Commissioner Alisha Bell elected new Wayne County Commission chair

Wayne County Commissioner Alisha Bell (D-Detroit) was elected chair of the Wayne County Commission in a vote of her fellow commissioners Jan. 8 during the commission’s organizational meeting for its 2019-20 session.

She is the first new commission chair since 2010 and the ninth under the current Wayne County charter, which was approved by voters in 1981 and went into effect Jan. 1, 1983.

Chairwoman Bell is in her ninth commission term, including serving four terms as the commission’s vice-chair. She represents District 7, which includes neighborhoods in central and western Detroit.

“I am proud of the commission’s role in stabilizing county finances,” Chairwoman Bell said. “Working together, we were able to eliminate an $82 million accumulated deficit and create a general fund surplus for four consecutive fiscal years. The commission will remain committed to keeping this financial progress going.”
Chairwoman Bell also commended Wayne County Executive Warren Evans and other countywide elected officials for their fiscal discipline and pledged to continue working closely with the executive’s office to keep the county on sound financial ground. In addition, she will seek closer ties with the legislative leaders in Oakland and Macomb counties and the city of Detroit on critical regional issues, including regional transit, road infrastructure and human trafficking.

“Another of my priorities will be to reform the county’s bail bond system which penalizes lower income residents who remain incarcerated for too long because they cannot be bailed out,” Chairwoman Bell said.

Chairwoman Bell is responsible for scheduling and presiding over meetings, approving agendas and selecting appointments of members to the commission’s standing committees. She is also responsible for drafting and administering the commission budget and supervising commission employees.

In addition to serving on the county commission, Chairwoman Bell also serves as chair of the Wayne County Zoological Authority and Wayne County HealthChoice, which provides a variety of health care options for county residents and families who qualify.

She is also immediate past president of the National Association of Black County Officials and current chair of the National Association of Counties’ (NACo) Justice and Public Safety Committee.

Chairwoman Bell replaces former commission Chairman Gary Woronchak (D-Dearborn) who left the commission at the conclusion of its 2017-18 session after serving on the commission for 14 years, the last eight as its chair.

Chairwoman Bell is a graduate of Cass Technical High School and holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Florida A&M University and a master’s degree in education from the University of Nevada Las Vegas.
In other action during the commission’s organizational meeting, Commissioner Joseph Palamara (D-Grosse Ile Twp.) was elected vice-chair and Commissioner Jewel Ware (D-Detroit) was elected vice-chair pro-tempore for a fourth consecutive term.

Commissioner Palamara was first elected to the commission in 1998, after serving seven terms in the Michigan House, and has most recently served as chair of the commission’s Committee on Ways and Means, which helps create the county budget.

Commissioner Ware was first elected to the commission in 1994 and served as its chair from 2003-08. Most recently, she has served on commission committees on Economic Development and Government Operations, along with its Special Committee on Senior Citizens and Veterans Affairs.

Three newly elected commissioners also took their seats during the Jan. 8 meeting. They include: Monique Baker McCormick (D-Detroit), who represents District 6; Melissa Daub (D-Canton Township), who represents District 10; and Sam Baydoun (D-Dearborn), who represents District 13.

The commission is the county’s legislative branch of government. Its primary role involves approving the county’s $1.47 billion budget, enacting ordinances and adopting resolutions. The commission also approves county contracts, makes appointments and establishes rules.

The 15 Wayne County Commissioners are elected every two years. Wayne County residents can contact their individual commissioner by visiting the county website, www.waynecounty.com.