

# **Environmental Commission Meeting: March 1, 2023 (corrected)**

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Commissioners Present: Bill McConnell, John Sarver, Ned Jackson, Tom Frazier, Anna Colby, LeRoy Harvey, Emma Andrechek, Amelia Saffron, and Graham Diedrich. Luca Wisinski, Courtney Wisinski, and Kendra Grasseschi absent.

Guests: Deborah Guthrie, Pat Jackson, Frank Walsh, and Mr. Saffron.

## **SUMMARY**

Township staff took comments of how they can support the Commission's goals and updates were provided on the Climate Sustainability Plan.

## **AGENDA & MINUTES**

Agenda and minutes approved with suggestion that future minutes include participants.

## **HOW ADMINISTRATION CAN HELP**

Frank Walsh began by discussing the desire for enhanced communication between township groups. He also talked about setting high goals for the township and ways to continue to improve. He explained the aspects that set Meridian Township above others mentioning the solar initiative, build back the buffer, green team, energy team, recycling initiatives, and more. Walsh asked the commission how the township can help the environmental commission be successful other than increased communications.

McConnell mentioned that having a full-time environmental coordinator has been extremely important. He also included other township staff like those in communication are essential for the environmental commission's goals. The green grant program was also talked about as an important aspect of their mission in how it helps with education and recycling programs. Frazier talked about how having Courtney Wisinski as a liaison to the commission has been very helpful. Sarver and Ned Jackson seconded this point. Sarver pointed out that with so much to do and so many possibilities, it would be helpful to have some direction from the township board as to if they are missing anything that they would like to do. Diedrich seconded that it would be helpful to understand where there are opportunities for more engagement. Walsh encouraged commission members to sign up for Meridian Happenings to stay up to date with township news. Ned Jackson talked about how quick communication has helped in many ways across the township.

McConnell brought up the energy section of the Climate Sustainability Plan. He wondered about the township's energy efficiency when it comes to water pumping and treatment. He brought up that having an intern in public works that could be trained to find these types of information that could communicate with the commission would be helpful. McConnell also discussed how planning could potentially help with the commission's mission through managing stormwater in permitting and inspections. An incentive program for property owners to accommodate stormwater was also suggested as an option for the township to help with the sustainability goals.

Walsh added that a summer intern was just hired that could take on a project like working with the environmental commission.

Ned Jackson talked more about communication not just within the township but also with other jurisdictions like the drain commission, schools, county road department, department of transportation, and more. He wondered about the possibility of meeting more consistently with all these entities for exchange of information.

Pat Jackson suggested that the environmental commission minutes should be shared with the board.

## **CLIMATE SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**

### **Land Preservation Plan and Water**

- Focus on climate change impacts
- Wetlands and climate change on the outdoors and Municipal water usage/disposal
- Not concerns on overwhelming sewage treatment plants due to stormwater, but there are energy consumption concerns
- Encourage rain barrels in case of droughts
- McConnell points out that water treatment is the highest energy consumption in the community

Diedrich asked about how much water is wasted in the systems. McConnell mentions that although the specific amount is not known, there are many repairs and improvements being made. Ned Jackson expressed the desire for a liaison between the commission and water treatment plants along with arranging a tour of the water treatment facility.

Sarver suggested using the new intern to gather statistics and information on township systems. Colby also talked about possibilities for the intern to look into grant opportunities.

McConnell expressed interest in benchmarking water consumption and disposal to identify areas for improvement. Ned Jackson questioned how this could be done. McConnell suggested that the water treatment personnel have information for water consumption. Colby mentioned that general knowledge of what uses the most water could provide ideas for improvement without a need for specific data. Emma adds that the high school has begun education for limiting water consumption, so habits could be on track to change in the future.

LeRoy talked about Green Dialogs. Every Wednesday at 9:00 A.M. over zoom. May will have the director of the waste water treatment plant, and the first April meeting will include a guest speaker that has knowledge on water.

### **Foods and Organics**

- Composting and methods for reducing organic waste
- Gleaning (Food waste/Local food production)

Food group has been working on determining food wastes at schools. Commercial entities are major contributors to food waste, so there are opportunities with them to consider ways to minimize this.

Sarver wondered what is considered a local food producer. Colby mentioned this is not defined in this section yet since there are many ways to define local but that is a detail that could be added.

Diedrich asked where he could provide assistance on the Climate Sustainability Plan and McConnell mentioned there are many opportunities within the food section.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Deborah Guthrie spoke on the Climate Sustainability Plan with public comments. She talked about the personal impacts the recycling initiative had on her. She mentioned her appreciation to the commission for its attempts to protect the environment. She mentioned even small incentives can work for encouraging people to make small lifestyle changes.

## **STUDENT ALTERNATE POSITION**

Amelia is appointed as the alternate student commissioner which was approved unanimously.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS/ UPDATES**

- More wetland education flyers will continue to go out in the future, but tax information was removed due to it being confusing
- Discussion about starting small pilot food rescue program
- Green team events include March 18<sup>th</sup> which is the beginning of farmer's market events and April 22<sup>nd</sup> recycling event at Chippewa Middle School
- Green Team working with Okemos Earth Club to sell upcycled clothes along with educational activities
- The Earth Club also has a new website with upcoming projects
- Energy Team updated the energy sections to include updated data on renewable energy and efficiency
- Four meetings are planned for solarize Meridian
- Transportation Commission has begun reviewing the transportation section of the Climate Sustainability Plan

**ADJORNED 9:00 P.M.**

Minutes draft prepared by Lauren Falzarano