

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING

Date: March 3, 2026

6:00 p.m.

Place: Basement of County Justice Center, Caledonia, MN

Members Present: Cindy Wright, Eric Johnson, Kurt Zehnder, Robert Schuldt, and Greg Myhre

Others Present: Interim Auditor/Treasurer Polly Heberlein, The Caledonia Argus Reporter Katia Gorsuch, Coordinator Brent Parker, EDA Director & Coordinator Support Allison Wagner, Interim Attorney Suzanne Bublitz, Sheriff Brian Swedberg, Roger Pearson, Tracy Pearson, Clayton Johnson, Dan Vesterse, Tony Schroeder, Joe Hastlez, Gary Gimble, Gary Oldenburg, Glenn Tullius, Donald Ott, Dave Weber, Rick Frank, Steve Reiman, Ramen Frankin, Jason VanGundy, Jeremy Van Gundy, Bob Borowiak, Curt Henderson, Marc Nelson, Dewayne Schroeder, Geoff Halverson, Kaleb Peterson, John Meyer, Jon Koche, Ryan Rohrer, Matt Johnson, Nathan Hahn, Larry Gaustad, Dan Solum, Marissa Solum, Nathan Lee, Damien Lampert, Dustin Miller, Jordan Jaster, Kathy Solum, Steve Bauer, Rande Gustafson, Mary Lou Gerand, Nick Schneider, Ricky Flatin, Russel Gerard, Jeff Frank, Kaleb Skauge, Chad Wiebke, John Hauser, Bruce Kuehmichel, Steve Massman, Bruce Vongroven, Jason Abnet, Bonnie Laumb, Jeanett Buttell, Mike Buttell, David Abts, Dylan Lee, Carter Chigilo, Owen Gee, John Tschumper, Edward Voight, Mike Solum, Shane Eastman, Sam Fattig, Amy Fattig, Scott DeWitt, Deanna DeWitt, Jeff Abrams, Kay M Capps Cross, Michael Sieve, Chris Bjerke, Nick Bjerke, Bruce Lee, Mark Bird, Jason Wiebke, Mark Weichert, Susan Schneider, Bo Hamlin, and Nathanael Culver

Presiding: Chairperson Myhre

Call to order Special Meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Motion was made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Schuldt, motion unanimously carried to approve the agenda.

APPOINTMENTS

A public hearing on the use of rifles for deer hunting in Houston County was started. Minnesota Statutes § 97B.031, Subd. 7 had authorized a county board located in the former

shotgun zone to adopt an ordinance after notice and public hearing to limit the type of firearms that may be used to hunt deer within the county if they chose to do so.

Dave Weber from Money Creek said he was strongly in favor of allowing rifles for deer hunting. He said safety came down to the shooter not the firearm.

Russel Gerard from Wilmington Township said he was looking forward to hunting with a rifle. He said he could think of plenty of reasons people should be able to use rifles. He said they were nice to shoot, and nice for kids to shoot. Rifles were already legal in Minnesota, and his daughter used a rifle. He said he was 63 and looking forward to spending the rest of his years hunting with a rifle. Gerard said most of the comments made about safety at the previous meeting were from the “big buck crowd”. He said he filled his freezer with food. He did not think safety was an actual issue.

Donald Ott from the Mound Prairie area said he thought rifles were safer to use. He said Wisconsin numbers supported this. He also said using rifles would lower the cost of hunting. He said rifles were more accurate and had a more effective kill.

Nathanael Culver from Hokah Township said rifles should be allowed. He said he hunted in Fillmore and Houston County. He argued that shotguns were more dangerous than rifles. He said rifles were less likely to get caught up in brush.

Roger Pearson from Caledonia said he was not in favor of using rifles for deer hunting. He said he had drivers training, but even though he had the training he didn’t always follow the rules. He was against rifle use.

Glenn Tullius from La Crescent and Money Creek said he grew up near Fountain City. He said statistics were excellent for Minnesota safety. He was in favor of using rifles. He said he was sorry the Commissioners had to make the decision.

Dustin Miller was in favor of using rifles for deer hunting. He said he hunted all year long and used bow, shotgun, and rifle.

Dylan Lee from Houston said he thought it was safer to use a rifle. He said a vast number of people shot rifles at coyotes four months out of the year. He said as long as people were safe the equipment they used shouldn’t matter.

Jeff Frank said he had lived in Minnesota for nine years. He also hunted near Fort McCoy and in Wisconsin. He said he lived in La Crosse as a youth and at the time it was a shotgun only territory. He said since the rule changed in Wisconsin there had not been any issues that he was aware of. He said his daughter was 14 years old and he wanted her to be able to use a rifle that was easiest to be able to hold. He was in favor of rifles.

David Abts said he was in the Gopher State Sportsman Club, a youth coach, and firearm safety instructor. He said rifles would benefit youth and those who were not able bodied. He said using rifles would help smaller stature shooters. He said rifles could be lighter than shotguns. He said carrying a lighter gun allowed for a safer hunt as the shooter would be less fatigued.

Jeanett Buttell said she was a lifelong resident of Houston County. She was against the use of rifles. She said it scared her to think of sitting in a tree stand with her grandchildren with rifles. She said the area she hunted was a very hilly property and she had safety concerns.

Kaleb Peterson from Hokah said he was a police rifleman and also in the national guard. He said he was in favor of legalizing rifles. He said he didn't believe it was other people's business to tell people what they could hunt with. He said there were laws in place for individuals. He said shotguns were more expensive.

Jeremy Van Gundy from Houston said the DNR first introduced the rule as a deer management tool. He said decisions should be made based on facts not feelings.

Clayton Johnson from Black Hammer Township said he had created a video that had been shared with the Commissioners. He was against the use of rifles for deer hunting as he was concerned about safety. He said he was concerned about people hunting from the road.

Daryl Melbostad from Spring Grove said hunting with a rifle was more ethical. He said landowners should have the option to say what people could and could not hunt with. He said he didn't believe the State of Minnesota gave the Commissioners an easy job.

Bob Borowiak from Houston said the County had received over 300 signatures from people saying they wanted the County to opt out of the new rule. He asked how many signatures had been received from the other side. He said he thought someone who signed their name to something was more powerful than a verbal statement.

Rande Gustafson from Winnebago Valley said he was not a deer hunter as he didn't like the cold or the meat. He said he was not sure if he was for or against the use of rifles. He said his land bordered State land. He said he had heard that tourism might increase. He said if that happened concerns would also need to be addressed. He had had issues with trespassers and had been told by the DNR that they could not respond for a week due to lack of workers. He was concerned about trespassing and vandalism.

Jordan Jaster from Spring Grove said people should give the new rule a chance. He said if there were a bunch of problems the Commissioners could change it back to the way it was. He quoted his mom saying "you never know if you like it or not if you don't give it a chance".

Mike Sieve from Yucatan Township said "we live in a society that wants instant gratification". He asked when hunting would get back to the sportsmanship that he appreciated.

Tony Schroeder said there were currently a lot of deer. He said maybe Houston County should just try using rifles.

Mark Weichert from Caledonia said it was inappropriate to use rifles in Houston County. He said he thought there would be more out of state hunters if it were to be allowed.

Kathy Solum from Houston said she supported the use of rifles. She said she grew up in La Crosse in a hunting family. She said she had started bow hunting. She said they owned farmland and their crops had been decimated by deer. She said she had lost a cousin in an accident due to deer. She was not afraid of rifle hunting. Solum said deer hunters were respectable. She said northern Minnesota and Wisconsin currently used rifles. She said the use of rifles would allow youth, smaller, and older adults to be able to hunt. She said the County had CWD. She said banning rifles would lead to confusion for the hunter. Solum said she was for the use of rifles and she was sorry the Commissioners had been put in the position of making the decision.

Mark Nelson from Houston said he had a law enforcement and EMS background. He said he didn't have an issue with rifles. He did not have safety concerns after working in law enforcement for 20 years in Wisconsin.

Dan Vesterse from Spring Grove said he was a big buck hunter. He said rifles traveled farther and faster. He said a video had been prepared with tracer rounds. Vesterse said if people wanted to hunt using a rifle they could go where they were allowed. He was against rifles and said people could not find a big buck anymore. He said it was a classic example of if it is not broke don't fix it.

Geoff Halverson, Houston resident, said he was opposed to rifle hunting. He had concerns for safety and other hunters.

Bo Hamlin said he grew up in La Crescent. He was a veteran with the United States Marine Corps. He said Buffalo County Wisconsin produced the largest bucks in the United States and rifle hunting was allowed there. He said 18% of the population participated in firearm deer hunting. He said there were concerns about deposits of lead. He said non-toxic percentiles could only be found with rifles. He said rifles allowed for more ethical hunting. He said rifles had lower cost ammunition. He said allowing rifles let hunters have the ability to have options.

Deanna DeWitt said most accidents happened from tree stands. She said for the farmers she hoped people could use rifles and the State of Minnesota had passed it.

Curt Henderson from La Crescent was a firearm instructor. He asked the board to keep it the same. He said a lot of people in the room had good points. He said he took kids hunting because their parents didn't want anything to do with it. He said there were a lot of fools out there.

Mike Solum from Wilmington Township said he was opposed to the use of rifles. He said he agreed with what others had said.

Kay Cross from Spring Grove said she was not a hunter. She was opposed to allowing rifles for deer hunting. She said she remembered a child who was shot in his backyard who someone thought was a deer. She said she had empathy for the people who accidentally shot someone and for the people who got shot. Cross said she lived near the edge of town. She said she was giving an emotional plea and urged the Commissioners to not allow the use of rifles.

Dan Solum from La Crescent Township said he was for the use of rifles. He said you could misuse anything and get hurt.

Mike Buttell from Houston County said he was an “old school” hunter who still knocked on people’s doors to hunt. He had taught his kids to do the same. He said he was for shotgun only.

Larry Gaustad from Yucatan Township said he had lived there for 74 years, and shot a lot of deer. He said he didn’t have a preference one way or another when it came to the use of rifles or shotguns. He said he had called St. Paul and asked why the pressure had been put on the Houston County Commissioners. He said he also called a DNR official to see if they would come to the meeting. He said there were lots of deer. He said in three days 81 deer had been shot with 100 permits on his hunting land. He said he had shot deer with everything. He said people should thank the farmers for raising big bucks.

Nick Schneider from Mound Prairie Township said most everything he had wanted to say had already been said. He said the DNR had chose to make the change. He did not think they would have left the decision up to the Commissioners if it was a safety issue. He said people did not want more laws. He said the data showed rifles were safer. He asked that the board give people the chance to make the decision on their own.

Steve Bauer from Caledonia said it was a safety issue. He said anyone who shot a rifle knew it went farther. He asked the Commissioners to remember the names of those who signed the petition when they voted.

Scott DeWitt from Caledonia Township said he was for the use of rifles. He said there were certain situations where he wanted to use a rifle. He said he did custom combining and saw a lot of deer damage to crops. He said often when combining outer rows of corn no yellow came through. He said he hunted for the meat and not the horns. He said he wanted the opportunity to use a weapon of his choice where it was safe.

Bruce Vongroven said he was a lifelong Houston County participant. He said he hoped there was not division among the hunters because of this. He said he hunted with a rifle out west. He said most people that hunted were ethical. He said rifle people would start taking shots from farther, and farther away. He said he had concerns about safety. He was not for using rifles for

deer hunting in Houston County. He said farmers were growing the deer. He thanked the board and told them good luck with their decision.

Tracy Pearson from Caledonia was against the use of rifles and had been raised by hunters.

Ed Voight from Caledonia Township was a beef farmer. He said it was important to protect livestock.

Susan Schneider from Caledonia was against the use of rifles. She said the topography in Houston County was different. She said the distance rifles could travel could be a dangerous situation. She said a lot of people who came to Houston County to hunt were not familiar with the area.

Rich Zibrowski from Houston said he was for the use of rifles. He had hunted since he was a kid. He said he drove truck, and he felt safer in the woods than he did on the road driving. He said if people didn't want to use a rifle then they shouldn't use one.

Bonnie Laumb from Caledonia was against the use of rifles.

Shane Eastman, Houston County resident, said he was for freedom of choice. He said, "Give us a choice, that is all I want".

Bruce Lee said he was for allowing rifles.

Jackson Perry said "give us a choice". He said he was for suppressors.

Sam Fattig from Hokah said he lost a deer a few years prior and it may have been due to slightly less accuracy. He said he would be out hunting coyotes with a rifle. He said where he hunted there were massive backdrops so ricocheting was not an issue.

After hearing no more public comments, the public hearing ended.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Zehnder, motion unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 7:21 p.m. The next meeting would be a workgroup session on March 10, 2026.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

HOUSTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA

By: _____
Greg Myhre, Chairperson

Attest: _____

Brent Parker, Coordinator