OTTAWA COUNTY GROUNDWATER BOARD

DATE: April 16, 2025

PLACE: Ottawa County Fillmore Complex, Conference Room E

PRESENT: Adam Elenbaas, Dean Smith, Sarah Bowman, Scott Meullerleile, Jerry Geertman, Carrie Rivette, Curtis Carini, Patrick Staskiewicz, Jennifer Jermalowicz-Jones, Dave Kraker, Joe Bush, Phil Kuyers, Sara Pearson, Lee Machiela

ABSENT: Jordan Jorritsma, Henry Werksma, Ted Malefyt, Mark Baker

STAFF: Matthew Chappuies, Paul Sachs, Andrew Roszkowski, Jason Shamblin, Drew Shaw

PUBLIC: Steve Hecksel, Eric Kangas

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Elenbaas called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

Chappuies conducted role call. Quorum is established and 2/3rds are in attendance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

GWB 25 - 06 Rivette moved to approve the April 16, 2025 agenda. The motion passed.

UNANIMOUS

OLD BUSINESS

A. Approval of the February 19, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Rivette noted that the next meeting was incorrectly listed as Thursday and should be corrected to Wednesday.

GWB 25 – 07 Rivette moved to approve the amended February 19, 2025 Minutes. The motion passed.

UNANIMOUS

B. Shallow Wells Work Group Update

Paul Sachs, Director of the Department of Strategic Impact, provided an update on the Shallow Wells Work Group, which reconvened on March 28. Nine participants were present for the discussion, however, Representative Meerman and his staff were unable to attend, and as a result no updates were available regarding his review of the well code or related deviation standards.

Despite their absence, the group discussed the existing local shallow well policy administered by the Environmental Health Division, with additional focus on related efforts involving landscaping and irrigation. Sachs noted that the conversation was productive and resulted in the drafting of preliminary meeting minutes.

At this time, the working group recommends reconvening for further discussion before any guidance or recommendations are shared more broadly.

C. Composition of Board Membership

The proposed updates to the Bylaws and Rules of the Groundwater Board were brought forward for final approval. As the updates had been discussed at length during previous meetings, no further detailed review was provided .

GWB 25 – 08 Patrick Staskiewicz moved to approve the proposed amendments to the Bylaws and Rules of the Groundwater Board. The motion was supported by Carrie Rivette. The motion passed.

UNANIMOUS

PERTINENT PROJECT UPDATES

A. State Appropriation

Matt Chappuies provided an update on the state appropriation for the groundwater initiative. He shared that the County's request for a 24-month extension to the original 2025 funding deadline has been approved by the State of Michigan. The new expiration date is now set for 2027.

This extension allows the team additional time to continue the installation of groundwater monitoring stations and to carry forward with the broader objectives of the program, including outreach and data collection efforts.

B. Education/Outreach

i. Allendale Christian School

Chappuies shared an update on the recent outreach collaboration with Allendale Christian School. In February, staff visited sixth-grade classrooms where students created original groundwater-themed board games. Approximately 15 to 20 student groups participated, each developing their own game to help communicate local groundwater issues through creative, hands-on learning.

Chappuies, Andrew Roszkowski, and Paul Sachs attended the event and were able to demo the games alongside the students. The event was well-received and is expected to become a recurring component of the school's curriculum.

Paul Sachs added that the teacher has consistently incorporated groundwater education into his lessons and has been refining the board game concept each year. He has expressed interest in eventually producing a finalized educational board game, potentially in partnership with individuals from Grand Valley State University who have experience in game design.

ii. Water Quality Forum

Chappuies reported on the team's participation in the recent Water Quality Forum held last month. The County hosted a booth at the event and had the opportunity to engage with numerous community members regarding groundwater issues.

The event saw significant public turnout, with approximately 350 attendees. Several Groundwater Board members were also present. Chappuies noted that the forum

generated notable interest, including a TV news story that evening highlighting Ottawa County's groundwater challenges.

iii. Brochure

Chappuies also shared that the team is in the process of developing a comprehensive educational brochure designed to clearly explain the County's groundwater issues. The brochure aims to summarize both the challenges and the County's efforts in a concise and accessible format. While the existing video content has been effective, there has not yet been a single printed resource that captures the full narrative. The brochure is being produced in collaboration with consultants and other County staff, with a final draft expected within the next month.

iv. Kiosk

In addition, Chappuies announced the rollout of a new interactive kiosk, currently configured as a touchscreen computer. The team successfully tested the kiosk during the Water Quality Forum and received positive feedback. The unit provides access to overview videos, groundwater diagrams, and an interactive map, and will serve as a mobile display for use at public events, festivals, and possible other internal locations. Ongoing improvements are being made to enhance its functionality and presentation.

C. Native Landscaping

i. Sign Project

Matt Chappuies provided updates on the County's native landscaping initiative. Now entering its third year, the landscape is expected to reach full maturity this spring. Chappuies noted significant growth and development last season and expressed optimism about continued improvements in the coming year.

He also reported that interpretive signage for the project is currently on-going. Draft content has been completed, and the County is working with a local sign manufacturer to fabricate and install the signs when they become available.

Paul Sachs added that a full season of data has already been collected on the outcomes of the project. Previously shared statistics highlighted nearly $7,000 in cost savings and the conservation of over 250,000+ gallons of irrigation water. These results have drawn interest from local school districts, municipalities, and other organizations eager to learn from the County's demonstration project. The team plans to continue expanding these efforts and sharing lessons learned as part of its "lead by example" approach.

ii. Other Sites

Chappuies noted that while the demonstration site has shown success, several other County-owned locations still utilize traditional turf grass. Plans have already been

drafted to replace turf grass at sites including the James Street campus and the Hudsonville Courthouse building.

Last year, the team submitted a request for Capital Improvement Project (CIP) funding to support these efforts but was not awarded funds. Despite this, the team remains committed to pursuing funding opportunities and plans to reapply in a future CIP cycle with a robust and complete ready-to-approve type plan. The goal is to continue expanding native landscaping efforts across County properties as part of a broader sustainability strategy.

D. Groundwater Monitoring

The total number of active sites has temporarily decreased from 11 to 10 due to the removal of the monitoring well at the Blendon Township Hall. However, efforts are underway to replace this site.

Several new monitoring locations are currently under review for approval by both the Water Resources Commissioner's Office and the Parks Department. Chappuies noted that, pending approval, drilling could resume within the next one to two months, with the goal of establishing up to 10 new sites.

E. Surface Water Monitoring

The County is developing a partnership with the Careerline Tech Center to implement a new surface water monitoring initiative. Students will be involved in installing a network of monitoring stations at various sites across the County, beginning as early as this summer or fall.

The project team is currently working with the Water Resources Department and the Road Commission to secure access to bridge locations suitable for equipment installation. The planned monitoring stations will vary by site. Some of these locations will feature basic streamflow gauges while others may include water quality sensors.

The Careerline Tech Center is drafting a monitoring protocol, which will undergo review before deployment. Chappuies noted that the USGS is also expanding its network stream gauges, and the County is exploring potential coordination or co-location opportunities. However, USGS requirements for equipment and data quality may not align with the County’s approach at all sites.

The County intends for these surface water monitoring sites to be semi-permanent, with an expected lifespan of at least 10 years. Data collected will help inform broader groundwater and hydrological efforts and are planned to be shared with relevant local, state and federal partners where appropriate.

F. Modeling

Chappuies provided an update on the County's efforts to evaluate groundwater modeling technologies. The team is currently exploring a range of both established and emerging methods for developing high-quality 3D models. Multiple technologies and firms are under consideration.

Given the significant investment being made in data collection, Chappuies emphasized the importance of channeling that data into a robust, adaptable model that can be updated continuously over time. While no final decision has been made regarding the modeling platform or approach, the County remains committed to supporting this initiative and will continue to assess its options moving forward.

G. Masterplan/Zoning Composite Mapping & Analysis

Paul Sachs presented an upcoming initiative designed to support local governments in integrating groundwater data into their land use planning efforts. Ottawa County is home to 24 local jurisdictions, each with its own master plan and zoning ordinances. To assist these communities, the County is beginning a project to compile existing master plans into a composite map using Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

The team will overlay this composite with key data layers, such as areas of groundwater concern, zones of drawdown, and locations of existing infrastructure. By visualizing this information on a countywide scale, the project aims to identify locations where current planning and zoning may not align with groundwater challenges or infrastructure capacity.

This tool is intended to be informative and will be shared with local governments to help initiate discussions. The goal is to encourage thoughtful review of local zoning considering regional groundwater conditions and to offer support where adjustments may be beneficial.

H. Pertinent Updates from Board Members

i. Board members discussed challenges related to promoting native landscaping, particularly the limited commercial availability and higher cost of native plants. The conversation explored the potential role of local greenhouses in supporting groundwater-friendly landscaping, as well as the broader messaging strategy of the Board.

Questions were raised about whether the Board should promote exclusively native species or encourage any drought-tolerant alternatives that reduce irrigation needs. Members also noted the complexity of asking businesses to promote water conservation practices that may not align with their traditional sales models.

The discussion shifted toward the importance of a broader water conservation message. Suggestions included focusing on education around efficient irrigation

practices, such as drip systems, as a practical and accessible way to reduce outdoor water use while maintaining attractive landscapes.

ii. Jennifer Jermalowicz-Jones briefly shared updates from recent projects in Wexford County, where elevated PFAS concentrations were identified in some well samples near Lake Mitchell and the City of Cadillac. This prompted a short discussion among board members regarding PFAS testing and associated costs.

Staff noted that Ottawa County is not currently conducting PFAS sampling, due in part to the high cost. Members were encouraged to reference the State of Michigan's MPART website for existing PFAS data and statewide sampling efforts.

The group briefly discussed the possibility of spatial comparisons between state-monitored wells and local sites, though no immediate action was determined.

iii. Sara Pearson provided an update on a five-year, DNR-funded statewide aggregate mapping project led by the Michigan Geological Survey. She explained the potential connections between geological formations identified in the mapping and groundwater recharge areas. The aggregate mapping data, typically utilized for economic development, may also be integrated into composite mapping efforts for natural resource management, including groundwater considerations.

iv. Sarah Bowman from the Conservation District reported a busy start to the year with ongoing spring tree and plant sales. They hold an annual plant sale in the spring and in the fall. This year has seen a significant increase in pre-orders for garden kits which are pre-selected plant groupings designed for specific habitats. Pre-orders rose from 51 kits last year to 157 this year, indicating growing community interest. The main sale day is scheduled for May 17th, offering individual plants on a first-come, first-served basis. The event's Facebook page shows over 1,100 interested participants, suggesting high demand. These sales serve both as a fundraising opportunity and to increase availability of native plants, which remain limited in many nurseries.

v. Jason Shamblin, Ottawa County Parks Director announced that a native planting workshop is scheduled for May. This will be the first in a planned series of workshops focused on native plantings.

vi. Pat Staskiewicz from the Road Commission provided several updates:

He spoke with State leaders at a recent forum regarding efforts to regulate data centers. EWWA Government Affairs is currently collaborating on it. The outcome is still uncertain, but momentum appears to be building.

In response to a board inquiry, Pat investigated Iowa's use of small-diameter water mains for drinking water. While such systems are used there with accompanying fire

protection plans, EGLE maintains that fire protection remains the primary barrier to adopting similar systems locally.

Water Use Advisory Council Meeting: highlights include key topics from the recent meeting, encouraging board members to view the recorded session online for further details:

i. *Michigan Hydrologic Network*: A developing initiative to consolidate public and private groundwater models into a centralized repository, allowing for greater accessibility and reuse.
ii. *Integrated Water Management Database*: A complex effort to connect various water data systems across the state without duplicating data storage.
iii. *USGS Transition Probability Modeling*: A new machine learning-based approach to simplify and speed up groundwater modeling. The system uses high-powered models to generate patterns, allowing for quicker, publicly accessible versions based on those outputs.

He noted that many of these initiatives have been long in discussion and are now beginning to show results.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Eric Kangas of Spring Lake gave public comment regarding water quality concerns.

ADJOURNMENT

GWB 25 - 09 Chair adjourned the meeting at 10:30 am.