

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
REGULAR MEETING ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION –**DRAFT**-
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos MI 48864-1198
517.853.4000, Township Hall Room
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7th , 2026, 7:00PM

PRESENT: Chair Bill McConnell, Vice Chair Yu Man Lee
Commissioners Richard Miksicek, Laura Belisle, Harrison Batten and
Trustee Nickolas Lentz

ABSENT: Commissioner Tom Frazier

STAFF: Project Engineer Jack Hughes

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair McConnell called the January 7th, 2026, Township Environmental Commission meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

2. ROLL CALL

Staff Engineer Hughes called the roll of the Commission.

3. PRESENTATION

A. Wetland Education Signage – Emma Campbell

4. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None at this time.

5. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

None at this time.

6. COMMUNICATIONS

None at this time.

7. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Commissioner McConnell moved to approve the Agenda of the January 7th, 2025 Environmental Commission Regular meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner McConnell moved to approve the Minutes of the November 5th, 2025 Environmental Commission Regular Meeting, as Amended. Motion passed unanimously.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Bird City Discussion and Resolution

Commissioner Miksicek read a resolution in support of the Bird City Initiative. Commissioner Miksicek initiated the discussion by outlining the program's history, noting that it was launched by the National Audubon Society in early 2025 to promote bird-friendly municipal practices. He highlighted that five other Michigan communities have already achieved this status and noted that a local coalition (including representatives from Michigan Audubon, the Harris Nature Center, and township staff) has already begun the preliminary work.

Commissioner Miksicek emphasized that Meridian Township is an ideal candidate because many bird-friendly initiatives are already in place. These include the township's extensive nature preserves, the Land Stewardship Program, invasive species management, and an existing Dark Sky ordinance. Beyond conservation, the designation is expected to boost eco-tourism by attracting birdwatchers and fostering a community-wide mindset of environmental stewardship.

The Commission then focused on the logistics of the application fee and the formal motion. While there was discussion regarding whether the \$200 fee should come from the Climate Sustainability Fund or Land Preservation Funds, Trustee Lentz assured the group that the township's leadership does not view the cost as an obstacle. Chair McConnell proposed an amendment to the resolution to clarify that the Environmental Commission is officially recommending that the Township Board adopt the resolution.

Chair McConnell moved to approve the Resolution of Support for the Bird City Initiative. Seconded by Commissioner Miksicek. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Resolution of Appreciation was read by Commissioner Batten commemorating Commissioner Peterson's service.

Commissioner Batten moved to approve the Resolution of Appreciation to Environmental Commissioner Cynthia Peterson as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

C. Approval of Meeting Dates for 2026

Staff Engineer Hughes proposed altering the meeting time from 7pm to 6:30pm. This was accepted for 2026.

Chair McConnell moved to approve the 2026 Meeting Dates for the Environmental Commission, as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Miksicek. Motion passed unanimously.

D. Commission Roster and Elections

Commissioner Batten clarified his reappointment date to be corrected on the presented Roster. There are two vacancies on current roster. Staff Engineer Hughes will look into previously submitted applications for these positions and bring them to the next meeting.

Chair McConnell then opened the floor for nominations for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair. He described the duties of Chair for those interested and gave an overview of the Environmental Commission's evolving role, noting that while the administrative duties are light and the public-facing aspects are generally positive, the group's core purpose has shifted significantly. Historically, the Commission spent much of its time on intensive wetland use permit applications involving complex engineering and public hearings. However, these applications have dropped off "precipitously" as the township has become more built out and developers have learned that avoiding wetlands altogether is a much faster path than navigating the "red tape" of multiple committee reviews.

Because the current ordinance is working so effectively that developers are self-regulating, Chair McConnell observes that recent agendas have become light and focus more on information sharing than actual deliberation. He suggested that the Commission's authority over wetland permits could either devolve to an administrative-staff level or return to a "Wetland Preservation Board" model that, like the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, only meets when an active application exists. He urged the commissioners to think critically about how to best serve the township and ensure their time is spent on purposeful, high-impact work rather than meeting out of habit.

After some discussion about Chair support and meeting logistics, Vice Chair Lee and Chair McConnell decided to swap positions, electing Commissioner Lee as Chair and Commissioner McConnell as Vice Chair.

Chair McConnell moved to approve the slate appointment of new Chair and Vice Chair positions. Motion passed unanimously.

10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Brownfield Redevelopment Authority – Vacant Position available.

Vice Chair McConnell noted there was an email from Commissioner Frazier accepting the vacant position on the B.R.A.

Vice Chair McConnell moved to approve the Appointment of Commissioner Frazier to the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority. Seconded by Chair Lee. Motion passed unanimously.

11. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Staff

Staff Engineer Jack Hughes provided an update on the Climate Sustainability Fund, clarifying that while unspent funds at the end of the year liquidate back into the general fund, they remain "earmarked" and accessible for formulated proposals. He reported that of the approximately \$47,000 remaining at the end of 2025, \$22,000 has been allocated to the Marshall Park Bioswales project. This initiative aims to address severe residential flooding through a holistic, "green" approach, using a series of shallow basins and emergent wetlands, rather than traditional concrete drainage systems. Hughes noted that the funding is critical for maintaining this natural approach, as it allows the township to avoid the standard concrete-heavy solutions typically favored by the Drain Commission.

Looking ahead, Hughes shared a "sneak preview" of the engineering designs for Marshall Park, which include three tiered basins that function like a mountain lake system to filter and transpire stormwater before it reaches Lake Lansing. While some aspects, such as paved pathways, are still being debated due to maintenance concerns, the project will prioritize native plantings and educational signage to explain the transition from a flood zone to a functional wetland. Hughes concluded by clarifying that it is the staff's responsibility to develop project proposals for the Environmental Commission's review, and he expects to present a more comprehensive list of cost-estimated sustainability projects at future meetings.

The commission discussed the Bioswale Project, focusing on the technical design, funding, and community outreach for it, as well as the status of the township's Green Grants program. Staff Engineer Jack Hughes clarified that the \$22,150 currently listed in the budget is a dedicated expense for the project's design and engineering phase, rather than a construction earmark. The design utilizes a tiered basin system where the upper areas are intended to dry out relatively quickly for semi-usable green space, while the lower southeast basin will remain a perpetual emergent wetland. Commissioner Lee raised an important ecological concern regarding the new habitat potentially attracting wildlife like turtles and amphibians to a high-traffic road area; in response, Hughes agreed to investigate "eco-passages" or specialized culvert designs to mitigate road mortality.

The committee also addressed the need for proactive community engagement. Commissioners McConnell and Miksicek suggested that the Lake Lansing Advisory Board (LLAB) be used as a platform to notify residents about the project before construction begins, even though a formal public comment period is not legally required for these specific park improvements. Regarding the project's total cost, Hughes noted that a final estimate is still pending as the design is finalized, but the township expects to combine Climate Sustainability Funds with Local Road Program funds to cover the construction.

Finally, Staff reviewed the Green Grants program, noting that the \$15,000 allocated for 2026 is a separate budget item from the climate fund. Several 2025 grants are currently being finalized and paid out. To prepare for the 2026 cycle, Staff has prepared an upcoming advertisement in the *Prime Meridian* magazine and township Website. Applications will be taken to the Environmental Commission for review and approval.

B. Liaisons

Trustee Lentz provided an update from the Township Board.

Trustee Lentz provided an update on the recent Township Board meeting, which focused primarily on the ongoing challenges of securing a new location for the Senior Center. Despite various attempts to partner with private building owners, a suitable facility has yet to be found. The situation is increasingly urgent because a \$5 million state grant (funded via federal ARPA dollars) is set to expire at the end of September 2026. The township is currently exploring whether this timeline can be extended or if alternative facilities can be utilized, especially since the current Senior Center will only remain available for another two and a half years. Lentz noted that a previous millage failure has limited the township's ability to construct a new building from scratch, leaving staff to search for existing spaces that meet the center's specific size requirements.

In addition to the Senior Center, the Board is refining its Township Board Goals and Values. Lentz

explained that the Board is distinguishing between "Values", broad principles like environmental protection, and "Goals," which are reserved for active, measurable projects. Finally, Lentz touched on the potential new housing development on Central Park Drive. While the project remains a major topic of local interest, it is currently in a "back-and-forth" stage between township staff and developers and has not yet returned to the Board for formal action.

Vice Chair McConnell provided an update from the Planning Commission.

He reported that the Planning Commission's November 17th meeting focused heavily on the proposed housing development along Central Park Drive. Following significant deliberation, the Commission ultimately passed a resolution recommending that the Township Board approve the project. This recommendation, however, comes with a substantial list of approximately twelve conditions offered by the applicant to mitigate local impact. These concessions include building height and unit count limitations, as well as enhancements to walkability and North-West directional connections to create a better buffer for the adjacent single-family homes. McConnell noted that the proposal drew some of the most "voluminous" public feedback the Planning Commission has received in recent memory, and the final decision now rests with the Township Board.

Chair Lee provided an update on the Land Preservation Advisory Board's November 12th meeting, highlighting several key infrastructure and conservation efforts. The board is currently reviewing a proposed township pathway through the Pike Crossing Preserve near Lake Lansing, as well as a potential parking lot at the ecologically sensitive Green Road entrance to Lake Lansing North; the board plans to relay its environmental concerns regarding the parking lot to Ingham County. Additionally, Stewardship Coordinator Emma Campbell provided a report on the local deer harvest, which had reached 82 by mid-November, and discussed a new initiative born from her talk with the Capital Area Audubon. This initiative focuses on replacing invasive shrubs like Autumn Olive with native species to ensure that local bird populations maintain a consistent food source as invasive species are removed throughout the township's preserves.

There was no update available from the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority.

Commissioner Miksicek provided an update on the Parks Commission's recent activities, highlighted by several community-driven projects and long-term planning efforts. Notably, residents have requested a small shelter at the Nancy Moore small dog park to protect elderly users and those with mobility issues from the elements, a request Director Wisinski is currently investigating. The Commission is also exploring the feasibility of a regulation-sized cricket field; however, finding the necessary six and a half acres has proven difficult, as the leading site at Meridian North Park is only half the required size and contains two emergent wetlands. Looking toward the future, the Commission is working with a consultant to develop a five-year Parks and Recreation Master Plan, which is a prerequisite for securing Michigan DNR grants.

In a move that aligns with the township's "Bird City" goals, the Commission approved an Eagle Scout project by Nicholas Lydick from Haslett Troop 97. The project involves installing full-size wing profile cutouts of indigenous raptors along a pathway at the Harris Nature Center. This installation is slated for completion in Spring 2026 and may be dedicated in conjunction with World Migratory Bird Day events. Aside from these highlights, the Commission's remaining time was spent on routine budget discussions and general event planning.

C. Teams

Commissioner Miksicek provided an update on the Energy Team's recent focus, noting that the Ingham County Office of Sustainability is currently finalizing listening sessions to develop a County Sustainability Action Plan, which is expected to be completed in 2026. A significant portion of the discussion centered on a proposed \$10 billion, 1.4GW AI data center in Saline Township. Despite strong local opposition and an initial rejection of rezoning, the township has settled with developers, and the Michigan Public Service Commission approved the facility in late December. Miksicek highlighted concerns regarding the project's impact on electrical ratepayers, particularly Detroit Edison customers, and noted that while construction is slated for early 2026, reports from Axios suggest potential funding uncertainties for the massive undertaking. He suggested that the Environmental Commission should remain attentive to the complex issues surrounding large-scale data centers in case similar projects are ever proposed for the Greater Lansing area.

Staff Engineer Hughes provided a brief update from the Green Team as they meet to finalize their schedule of events for the 2026 season.

D. Haslett/Okemos High School

Commissioner Batten reported on recent student-led environmental initiatives, highlighting a highly successful Sustainability Club field trip to the Kent County Waste and Energy Facility and Recycling Education Center in Grand Rapids. Batten noted that the experience was particularly educational, offering a first-hand look at how trash incineration reduces landfill volume and generates usable heat energy. On the elementary level, the student-run "Earth Club" has launched effectively with hands-on activities, such as a simulation demonstrating the difficulty of cleaning up oil spills. Future plans for the younger students include creating "wetlands in a bottle" and conducting invasive species walks on local school grounds.

Looking ahead, the District Sustainability Team is meeting to coordinate the Green School Certification process through the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). To overcome past administrative hurdles like time constraints and deadlines, the team plans to assign student liaisons to help each school complete their applications. Additionally, efforts are underway to build a stronger web presence to showcase and promote the various environmental activities occurring across the school district.

E. Other

No reports.

12. OTHER MATTERS AND COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None at this time.

13. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:02pm.