



Department Updates

July 2020

Circuit Court

Judge James Babler Circuit Court Judge

The Barron County Circuit Court began allowing in-person appearances in all cases beginning July 1, 2020, although still encouraging appearance by Zoom video or telephone. While the Courts and the Justice Center have been always been open, most in-person appearances were suspended by the Wisconsin Supreme Court Order in March. In May, the Supreme Court required that the Courts in each county adopt plans to reopen court and conduct Jury Trials. Judge James Babler, Presiding Judge for Barron County, issued an Order Adopting an Operating Plan and Jury Trial Plan in response to the Covid-19 pandemic with the plan approved by District 10 Chief Judge Maureen Boyle.

The Supreme Court required that the Presiding Judge in each county consult with justice system partners, mandate face coverings for court proceedings, and set up practices for sanitation and hygiene. At the same time, the Supreme Court also encouraged the local Courts to incorporate recommendations from the Wisconsin Courts COVID-19 Task Force. The Barron County plans adopt the vast majority of the Task Force recommendations for reopening.

“Clerk of Court Sharon Millermon and I have been working on plans to reopen since early April so we were in a good position to safely proceed,” said Babler. The first week of June, Judge Maureen Boyle successfully conducted a three-day Termination of Parental Rights jury trial under the new requirements and I conducted a one-day criminal jury trial in late June. “We are once again conducting Jury Trials, albeit, in a different and safe manner.”

The new Emergency Order lifts the ban on in-person appearances for non-essential cases on July 1, 2020. However, the Barron County Judges intend to continue to use and encourage Zoom Video and telephone for many of the cases, even after July 1. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced all of us to live and work in different ways, including the Court system. Surprisingly, some of the new methods have worked so well that we anticipate that they will become permanent in the Barron County Court system.

Some of the major requirements for operation include: face coverings to be worn by everyone entering the Justice Center to do court business; limits on the number of people who may be in each courtroom, with seating clearly marked; limitations on the number of people who may use bathrooms and elevator at one time; and numerous hand sanitation stations throughout the Justice Center.

The judges are extremely grateful and thankful to the many County Departments and Staff who have assisted us in safely reopening the Courts. We could not have done it without their cooperation. This is yet another example of how well all Barron County Departments work together for the common good of the citizens of this County.

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Register of Deeds

Margo Katterhagen Register of Deeds

Recordings are up!! We recorded 1,150 documents in the month of June. The last time we recorded over 1,000 documents in one month was August 2012! This is due to the “re-finance” boom that we are currently experiencing. Unfortunately, this slows the real estate market down. Sales fell 25.8% across the state in May. Barron County transfer fees were up by 44% in May, compared to April, so properties are selling in Barron County!

COVID-19 took a toll on vital record requests. Our office had 376 less vital record requests (279 birth applications) in the 2nd quarter of this year, compared to the 1st quarter (pre-COVID). That’s a revenue loss of over \$8,100! With the R.E.A.L. ID deadline being extended to October 2021 that was another huge factor on why the requests slowed down.

We are continuing to have one staff member work from home until our counter traffic picks up. This person is able to work on our daily documents as well as our older documents. We have back indexed 6,673+ documents since the middle of March. Making more documents available online = more revenue for the County. Slowly but surely we are advancing to our normal work environment.

Treasurer

Vonnie Ritchie Treasurer

Barron County adopted the ACT 185 Resolution on April 21, 2020, 34 other municipalities have also adopted similar resolutions. The Town of Sioux Creek and the Village of New Auburn are **not** adopting a resolution so nothoring changes for their taxpayers. What taxpayers need to know is that if their municipality adopts the resolution, interest and penalty will be waived on only postponed taxes if they are paid by October 1, 2020. This ACT does not change the due date of July 31, 2020 so the taxes shown on our system may show as delinquent if they are unpaid in August. We will proceed with the tax certificates on September 1, 2020 per Wisconsin Statutes. Interest and penalty continue to accumulate at the rate of 1.5% per month starting February 1st for any taxes that were delinquent in February for all municipalities. 7511 (11,427 parcels) postponed reminder postcards were sent out on Thursday, June 25, 2020, and 631 (712 parcels) delinquent notices were mailed on June 30, 2020. These notices did not include parcels in the City of Rice Lake as they collect all 3 installments through July 31st.

We are recommending that taxes be paid online or by mail due to the COVID-19 virus. There are additional processing fees for online payments. We also have a drop box by the main entrance of the Government Center (Monroe Ave) and we will mail receipts to those using the drop box. The drop box has been used much more than in past years but we are glad that it was in place and available for payments for all Government Center Office use. If you have questions please feel free to contact us.

Clerk of Courts

Sharon Millermon Clerk of Courts

The April update informed readers of the courts and Justice Center remaining open during the present COVID-19 pandemic. This update informs readers of the safety steps taken for jury trials to resume.

To date, three jury trials have proceeded since June 1st. Barron County was second to Bayfield County in the State to resume jury trials. Even some county board supervisors experienced firsthand the preparation and efforts put forth to safely hold jury trials.

In the past, the jury bailiff and I alone have signed in and directed jurors. This task now is much more staff intensive and it involves all deputy clerks that are available to assist in keeping jurors 6' apart and directing the juror to their assigned seating.

Steps being taken to safely resume jury trials are:

1. Jurors are asked to remain in the parking lot when they arrive for a jury trial. Prior to entering the Justice Center, the juror is asked COVID screening questions provided by Laura Sauve, Barron County's Public Health Officer, to which I am grateful for her guidance. To date, three jurors have been sent home as a precaution.
2. Once inside the Justice Center, a registered nurse takes the juror's temperature.
3. All people entering the Justice Center must wear a face covering as well as all court staff when in a courtroom with in court appearances including jury trials.
4. Jurors then sign in and are seated in a courtroom by deputy clerks. Video conferencing is used in the jury selection process to stream between two courtrooms.
5. Both jury deliberation rooms are used to social distance the 12 jurors for breaks and lunch. Four restrooms are available for jurors to use.
6. Seating in the courtrooms and jury deliberation rooms have been measured and marked 6' apart. A tape measurer has become part of my office décor.
7. No communal coffee pot or snacks are available. Lunch is delivered in individual containers with eating utensils being wrapped in plastic and condiments individually packaged.
8. Jurors must always sit in the same seat in the jury deliberation room and courtroom.
9. The Emergency Operations Center is used for jury deliberation.
10. Hand sanitizers, bottles of disinfectant, paper towels, gloves, masks, etc. are all available for jurors. In addition if notes are taken by the juror, the pad of paper and pen are sent home with the juror.
11. Jury deliberation rooms are disinfected daily.

For those prospective jurors who are anxious about being in a public building and truly concerned about their health, I have been lenient in moving the juror to a different panel. Somewhat surprisingly during this pandemic, very few jurors have expressed fear or concern about serving as a juror and understand the constitutional right to a jury trial. It is truly a pleasure working with Barron County citizens.

Having mentioned all of the precautionary steps and procedures implemented to resume jury trials safely, we all know that at any given time depending on the health of our county/world, it is subject to change. Keep safe Barron County!

Waste to Energy / Recycling

Ray Zeman, Director

Financials

The Waste to Energy and Recycling Facility financials are solid at the mid-year. The Recycling cash and cash equivalents are \$1,051,825 and the Waste to Energy cash and cash equivalents are \$534,585 as of June 30th.

Recycling

The Recycling Department is experiencing an influx of contamination received from the drop box sites. With this increase in contamination we are also seeing a decrease in sales of recyclables. Sales of recyclables has decreased from \$27,915 to \$10,679 during the same time frame last year. This decrease in sales has been offset by the increase in the per parcel charge. With this decrease in sales and an added cost to recycle, the Solid Waste board has approved a change in the way we recycle. Barron County will be merging to manned sites and also reducing the number of drop off sites from 15 to 10. This attempt will allow us to have a face to face contact with the public to help with recycling practices. Implementation of the transition into manned sites will take place for the remainder of the year. During this transition we will be purchasing new style boxes, fencing and signage.

A new recycling truck is in the quoting stage for the recycling center. We hope to have the new purchase finalized within the 3rd quarter.

We will begin installation of the public dumping site early September. This will be located to the west of the tipping floor area. The public dumping site will provide access for private customers to unload their waste and recyclables away from the contracted haulers. This area will be an elevated drop off zone where the customer will discard their waste over a railing into a roll off container.

Waste to Energy

The first half of 2020 has been a very busy and productive period for WTE. The EPA alleged finding of violation of 03-14-2019 has been resolved and closed. This EPA FOV started on 03-14-2019 and was resolved early May 2020 with a CAFO (Consent Agreement and Final Order). The penalty paid of \$33k was a very small fraction of the suggested penalty. A major portion of the EPA FOV was regarding a stack test that was performed in October of 2016. This CAFO closes the EPA FOV without the county agreeing to any wrong doing.

The water treatment system that has been in the process of procurement for some time now is being installed currently and will be in operation by the end of August.

Incinerator major repairs have been completed on one of the incinerators and is performing excellent. This major repair was a refractory lining in approximately 50 % of the #2 unit.

The WTE air operating permit will expire 06-28-2021 and the renewal process is well under way. Included within this air permit renewal is a construction permit that will include a new acid gas removal system, expansion from 100 tons per day to 150 tons per day and an expansion in duct sizing prior to the boilers. This application process deadline is late December 2020 and will be finished and sent to WDNR late August. The process of this air permit renewal and construction permit will take several years for completion. Once Barron County has the WDNR approved air permit with construction permit than the installation of the new acid gas removal system and duct expansion can take place. Typically there is an 18 month to 36 month time period for completion of these projects. Upon completion of these large projects, BCWTE will have the capability to burn more waste in a more environmentally friendly way. The expansion triggers what is called NSPS (New Source Performance Standard). This standard is more stringent for air emissions. The addition of the new acid gas removal system will allow us to not only improve our emissions but also allow us to obtain this more cost effectively due to the efficient use of lime that is injected into the system for acid gas control.

Currently we are installing an updated operating system for the incinerators and boilers. This new operating system is replacing a portion that is 34 years old. We have been involved with this update for several years. Upon completion of this installation we will have the capability to expand controls and operation of the facility. The cost of this update is \$25,000.

The new ash truck, a 2020 Freightliner has been purchased and is now in operation. A new ash trailer is also on order and will be in operation by mid-September.

The wheel loaders that load the waste into the incinerators will have a new addition in the upcoming year. We are on schedule to update one of the loaders every two years.

COVID-19

COVID-19 has also effected how waste has been brought to the facility. We have experienced a large increase of private customers. During this same time period last year we have received double the amount of waste that private customers have delivered. 2019 individual waste received thru June was \$103,107 and 2020 for the same time period is \$193,824.