



CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Virtual via Zoom Conferencing
Wednesday, February 3, 2021 6:00 pm

PRESENT: Chair, Tunga Kiyak; Vice Chair, Walter Benenson; Commissioner, Mike Nevells;
Commissioner, Leslie Charles; Commissioner, Brian Seipel; Alternate
Commissioner, Riti Adhi

ABSENT: N/A

STAFF: Brandie Yates, Communications Manager

TOWNSHIP: Deborah Guthrie, Township Board Liaison and Patricia Herring Jackson,
Township Trustee

COUNSEL: N/A

COMCAST: John Gardner, Comcast Regional Director, External Affairs; and Yvette Collins,
AT&T

1. **CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

Chair Kiyak called the meeting to order at **6:02 pm**.

4. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Vice Chair Benenson moved **TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS SUBMITTED**. Seconded by
Commissioner Charles.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

5. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Vice Chair Benenson moved **TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FOR WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER
2, 2020 REGULAR MEETING**. Seconded by Chair Kiyak

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

6. **COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER REPORT**

Updates on Communications Goals for 2021 and the Township Goals, which include the
Communications Manager assigned to the Township Brand Sign Committee to work on
Township wayfinding signs; entrance signs to the community, building & campus signs and
park/trail signs.

The Township website is getting a refresh. The Township Board assigned a committee led
by the Communications Manager. The refresh is a 6 month process. It is recommended that
websites should be updated every few years. Design elements will change with user
functionality and ADA compliance as the priorities. Currently the Communications Manager
is working with departments to review the content for their department pages.

The Communications Department is working on re-evaluating the equipment in the noise
room and the control room.

The Census is still collecting data through April.

7. TOWNSHIP BOARD LIAISON

Small Business Grant checks signed for approximately 105 businesses and approximately \$500,000. A special study session meeting was added to discuss recreational marijuana. The Village of Okemos project is moving forward. Buildings have come down ahead of schedule, the developer will submit new plans and Consumer Energy lines are planned to be buried. A new restaurant, Anna’s House had its grand opening. Buddy’s Pizza Detroit is interested in the Burger King property to level the old building and build new. A family bought the property where the Walnut Hills Club is located. They are planned to tear down the club and build seven homes for the family members. Haslett Village Square plans have been approved and still moving forward. The Marathon Gas Station has been approved for Brownfield money and will soon see development moving forward. The Lake Lansing Trail Connector agreements have been signed and clean-up is being done along the easements. The Township Board is assessing the possibility of having broadband throughout the community, a committee has been assigned to work with the Communications Commission for a recommendation and plan to implement.

COMMISSION REPORT

Commissioner Seipel attended the Virtual Township Volunteer Appreciation event. The Township Annual Report was shared. Township was acknowledged for Okemos being the #6 Best Places to Live in America, #1 for Best Places to Live in Michigan, #1 for Best Small Town to Raise a Family in Michigan and #6 for Best Suburbs to Live in America. Haslett was selected as the #10 Best Places to Live in Michigan and #10 Best Suburbs to Live in Michigan and previously Haslett and Okemos Public Schools received high rankings as the Best Schools in Michigan.

8. ACTION ITEMS

N/A

9. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Communications Commission Draft 2021 Goals

Determine how the Communications Commission can assist the Communications Dept. with the Township goals. The Communications Manager drafted a few goals; to assist with the Township’s Broadband goal, revisit a Communications Needs Assessment Survey, and assisting with outreaching and finding additional revenue sources (grants, etc.)

The Commission Chair stated that the goals make sense and all should be on the Commission’s radar for the year. The Chair’s recommendation is to move the draft goals to an action item for the April meeting. Communications Manager will send a follow up before the April meeting to check on any additional goals to add.

B. Broadband Access in Meridian Township

Broadband Access is a Township Board goal with an appointed committee to work with the Communications Commission. There has been no Township Board discussion yet, but some members have looked into what other communities have done. The Township Clerk has reached out to the organization PROTEC to ask for insight about other

municipalities and findings will be shared with the work committee. The Township Clerk and Trustee Jackson have been assigned to the work committee.

A proposal was made to identify commissioners interested in working with the Township Board and committee on the Broadband goal. To put some goals to paper and begin research. The Township Board is looking for Broadband across the Township with no spots left without access. Commission Chair Kiyak volunteered himself and asked for the support of one other commissioner.

There are many organizations and businesses trying to help community members gain internet access during COVID because of virtual school and parents working from home. For instance, the Capital Area District Libraries is offering checkouts of Chromebooks and Hot spots. There is an opportunity to partner with these organizations and community groups.

Commissioner Nevells works with the Bikes to Books program and would volunteer to be the liaison to connect the group. Clerk Guthrie is on the Friends of the Okemos Library Board and has mentioned the Broadband goal of the Township.

Chair Kiyak mentioned that in order to make progress the working group would need to meet more frequently than just during regular Commission meetings. A question was asked whether PROTEC will provide information about barriers & legalities.

AT&T representative spoke about State & Federal programs available and funding to assist with broadband in communities. There are programs and plans already out there and she can provide any information requested. The Commission stated that they would appreciate the information.

The main goal is to address the gaps within the Township that the providers don't currently cover. There are other staff members on the committee; it isn't just for the Communications Commission to figure out. Commissioner Seipel said he would assist Chair Kiyak with goals and recommendations for the Township Board.

C. Communications Commission Rules & Procedures Revisions Update

Need to focus on what needs to be changed. Highlighted areas recommended to be updated or language changes. Items need to be reformed. Commissioners Nevells and Charles are working on a draft to present at the next meeting and hope to have a better product in the end. The next step after changes are presented and agreed upon will be to take to the Township Board for final approval.

The language is still about managing cable franchise agreements, etc. The revisions should reflect being a Communications Commission and not just Cable. Should include marketing, communications, etc. Also, need to meet the goal of the Township Board. What does the Board expect from the Commission?

10. COMMUNICATIONS

An ongoing complaint about not having access to Internet service at a home within the Township. Staff had assisted with helping resident find alternative company to provide access. Resident has stated that other companies do not offer services either. Multiple options have been provided. A thank you was given to AT&T and Comcast providers for their fast responses and follow-up.

Resident is currently using a hot spot for service. Comcast stated that they would love to provide service to everyone, however there are costs associated with making an extension to an individual home, especially if there aren't other houses or businesses in the same area.

11. REPORTS

A. Video Service Provider(s)

AT&T subscriber numbers (u-verse) have been dropping with new OTT services being provided. Send any complaint questions to Yvette Collins. AT&T offers Access program for low income families. Must be new subscriber

Comcast Essentials program has extended two month free offer for new internet essentials customers through June 2021. Will also waive past due bill requirement. Speeds have doubled for the program, recognizing that families have multiple kids and parents working from home all needing internet access. One qualification that hasn't changed is that you cannot have been a Comcast customer within the last 90 days.

Both providers offer solutions for existing customers having difficulties paying their bill. Must call company and ask for assistance.

B. Programming

C. Website & Social Media

D. Promotions/Publications

E. Finance

A PEG and Franchise Revenue update was provided. Revenues are down about \$22,000 from 2019 to 2020 through 3rd quarter. A decrease of approximately 4%.

F. HOMTV Internship/Alumni

- i. 10 new interns for the new semester. Internship program has been reconfigured to evolve with current times and technology
- ii. Save the Date – Intern Appreciation Night & GTA – different this year, will be held virtually with mock awards – Golden HOMies Awards. Testimonials from Alumni and a LIVE speaker.

12. PUBLIC REMARKS

N/A

13. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Kiyak moved **TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**. Seconded by Commissioner Charles.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Chair Kiyak adjourned the meeting at 7:24 pm.