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**\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\***

September 29, 2015

**County Commissioners Prepare for Strategic and Financial Future**

**Traverse City** – On Wednesday, September 23, Grand Traverse County Commissioners met and heard a preliminary report from the county’s independent financial analyst, Stephen Peacock. According to that report, in 2016, the county will be confronted with a \$3.4 million structural deficit, with increased shortages projected for the coming years. The projected deficits are affected by dollars committed to current defined benefit plans for employees, post-employment retirement obligations, and dam removal. According to the report, the county’s projected revenue is not enough to offset those liabilities.

“Now that we have defined what we are facing,” said County Commission Chair Christine Maxbauer, “we believe this is an opportunity to follow a more sustainable path, and purposefully address the issue.”

County Commissioner Alisa Kroupa said she appreciates what the independent financial analysis has shown so far, because “it puts out there our true structural deficit, which was solved by borrowing from fund balance for many years, and reveals our outstanding debt.”

During the County Commission’s September 23 Ways and Means Committee meeting, the possibility of eliminating county services was raised by Commissioner Addison Wheelock, Jr. Kroupa agrees that the level of services to the community could be affected, and says, “We will work with staff and the community to minimize the impact on the public we serve.” Kroupa added that she ran for office “to bring our county’s financial issues to light, and to work as a team to solve them.”

County Commission Vice Chair Dan Lathrop said he prefers to address the County’s financial situation now, “when we’re in control...do the best we can with it rather than have an emergency manager come in and do it.”

Peacock stated that the county’s current financial situation is “fixable”, but that “ignoring it will be a problem,” and “fixing it will be the hard part.”

The county’s independent financial analyst will return to present a more comprehensive report to the County Commission in October. Prior to the report, it is anticipated that commissioners will finalize the County’s mission statement, articulate their common vision and values, and discuss potential strategies for fulfilling the mission during the second strategic planning session to be held on Saturday, October 2, at Twin Lakes Park. According to Maxbauer, “An agreed upon mission will drive how we address the county’s projected deficits.”

The County Board of Commissioners holds its regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, September 30, and looks forward to discussing a resolution in support of the Commission on Aging’s planned Traverse City Senior Center Renovation project, and deciding whether to accept grants that have been awarded to the County Planning and Development Department.

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