



"In the Spirit of Town Government"

AGENDA MEMORANDUM

To: Honorable Town Chairperson and Town Supervisors
From: Michael J.D. Brown, Administrator
Date: May 19, 2026
RE: Road Survey

SUMMARY: In April 2019 the Town held an advisory referendum to seek voters’ opinions on how they would prefer to pay for road reconstruction. This resulted in the Town developing a Transportation Utility to assist with paying for road projects as well as a financing plan which looked to utilize debt to pay for projects. In addition, an engineering and drainage study was prepared which resulted in development of a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

In 2022 a law suit was filed challenging the Town’s Utility Transportation. In June 2023 the WI Supreme Court invalidated the Transportation Utility which led the Town to have discussions on how to continue to fund the CIP as well as reevaluate its CIP.

Below is a summary of meetings related to the discussions that ensued since June 2023. Additional meeting agenda/minutes can be found at <https://www.townofbuchanan.org/your-government/agendas-minutes>.

At the **July 18, 2023** meeting the Board had a budget discussion.
https://granicus_production_attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/buchanan/6a4fd4c58aba170634d51c8cf503c67d0.pdf.

At the **August 15, 2023** Special Board meeting the Board had a budget discussion.
https://granicus_production_attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/buchanan/9fa06f40c2db11130670310521c1c57b0.pdf.

At the **September 19, 2023** meeting the Board decided to utilize debt to fund the CIP up to \$1.5 million/year.
https://granicus_production_attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/buchanan/c49feebb4788a8d18a15211d3b8f5eaa0.pdf.

At the **May 21, 2024** meeting, Supervisor Knuppel requested a discussion be held regarding referendum to fund road projects and Supervisor Meyer concurred.

At the **June 18, 2024** meeting Baird presented information regarding this topic which they presented similar information at the September 19, 2023 Board meeting. Additionally, at the June 18, 2024 meeting the Board requested additional information from Baird to show what the numbers would look like if there was a combination of borrowing and referendum used to fund capital projects.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=751&doc_id=a07336fe-2f2a-11ef-81ef-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=751

At the **July 16, 2024** meeting the Board heard from Baird and discussed their updated numbers based on the Board's request from the June 18, 2024 meeting. The Board decided to schedule a Special Meeting to further discuss this topic and bring it back to the August 20, 2024 meeting for consideration.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=758&doc_id=e9729a60-4458-11ef-8c72-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=758

At the **July 24, 2024** Special Meeting the Board continued discussion.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=760&doc_id=4d13b70a-4aa6-11ef-8c72-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=760

At the **August 20, 2024** Board meeting the Board discussed the following items. No action was taken other than a request to bring this back for the January 2025 meeting for further discussion.

- Staff was asked to investigate what would be involved if a firm was hired to assist with a referendum regarding process, chance of success and cost. Staff reached out to Wisconsin municipalities and the firm that was talked about was Mueller Communications. Staff spoke with Mueller Communications and learned it has a three-phase approach to referendums, more information can be found at their website at https://www.muellercommunications.com/case_study/about-referendum-work/.
 - The first two phases are to gauge the public and get a sense whether a referendum will be successful, the last phase is the education/marketing phase leading up to the referendum. If all three phases were completed there wouldn't be time to hold a referendum in April of 2025. If only phase 3 (education/marketing) is used then an April 2025 referendum could be possible as long as the work is initiated by November 2024. Staff believes all three phases are important for a successful referendum.
 - Based on staff's research by seeking input from other municipalities and Mueller Communications and previous information from Baird, a referendum for roads would be more difficult than an operations referendum since borrowing is an option. The time of year a referendum is put on the ballot should also be a consideration. Since April is the local election, in order to not make a referendum question political, it may be a better option to place it on a November ballot, which the next one would be November 2026.
 - Mueller Communications indicated phases 1 (7-10 weeks) & 2 (8-10 weeks) cost estimate would be approximately \$48,000 while phase 3 (12-16 weeks) would be approximately \$31,000. They indicated some communities that go through the first 2 phases decide not to hold a referendum if the results show there isn't support. These estimates were provided in 2024.

- The Board also asked whether the Town is spending enough on its annual Capital Improvement projects of approximately \$2 million per year and whether it should be more aggressive with completing projects and increase annual spending.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=763&doc_id=dd5d5de5-5fea-11ef-bafe-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=763

At the **January 21, 2025** meeting the Board discussed further and wanted to keep this topic on future agendas for further discussion. Staff recommended the Board wait to make any decisions until after the April election as there will be one new Supervisor and possibly two.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=780&doc_id=d445eca2-d8ed-11ef-a9e2-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=780

At the **February 25, 2025** meeting the Board further discussed this topic.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=784&doc_id=d427b69f-f476-11ef-ab6a-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=784

March 18, 2025: I attended the WCMA conference and attended two sessions on February 27, 2025 regarding referendums. The first was titled “Pass or Fail? Best Practices for a Successful Levy Limit Referendum” and the second was titled “Pre-Referendum Communications”. The slide decks are attached for reference and I encourage the Board to review them. Interestingly, both case studies of communities used were referendums that failed. While the majority of municipal referendums are for operations, attached is a list of communities that successfully passed road referendums. Unfortunately, the Department of Revenue (DOR) doesn’t require communities to notify them if they hold a referendum (only if they pass), so there isn’t data on the success rate of referendums.

In addition to a communication consultant, it is also recommended a financial consultant is contracted with to assist with the financial analysis and structuring the levy amount requested, which could cost approximately \$10,000 on the high side; it depends on the needs and amount of time spent on the project. In addition, legal fees would also be incurred.

Additionally, the following link provides data from the DOR regarding successful referendums, click on the Referendum Counts Tab

https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/research.policy/viz/LevyLimit0_2/Story1

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=788&doc_id=df6e8666-04e5-11f0-ab6a-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=788

April 22, 2025: Chair Joe Coenen provided a PowerPoint presentation regarding borrowing v. referendum. The Board acknowledged and discussed the need to increase spending on roads as it will be difficult to catch up if the Town doesn't spend more each year. The Board requested staff and Cedar to update the CIP to provide options for increasing spending each year and move Block Rd up due to concerns with quality of the road but also safety concerns heard at the annual meeting on April 15, 2025. The plan is to have this prepared for the June 24, 2025 meeting.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=791&doc_id=3f27aece-26a2-11f0-9f54-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=791

May 20, 2025: The Board continued discussion. As there are two new Board members since April, Chair Coenen asked each of them to prepare a list of pros/cons for borrowing/referendum for future discussion. A traffic count was requested to be performed for Block Rd. Staff reached out to East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and they performed traffic counts for vehicles and bike/ped the week of June 2nd. They will use this as a baseline data and then also prepare traffic forecasts based on planned development in the area including the new Culvers and residential subdivision going in on Block/Debruin Rd as well as the Kaukauna Middle School being planned for just east of STH 55. This information should be available for the July meeting for further discussion.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=794&doc_id=b2038154-3661-11f0-856f-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=794

June 24, 2025: Staff recommends discussing Borrowing v. Referendum in tandem with the Capital Improvement Plan discussion at the end of the meeting. In addition to the updated CIP, staff had Baird prepare updated borrowing v. referendum cost scenarios based on the request to increase spending on the CIP (attached).

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=799&doc_id=3583dc86-52b7-11f0-b7f5-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=799

July 15, 2025: At the June 24, 2025 meeting the Town Board voted to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire a referendum consultant to assist with investigating if a capital improvement referendum would be supported. The Board also asked to hold interviews with firms that are selected for

consideration. The RFP is attached for consideration. I would also like to discuss with the Board a date we can schedule to hold interviews in August.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=802&doc_id=3715ebca-6274-11f0-b7f5-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=802

September 16, 2025: The Town Board held a special meeting on August 19, 2025 to meet with referendum consultants and directed staff to move forward to work with Mueller Communications and Community Perceptions on developing a survey to evaluate if a capital road referendum would be successful. Depending on the results of the survey the Town may move forward with a referendum and engage these companies to engage in phase two of the project which includes an education and communication campaign regarding a referendum to be held.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=810&doc_id=1d5b99eb-93dc-11f0-8df7-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=810

January 20, 2026: Since the Town Board approved the contract with Mueller Communications and Community Perceptions, staff has been working with them and providing information per their requests in order to develop a survey to gauge whether a capital referendum would be successful. Attached is a memo from the consultants with a recommendation not to conduct a survey. The consultants will be available the night of the meeting to discuss this further.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=825&doc_id=a17a0c8f-f6ec-11f0-bb28-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=825

February 24, 2026: At the January 20, 2026 meeting the referendum consultants discussed its recommendation with the Town Board not to perform a survey to ask the public if it would support a levy increase through referendum to pay for road projects identified in the Town's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The Board still had interest in developing a survey to ask residents how they feel about the CIP and how to move forward with fixing the roads, even if it isn't how to pay for them. The consultants did caution the Board with going forward with a survey asking the residents about the CIP and road projects as the results could be contrary to the plan already in place as well as road projects already completed since the CIP was first developed in 2020. The CIP was developed with the plan to reconstruct roads with curb/gutter/storm sewer in order to fix the drainage problems which also removes water from the road base which in turn extends the life of the roads, thereby saving money in the long term as well as improving drainage issues. The Board planned to submit questions to the Administrator by Friday January

23, 2026 for the consultants to use in developing a survey to be brought back for discussion at the February 24, 2026 meeting. The Consultants will present the draft survey the night of the meeting. While the consultants have drafted a survey they still recommend not sending one out.

To provide some additional perspective on this conversation, back in 2014/2015 Springfield Dr. was reconstructed. The Town contracted with its engineer to perform a drainage study as there were drainage issues and the Town engineer recommended curb/gutter/storm sewer. The residents on Springfield attended a Special Town Board meeting (October 6, 2014) and were against it and wanted to keep ditches. The Town Board voted to move forward with keeping ditches at its regular meeting (October 21, 2014). Since the project was completed, there are still drainage issues/complaints and there have been residents that have voiced concerns about the project and wished curb/gutter/storm sewer was installed; even Town Board members acknowledged this during a meeting after the project was complete (May 6, 2016).

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=829&doc_id=5e5b72fb-1256-11f1-bb28-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=829

March 17, 2026: At the February 24, 2026 meeting the Town Board reviewed the draft survey with the consultants. While there wasn't agreement on moving forward with a survey from all Board members, there was direction given to the consultants to make slight modifications to the survey. The consultants revised the survey and it was sent to the Board members ahead of the meeting to review and provide feedback. The consultants will be available during the meeting to discuss the revised draft survey.

Minutes w/agenda attachments:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=831&doc_id=4ae4bd96-22db-11f1-bb28-005056a89546

Video:

https://buchanan.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=831

May 19, 2026: At the March 17, 2026 meeting the Town Board voted to move forward with the road survey. Staff worked with the consultants to get it finalized, mailed out and encouraged residents to fill it out via the Town website, multiple Facebook posts as well as had information available during the April 7, 2026 election. The consultants will present the results of the survey at the meeting and be available to have discussion with the Town Board on possible next steps. After the meeting the results will be posted to the Town's website.

Previously Discussed Timeline and Actions: Based on the information provided, if the Board is interested in going for referendum, staff recommends it should hire a communication firm as well as a financial firm to assist and place it on the November 2026 ballot. If successful, the levy would be able to be put on the tax roll and collected for fiscal year 2027 capital improvement projects. Based on timing, the Town will be required to borrow in 2026 to cover the projects planned which include CTH N (County project with grant funding the Town agreed to participate in through a formal agreement) and Eisenhower Dr. Trail (DOT grant project the Town agreed to participate in through a formal agreement that must adhere to timing requirements).

If a referendum is pursued and a firm(s) is(are) hired the following timeline should be taken into consideration to allow ample time for the process as well as to meet statutory deadlines. Some additional buffer has been built in to the time line:

1. Board decision to pursue a referendum and seek a consultant: July 15, 2025
2. Preparation of RFP: July-August 2025
3. Board approval of RFP: August 19, 2025
4. Solicit proposals: September-October 2025
5. Board selection of a consultant: November 18, 2025
6. Referendum investigation initiated: December 2025
7. Board reviews investigation data and decision to pursue referendum May 19, 2026 (buffer provided if additional discussion is necessary, could be pushed as late as July 2026)
8. Referendum Process per Statute and Marketing: August through November 3, 2026. Specific timelines must be met with a Resolution being adopted in August per Statute requirements.
9. Referendum Held: Tuesday November 3, 2026

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Staff recommends the Town Board discuss the road survey results with the consultants to understand its options moving forward.

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Attachments: NONE