker, EDA Director & Coordinator Support Allison Wagner, Interim Attorney Suzanne Bublitz, County Appraiser Joe Olson, Assistant County Attorney Daniel Coogan, Bev Bauer, Larry Bauer, Jana Beckman, John Beckman, Gary Becker, Luke Onstad, Rebecca Paulson, Dan Solum, Rissy Solum, Jon Kulas, Terry Schuldt, Ryan Schuldt, Kevin Bulman, Dean Ellingson, Phil Costigan, Matt Schmitz, Dave Wray, Steve Hartwick, David Bjerke, Jane Bjerke, Danny Rud, Shane Eastman, Todd Rohweder, John Earl Meyer, Gary Van Domelen, Chis Bierke, Christian Bjerke, Clayton Johnson, Dan Vesterse, Mike Moen, Bruce Kuehmichel, Larry Gaustad, Gary Gimble, Bruce Hoitink, Curt Henderson, Marisa Pearson, Roger Pearson, Robert Petersen, Stephen Reiman, Bob Burns, Matt Storlie, Bob Borowman, Carol Sweeney Monarch, Jerry Stempinski, Geoff Halverson, Bob Lemke, Kathy Solum, Connie Harnack, Tom Harnack, Steve Lunes, John Hauser, Bruce Lee, Deb Wray, Charlie Wray, Mark Weichert, Bonnie Laumb, Mark Betz, Mary Betz, Kevin Schulddt, Merle Becker, Donise Becker, Loren Lapham, Wesley Lapham, Chance Nelson, Kay Cross, Bob Borowiak, and Alan Klug

Presiding: Chairperson Myhre

Call to order Special Meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Motion was made by Commissioner Zehnder, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, motion unanimously carried to approve the agenda.

APPOINTMENTS

Motion was made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Zehnder, motion unanimously carried to open a public hearing on the use of rifles for deer hunting in Houston County. Minnesota Statutes § 97B.031, Subd. 7 had authorized a county board located

in the former shotgun zone to adopt an ordinance after notice and public hearing to limit the type of firearms that may be used to hunt deer within the county if they chose to do so.

Clayton Johnson from Black Hammer Township asked: “Why are we even considering rifles”. He said he questioned this. He said he had spoke to the author of the bill. He said he would appreciate the Commissioners maintaining a shotgun only zone. He said it was a safety issue.

Charlie Wray from Houston County spoke against the use of rifles in Houston County. He said a lot of people got excited when they saw a deer. He said rifles posed dangers to other hunters, people working in the fields, and others.

Bob Burns from Caledonia said he was not in favor of using rifles because he said they could increase dangers. He said the deer kill was plenty good using shotguns. Burns said he realized hunters used rifles for hunting other animals but that there were less people doing those kinds of hunting.

Steve Bauer from Caledonia said his main issue with rifles was safety. He said he was concerned about homes and small acreages. He spoke against the use of rifles in Houston County for deer hunting.

Dan Vesterse from Spring Grove said he was 55 years old and had owned land in Black Hammer Township for 40 years. He came from a hunting family. He recalled a story from 1989 where he had been stopped by the local game warden at the time and he had asked why rifles were not allowed for deer hunting in Houston County. He said the warden had said it was a safety issue due to the terrain. Vesterse said he was in the US Army. He said had concerns about the amount of ricocheting from rifle bullets. He was against using rifles in Houston County for deer hunting.

Kay Cross from Spring Grove said she was not a hunter. She had concerns for safety and fair chase. She said sportsmanship was a commitment to fair play. Kross told stories of children who had been mistaken for animals and were accidently shot. She said accidents happened under normal situations and added that distance and speed would “absolutely increase possibility for error”. She asked the Commissioners to please not allow rifles.

Mike Sieve from Yucatan Township said he had been hunting since 1990. He said more things kept being added to pressure the deer. He said he was concerned about sportsmanship. He asked: “When are we going to do something for the deer?”

Marisa Pearson from Caledonia said she did not support the use of rifles for deer hunting in Houston County. She said she had safety concerns. She said extending ranges decreased safety. She said archery hunters were already successful in harvesting deer. Pearson said shooting farther and faster was not safe. She was concerned about young hunters and said she wanted everyone to enjoy hunting as safely as possible. She said she was not comfortable

sending kids to the woods with rifle hunting. She said people might not participate in deer hunting due to safety concerns if rifles were allowed to be used.

Bob Borowiak from Houston said his concern was safety. He said if and when there was a negative event involving a high power rifle “who are they going to look at when that happens”. He said “You folks had the option to opt out”.

Steve Kurns from Caledonia Township said he came from a county in Wisconsin. He said when that county allowed rifles to be used for deer hunting there were no additional accidents after allowing rifles. He said a Pennsylvania study that had been referenced was anecdotal. He said shotgun rounds were more likely to skip. Kurns said it was about personal responsibility and that was preached in hunter safety. He urged the Commissioners to allow hunting with rifles in Houston County. He said to look at the data.

Carol Sweeny Monarch said she was opposed to using rifles in Houston County. She said her family hunted and her biggest concern was hunter safety. She said she would not allow rifle hunting on her farm. She said people might not get to hunt because of the risk factor.

Dean Ellingson from Spring Grove said he looked forward to hunting with a rifle. He said most hunters hunted from a tree stand. He said he was looking forward to a more accurate shot. He said rifles were more efficient. Ellingson said there were too many deer. He said people could still use shotguns if they chose to do so.

John Meyer from Gopher State Sportsman Club said his club was 200 members strong. The club endorsed the use of rifles for the 2026 hunting season.

Gary Van Domelen said he was a retired business attorney. He said he had property by Hokah. He said the original 1942 law was for deer herd management not public safety. He said the concern was that there would not be any deer left as at the time there were less deer than there are currently. He said the original law was never put into place for safety to begin with. He said Wisconsin statistics showed shotguns in more accidents in relation to their use. He said 70 to 80% of land in Houston County was owned by private people who could make a decision about rifle use on their private land. He said deer caused car accidents and CWD was an issue. He said he was in favor of using rifles for deer hunting.

Robert Petersen from Spring Grove said he had been using a rifle for 20 years. He said he did not see a problem with using a rifle.

Bruce Lee from Crystal Valley in Houston County said he would not mind people hunting on his farm with a rifle. He said there were too many deer. Later he said La Crosse County had a lot more people than Houston County.

Steve Hartwick from Money Creek Township said he had a small farm bordered on two sides by State land. He said people were more likely to hunt with a scope when using a rifle and

had a more limited view. He said every hunter was supposed to act responsibly but if everyone did we would not have game wardens. He had concerns for eagles. He was against using rifles.

Tom Harnack from Sheldon Township said rifles increased range. He warned about homes, buildings, and livestock. He asked the Commissioners to not allow rifles.

Roger Pearson from Caledonia said his grandfather was shot with a rifle during deer hunting. He said he thought people would hunt less if rifles were allowed. He said he really didn't want to see rifles be allowed to be used due to safety concerns.

Luke Onstad from Houston County said he had 40 acres. He said with a shotgun his range from where he would be shooting would not leave his property. He said with a rifle his range could affect 58 parcels besides his own. He said there were not very many deer up north where rifles were allowed. He said he was concerned about safety.

Joe Hartley from Caledonia said he was in favor of rifle hunting. He said people needed to "get over the fear factor".

Allen Klug said he was in favor of rifles. He said Iowa didn't have any problems, and Houston County wouldn't either.

Jeff Halverson from Black Hammer Township said he saw ample opportunity for people to hunt deer. He said he was strongly opposed to rifle hunting. He said Houston County had steep bluffs and deep valleys.

Mark Munson from Wilmington Township said he taught hunter safety. He said Minnesota was the only State in the Midwest that didn't allow some form of rifle hunting. He said 12 and 13 year hunters needed to be accompanied by an adult. At 14 youth could hunt alone but that was up to the parent.

John Hauser from Caledonia Township said if it wasn't broke don't fix it.

Kevin Bulman from Caledonia said he was a firearm safety instructor. He said four main rules for hunting included knowing your target and beyond. He said it was the responsibility of the hunter. He said it was more of a training issue than the weapon being used. He said it was up to parents and guardians to further train as to ethical and safety standards for hunting. He said while rifles were not needed he encouraged people to see rifles as an opportunity for the future. He said there were more options for lead free ammunition with rifles. He said suppressors could also be used to protect hearing.

Terry Schuldt from Caledonia said there used to be a three day hunting season and a lot more people got killed from that. He said he had concerns about people not from the area coming to hunt. He said there were too many trophy hunters that didn't shoot does, and people who would not let anyone else hunt. He said there should be more farmers in Houston County.

Christopher Bjerke, Houston County resident, said he wouldn't want to increase the danger factor, but did think shotguns were more crude. He said he was not going to say which way to vote. He said he did think there would be more people hunting with rifles.

Bruce Hoitink from Caledonia said rifles were more accurate than shotguns. He was in favor of rifles.

Christian Bjerke a student from Spring Grove said he was looking forward to using rifles as were his fellow students. He said using rifles would help hunters be more accurate and take down more deer. He said young hunters were looking forward to using rifles.

Motion was made by Commissioner Zehnder, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, motion unanimously carried to end the public hearing and return to the meeting.

Closing Public Comment:

None.

Commissioner Johnson said some had mentioned adding restrictions when it came to types of rifles, he said he wanted to make it clear that the DNR would not enforce those additional restrictions and it would be up to the County Sheriff's Office. He said the DNR would enforce the rule if the County decided to opt out and only allow shotguns, but they would not enforce any modifications to the rule. Commissioner Johnson said he did not like that the State had put the board in the position to have to decide between the two options.

Commissioner Wright said the County could review the matter every year.

Another public hearing on the use of rifles for deer hunting in Houston County would take place on March 3rd, at 6:00 p.m. in the basement of the County Justice Center.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Zehnder, motion unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 p.m. The next meeting would be a workgroup session on February 10, 2026.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

HOUSTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA

By: _____
Greg Myhre, Chairperson

Attest: _____
Brent Parker, Coordinator

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Date: February 10, 2026

9:00 a.m.

Place: Commissioners Room, Courthouse, Caledonia, MN

Members Present:

Cindy Wright, Kurt Zehnder, Robert Schuldt, and Greg Myhre

Others Present:

Interim Auditor/Treasurer Polly Heberlein, The Caledonia Argus Associate Editor Katia Gorsuch, Finance Director Carol Lapham, Coordinator Brent Parker, EDA Director & Coordinator Support Allison Wagner, Social Services Supervisor Bethany Moen, Fiscal Supervisor Heidi Harms, Public Health Supervisor Jordan Knoke, Engineer Brian Pogodzinski, Environmental Services Director Amelia Meiners, and Interim Attorney Suzanne Bublitz

Board Workgroup Session

The Commissioners discussed with Engineer Pogodzinski the City of La Crescent's , City of La Crescent draft Active Transportation Action Plan. Pogodzinski said a main priority of the City of La Crescent was to slow traffic down to increase safety for bikes and pedestrians. Pogodzinski said statute dictated that the speed limit on County roads in urbanized areas be 30 miles per hour. The County could not enforce a lower speed limit on County roads. Cities could lower speed limits on their City streets with ordinances, but these would not apply to County streets. County roads were mentioned within the plan. Pogodzinski said sometimes it seemed that solutions were coming ahead of a plan being formed. Commissioner Wright said she had participated in planning meetings and wanted to see the City of La Crescent get additional input from residents. She said she appreciated being involved from the County perspective. Commissioner Schuldt brought up some concerns in relation to the plan noting the County roads in the plan were truck routes and changing or narrowing those roads in the future would impact businesses and traffic. The board discussed that residents and businesses traveled on County roads through the City and it was not only residents of the City traveling on the roads. It was the general consensus of the board that the City of La Crescent should focus on City roads. The County wanted to continue to participate in planning meetings especially when it came to County roads. The County did not have an interest in narrowing County roads. The County wanted to focus on identifying problems, and not finding solutions before identifying problems. Lastly, the County wanted to be involved in the process. Pogodzinski would communicate this to the City.

Environmental Services Director Meiners discussed with the board a need for a new hook truck in the future to replace the current one. The current County hook truck was a 2007 and had lots of miles. It was also a stick truck and in hiring new staff the County was starting to see less

people who knew how to operate a stick shift. Meiners recommended getting an automatic truck. It was possible the current truck could be traded in.

Parker discussed the organizational structure of the County with the board, and possible future changes.

Parker said a MariBell resolution was being worked on and would hopefully be on the agenda the following week. Parker had sent some further information regarding the project to the Commissioners. A Certificate of Need application for the line had been submitted to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. The public could send comments to the Public Utilities Commission. The County's future resolution on the matter could also be submitted by the County.

Parker shared with the board a list of 54 zoning related ordinances that at some point would need to be looked at and reviewed. The ordinance list had been put together by the zoning office. Parker said reviewing the ordinances would be a time consuming process.

The workgroup session ended at 11:10 a.m.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

HOUSTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA

By: _____
Greg Myhre, Chairperson

Attest: _____
Brent Parker, Coordinator