

GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

September 16, 2025

Present: Andrea Moroughan, Chair; Josh Leviker, Vice-Chair; Herb Frost; Thomas Kalamas; and Jeff Nellenback.

Legislator Moroughan called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Legislator Moroughan moved to approve the August 19th committee meetings as submitted, seconded by Legislator Frost, and carried.

Naturally Lewis Executive Director Introduction – Joanne Witt

Joanne Witt, the new executive director of Naturally Lewis, introduced herself and shared her extensive background in education, highlighting her previous roles as a principal and director of career technical education. She discussed her experience in establishing a STEM academy at Fort Drum, which benefited over 1,500 students annually, and emphasized her commitment to creating hands-on learning opportunities. Joanne expressed her enthusiasm for her new position and her focus on economic development, shifting the emphasis from solely serving students to building community relationships. She acknowledged the support from colleagues Tim Hunt, Casandra Buell, Larry Dolhof, and Michele Ledoux as she transitions into her role.

Lewis County Land Bank Initiative – Casandra Buell, Director of Planning & Community Development

The Land Bank Initiative was discussed, which has been in exploration for over five years, focusing on revitalizing blighted properties in Lewis County. The initiative, established under the Land Bank Act of 2011, has seen 31 out of 35 land banks approved, aiming to reduce blight and enhance community value by reclaiming abandoned properties.

The process for creating a land bank in Lewis County was outlined, highlighting the need for a local law or resolution, application to Empire State Development, and intergovernmental cooperation agreements if multiple foreclosing government units are involved. Funding options include applying for annual grants to cover operational expenses and planning grants for strategic development. The focus will primarily be on addressing vacant and blighted residential properties.

The steps needed to create a 501c3 organization were outlined, which could be a lengthy process. The overall idea was supported, highlighting the need for improved community aesthetics to attract tourism. The group discussed the benefits of local representation and the potential challenges of a larger board. Chairman Dolhof proposed a board structure of one person, recommended by each legislator, from their district to ensure local representation, with the eleventh member being the County Manager.

The availability of grants for operational expenses related to land bank initiatives was outlined, emphasizing the cost-effectiveness of internal management. A self-funding mechanism was proposed where properties are demolished and resold, with the revenue reinvested into the land bank. It was also discussed that a land bank would better handle

properties that do not sell at tax auctions. Concerns about environmental risks and the management of liens on properties were addressed by the County Attorney stating waivers can be used in Land Banks.

The following motion was made:

1. Legislator Moroughan moved to authorize Recreation, Forestry & Parks Director Jackie Mahoney to travel to Cleveland Ohio on October 27, 2025 through October 30, 2025 to attend a Rails to Trails Conference, seconded by Legislator Frost, and carried. Legislator Nellenback was opposed.

There being no other business to come before the committee, Legislator Moroughan moved to adjourn at 1:25 p.m., seconded by Legislator Leviker, and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board