

Gratiot County Herald



Gratiot County's Largest Paid Circulation Newspaper

An Independent Publication

Number 18

April 30, 2026

Est. 1887

\$1.50

Too Few Candidates for Alma, St. Louis Primaries

Rosemary Horvath
Herald Correspondent

Registered voters in Alma and St. Louis will not have city races on the August primary ballot after too few candidates filed to require one.

In Alma, three candidates declared by the 4 p.m. deadline last Tuesday for four available City Commission seats.

Andrew Bare, who was elected in 2024 to a two-year term, is seeking a four-year seat. Incumbent commissioners Roxann Harrington and Danny Wernick are also seeking four-year terms.

Commissioner Michele Pitts is not seeking a third term, leaving one position open.

Because Alma elections are non-partisan, the city uses the primary only when enough candidates file to narrow the field. With three candidates running for four available seats, Bare, Harrington and Wernick advance to the November ballot.

Under the city charter, the top three vote-getters receive four-year terms. The fourth-place finisher receives a two-year term.

The remaining seat could still be filled by a write-in candidate.

"If a write-in candidate garnered more votes than an incumbent, it is possible that person could get a 4-year term," Alma City Clerk Sara Anderson said.

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Alma's Barb Wise, at 92 years old, attended her first Tigers game in Detroit last Thursday. Perhaps well worth the wait, the home team needed solo home run shots in both the eighth and ninth innings to tie and walk off a 5-4 victory over the Milwaukee Brewers.

County Board Approves Department, Policy Changes

Rosemary Horvath
Herald Correspondent

Gratiot County commissioners unanimously approved a new Community Development structure last week to separate building inspection revenue from other department funding.

The change follows County Administrator Tim Dolehanty's re-

view of board policies and department structures. Under the new organizational chart, Building Inspections will be overseen by a Building Inspector Director and financed through state-authorized funding and fee revenue.

Dolehanty said the county may eventually hire two additional inspectors, one for electrical work and one for mechanical inspections.

Planning and maintenance will remain under Community Development but will be financed through the General Fund.

See **COUNTY** page 5

Take Me Out to The Ball Game

William Meiners
Herald Correspondent

Maybe you're never too old to make memories. At 92, Barb Wise not only saw her first Detroit Tigers game in person last Thursday but also witnessed the home team's game-winning run in the bottom of the ninth for the victory over the Milwaukee Brewers.

A lifelong baseball fan now residing at Arbor Grove in Alma, Wise was surprised with the tickets and trip through the assisted living facility's Dream Big program, which helps residents reconnect with meaningful parts of their lives and create new moments alongside the people who matter most.

Although it sounds like Wise has stayed pretty well connected to baseball through nine decades.

See **GAME** page 5



Pictured with her youngest son, Kip, Wise sports a half-Brewers, half-Tigers jersey through Arbor Grove's Dream Big program, though her Milwaukee roots did not shake her Detroit loyalty.



ADDRESS LINE

Alma Elementary Students Shape Playground Plans



Alma elementary students helped select designs for new playgrounds planned at Luce Road Early Childhood Learning Center, Hillcrest and Pine Avenue, with construction expected to begin this summer.

Megan Neeley
Herald Correspondent

Elementary students in Alma Public Schools are taking an active role in shaping their learning environments, helping to select the design of new playgrounds funded through a district bond.

Voters approved \$29,945,000 last May, supporting a range of improvements, including safety upgrades and facility renovations. Among those were significant updates to playgrounds at Luce Road Early Childhood Learning Center and Hillcrest and Pine Avenue elementary schools.

The district is investing approximately \$160,000 to \$180,000 per playground, according to Superintendent Stacey Criner.

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117 North East Street, St. Louis 989-681-2181	

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Most any Midwesterner can accept a delayed spring if only to follow their central division teams through April rainouts and the occasional games with flurries.

These days, Wise welcomes any chance to catch the Tigers on the radio or television. "Wherever I can find them," she told The Herald in a phone interview on Monday.

That baseball fandom must be something of a poorly kept secret around Arbor Grove. Friends and staff alike have heard her stories about growing up in Wisconsin and listening to the Chicago Cubs on the radio. Indeed, Ernie Banks, Mr. Cub, may have been her favorite player in her college days at Wisconsin State College, La Crosse in the 1950s. And after college, then living

south of Milwaukee, she and her roommates could take a train to see a new ball club, the Milwaukee Braves, who had relocated from Boston. There she might have seen firsthand something powerful in the swings of a young Henry Aaron, before that team moved to Atlanta.

Wise and her family, including a husband and four kids, were fairly well-traveled themselves, living between Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan. Near the middle of the mitten for some four decades, she took on the Tigers as a team to cheer for. And their playoff resurgence over the last couple of years have made for compelling springs, summers, and falls.

Wise's youngest son, Kip Wise, a Mount Pleasant resident, was one of her traveling

companions for the Thursday afternoon game, which coincidentally may have been the best day for baseball in a young season.

With the city buildings framing the outfield of Comerica Park, Wise described the blue skies as "absolutely cloudless." Just a few rows up down the third baseline, they could see the players take the field, perhaps even hearing some of their chatter.

Wise was gifted with a jersey that was half Tigers, half Brewers. But she was all in on Detroit.

With pitching ace Tarik Skubal on the mound, all looked to be pretty smooth as his teammates staked him to a 2-0 lead after one full inning. After two quick outs in the fourth, the Brew Crew smacked back-to-back doubles to cut the Detroit lead in half.

The Tigers recovered one in the bottom of the sixth, but the Brewers got to Skubal in the seventh, scoring three in that frame to take a 4-3 lead. That, however, may have just set the stage for the new memory making.

Jahmai Jones hit a game-tying homer in the bottom of the eighth inning. Spencer Torkelson's line drive over the left field wall, as the play-by-play announcer shouted, "a Tork bomb sends everyone home happy!"

Neither Torkelson, nor the announcer likely knew that of more than 25,000 in attendance on a sun-soaked afternoon was Barb Wise, perhaps the oldest fan in the stands. And now she's got a new baseball story to go along with a lifetime of others.

PLANS continued from page 1

At Luce Road, an additional \$19,000 in Great Start Readiness Program funding was earmarked to ensure equipment is developmentally appropriate for younger students.

Criner added the playground upgrades are otherwise funded entirely through bond dollars and were outlined in the district's original proposal to voters. Improvements include removing existing pea stone gravel and replacing it with updated surfaces and new equipment, while maintaining structures that still meet safety standards.

A key feature of the upgrades is the addition of pour-in-place rubber surfacing at each school, improving accessibility by

meeting ADA standards and promoting a more inclusive environment for all users.

Due to cost constraints, the surfacing will be installed only in select areas, with potential for future expansion.

"We hoped to add additional pour-in-place, but unfortunately it's just really, really expensive," Criner said.

Beyond infrastructure, the district says the project highlights student voice and engagement, as children at Hillcrest and Pine Avenue played a direct role in the design process.

Student council representatives selected by their peers met with a representative

from Sinclair Recreation, who presented playground design options. Students then evaluated the proposals and voted on their preferred equipment and layout.

"We wanted the kids to have this real-life business experience," explained Dr. Kathy Konowalow, principal of both schools. "They learned about collaborative decision-making and really great soft skills like listening to presentations and making decisions."

The process also encouraged students to think beyond their own experiences and consider long-term impacts. They discussed how their decisions would shape the school

for years to come.

"Playground equipment lasts for decades," Konowalow said. "They will be able to share with their family, 'I picked out that playground equipment.'"

That long-term perspective made the experience especially meaningful for educators involved. Konowalow said it was inspiring to watch students engage in a real-life experience and step into leadership roles.

Construction on the playgrounds is expected to begin this summer, with completion anticipated by the start of the 2026-27 school year.

COUNTY continued from page 1

The change follows earlier concerns that building inspection revenue had been mixed with other department money. Dolehanty previously told commissioners that state law limits the use of inspection revenue to building inspection purposes.

911 upgrades reviewed

Gratiot County Central Dispatch Director David Rapacz walked commissioners through the origins of the emergency number 911 nationally, in Michigan and in Gratiot County.

He also reviewed changes at the Dispatch Center in Ithaca, including a reorganized layout, functional 911 work spaces and staffing changes such as the Emergency Communications Officer position.

During the first two hours of the storm a few weeks ago, "the dispatch center handled 71 calls or a day worth of calls," Rapacz said. He added that only three dispatchers were on duty, including two who had been employed less than six months, but they

handled the crisis expertly.

"They were great," he said.

After years of concern over areas around the county that could not be reached by police communication, Rapacz said the "monster 310 foot tower" changed all that.

Landowner Mike Pung leased a parcel of land in Pine River Township near U.S. 127 to the county for 60 years. Tower communications went live March 24.

Rapacz said it is the first tower in the state equipped with the newest required technology.

Because Gratiot voters approved a 911 millage, Rapacz added the department "is on the right path to being financially stable."

Policies revised

Commissioners also adopted several policy revisions last week, including changes to budget procedures, budget transfers, enhanced access to public records and a 13-page Freedom of Information Act policy. The board also approved a process for repealing obsolete policies.

A new comprehensive policy also outlines the process commissioners will follow when addressing county issues.

In related action, commissioners approved a \$15,395 contract with Andrews Technology of North Carolina to install a web-based employee time and attendance system.

Dolehanty said the system will make it easier to track employee work hours, including staffing levels in the Sheriff's Office.

Board appointments made

Commissioners also made several appointments to county boards and committees for 2026.

For EightCAP's 60th year of service, Jennifer Rondy, director of the Gratiot County Commission on Aging, was appointed to the agency's Board of Directors as the delegate for Commissioner Tim Gay. Michele Ringle was appointed as the delegate for Commissioner Jan Bunting. Chrystal Rockafellow will represent the Gratiot Consumer Sec-

tor, while Nancy O'Brien, of Ithaca Public Schools, will serve as Gratiot representative.

Rebecca Terry was appointed to the EightCAP Executive Committee as a Consumer Sector representative. Rondy was also named to the Human Resources Committee and the Bylaws and Appeals Committee, and was reappointed chair.

Maureen Murphy, a retired economics professor, and Karol Davidson, a retired Alma teacher, were appointed to five-year terms on the County Library Board ending March 31, 2031.

On the Veterans Affairs Board, Ken Davis of Ashley was reappointed to a three-year term. Autumn Leonard of Riverdale and Brandon Simmet of Ithaca were also appointed to three-year terms.

Bonnie Gustavison of Sumner was appointed to the County Planning Commission. Art McClintic of Arcada Township was appointed to a partial term ending Dec. 31.

PRIMARIES continued from page 1

A write-in candidate must file a declaration of intent by 4 p.m. Oct. 23 with the city clerk or file the document at the candidate's polling place on Election Day. Anderson said write-in votes cannot be counted without a signed declaration.

If no fourth candidate is elected in November, the Alma City Commission will appoint someone to fill the vacancy.

Pitts is closing out eight years on the commission after also serving on the city planning commission and fire board.

"After careful consideration I decided not to seek re-election because I feel confident that I have fulfilled my responsibilities to the community," Pitts told The Herald. "It has been an honor to contribute to the growth and well-being of Alma during that time."

St. Louis also has an opening on the November ballot after two

incumbents filed for three available positions.

City Clerk Jamie Long said Mayor Ralph Echtenaw is seeking a second two-year term, while Council member Robin Hart is seeking a four-year term.

No candidate filed for the other four-year council position now held by Kevin Palmer, whose term expires Dec. 31, 2026.

Palmer was appointed Sept. 19, 2023, to fill a vacancy. He previously chaired the Parks and Recreation Committee and served on the Board of Review and Compensation Committee. He also is a member of the Planning Commission.

The opening could still be filled by a write-in candidate.

Around Gratiot County
County Prosecutor Laura Bever

filed to succeed Stewart D. McDonald as 65B District Court Judge unopposed in November.

A mandatory retirement age restricts a Michigan district court judge from seeking reelection if they turn age 70 at the time of the election.

McDonald has been elected to three 6-year terms and would hit the age limit in a fourth.

In the township arena, also skipping a primary election, is Fulton Township.

A November race has Democrat Jennifer Lobdell of Elwell opposing Republican Aaron L. VanHorn Sr of Sumner for a 6 year term on the County Road Commission.

Republican Robert Baxter of Perrington, currently appointed as supervisor, seeks election to the position for a term ending in 2028.

Republican Melissa Zemla of Perrington seeks a partial term as treasurer.

No one submitted a petition for the Fulton trustee spot, which could also be subject for a write-in.

A Seville Township clerk who resigned last year was succeeded by an appointed clerk who did not

file for the position. Nor had anyone else. It's likely the township board will reappoint the acting clerk or someone new.

Democrat Tarry D. Stahl of Ashley seeks a term ending in 2028 as Washington Township Clerk.

Republican Ashley D. Gross of Wheeler filed for the Lafayette Township trustee spot unopposed.

NOTICE TO

NORTH STAR RESIDENTS

Notice is hereby given that the 2026 meetings of North Star Township will be held on the second Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the North Star Township Hall.

Heidi Drowley, Clerk

Public Notice

Notice is hereby given that the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners is accepting applications from interested citizens to serve on the following board(s). Applications are being accepted through May 8, 2026, 4 p.m. Appointments will be made at an upcoming Board of Commissioners meeting in May.

Current Term Ends	Board/Committee	Term Length	Contact Name/ No. for Information and Meeting Dates & Times
12/31/2027	Brownfield Redevelopment Authority Board- 1 Partial Term	6 Years/Partia	Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. 875-2083
12/31/2027	Economic Development Authority Board- 1 Partial Term	6 Years/ Partial	Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. 875-2083

Please contact the Clerk's Office for an application or on line at www.gratiotmi.com. and mail/deliver/fax to Angie Thompson, County Clerk, 214 E. Center St., Ithaca, MI 48847 Fax 989-875-5254.

Angie Thompson
Gratiot County Clerk

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