

# **County Board Chair Statement for Board Meeting 9/17/24**

You will notice that Public Comment is not on the agenda for tonight. That was my decision as Chair. We have a lot of work to get done tonight and I want us to be able to complete that work.

That said, I fully understand and appreciate that we have much to discuss as a County Board and, honestly, as a community. I have seen and heard some terrible accusations, innuendos, misinformation and flat out lies being spread throughout our community about people associated with our County government. This is outright hurtful. While community questions are welcomed and I'm happy to have face-to-face discussions with anybody and everybody with an interest in Richland County government, the rumor mongering which has gone on is not who we are. That's not how Richland County does business. That's not how we want to treat one another. We're better than that. When we have disagreements, we address them with each other and figure out the best way forward. That's not what's happening now, though. The online discussions I've seen are just disgusting. This has to stop.

I want to make it very clear that the Richland County Board supports the County Administrator. I'm not saying the County Administrator has never made a mistake – of course she has. We have all made mistakes. But for people to suggest that Ms. Pesch has done anything contrary to what she believes to be in the best interests of Richland County is absurd. She was hired to be the head of Richland County administration and carry out the policy direction this County Board establishes. The position requires some level of thick skin, but what I've seen her go through in the past few months is too much – nobody should have to endure that type of treatment. You can disagree with decisions, but the personal attacks I've seen recently against the Administrator, our Corporation Counsel, and other County staff sicken me. I've lived in Richland County my whole adult life and that's not who we are.

One sign of a healthy local government is a desire for citizens to want to know more about what is going on in their government. We had a great meeting recently about the condition of county facilities with over 100 people in the room and time for questions. While the discussions about the realities surrounding the condition of our facilities were not exactly pleasant, we all came away with a better understanding of the challenges and, most importantly, a desire to work together to do what is best for Richland County for ourselves and future generations.

We need more of that. We need citizens engaged with the County Board on important issues of the day. We need a County Board responsive to those citizens. We need a County Administrator empowered to carry out the mission the County Board establishes. We need our County team excited to come to work every day to serve our citizens. And, we have some really great people working in Richland County.

In an effort to move the conversation back in the direction of who we want and need to be as Richland County, I have called a special County Board meeting for next Tuesday, September 24, at 6:00 p.m. The agenda for the meeting will consist of:

1. Discussion with Attorney Andy Phillips and the Wisconsin Counties Association about roles and responsibilities in county government. This is a discussion Mr. Phillips has had with dozens of counties over the past few years and provides the foundation for our work as a County Board.

2. Sharing of information from the County perspective, followed by open question and answer time with the citizens of Richland County. We will not take any official action surrounding any particular topic, but this is an opportunity for anybody and everybody to ask questions about topics we know folks are discussing in the community: Pine Valley, the unfortunate cybersecurity incident, our ambulance service, or anything else our citizens want to discuss. In other words, this is an opportunity to have those face-to-face discussions that are so important to getting things done. If we need a bigger room, we'll get one. If people want to listen in online, we will make sure that can happen

I want to make it clear that while we will do our best to answer questions that people ask, this isn't going to be a debate. We will simply talk in a meaningful and respectful way and ask that you do the same.

I really look forward to our discussion next week and hope you do as well. In the meantime, I'm asking you as your Board Chair, as an elected county official, as a friend and as a long-time Richland County resident to please reserve judgment on issues until we all hear the full story and please refrain from participating in the spread of harmful rumors, which take away from our ability to get the real work of county government done.

Thank you and we'll talk more next Tuesday night.