

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
TOWNSHIP BOARD VIRTUAL REGULAR MEETING **-APPROVED-**
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos MI 48864-1198
517-349-1232, Special Meeting via Zoom
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2020 **12:00 pm**

PRESENT: Supervisor Styka, Clerk Guthrie, Treasurer Deschaine, Trustees Jackson, Opsommer, Wisinski

ABSENT: Trustee Sundland

STAFF: Township Manager Walsh, Director of Public Works Perry, Fire Chief Hamel, Police Chief Plaga, Community Planning Director Kieselbach, Information Technology Director Gebes, Parks and Recreation Director Maisner, Finance Director Mattison, Human Resources Director Tithof, Economic Development and Neighborhoods Director Clark, Communications Manager Yates

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Supervisor Styka called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INTRODUCTIONS

Supervisor Styka led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

Clerk Guthrie called the roll of the Board.

4. PRESENTATION

None

5. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Supervisor Styka opened public remarks at 12:03 pm.

No comment

Supervisor Styka closed public remarks at 12:04 pm.

6. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Trustee Jackson moved to approve the Agenda. Seconded by Treasurer Deschaine

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEAS: Clerk Guthrie, Treasurer Deschaine, Trustees Jackson, Opsommer, Wisinski, Supervisor Styka

NAYS: None

Motion carried: 6 – 0

7. BOARD DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Township's Ongoing COVID-19 Response

Manager Walsh asked Director's to give brief reports.

Human Resources Director Tithof reported the Work from Home Program began on December 9 and thanks to the Board and IT Department Staff, we were able to reduce the number of employees in the building while continuing operations and serving the public. Leadership and Staff have been observing the safety protocols such as wearing masks, social distancing and eliminating in person meetings by using Zoom. If an employee has symptoms, they have been contacting the HR Department immediately. She has been working with public safety staff to get them tested immediately if there is immediate need. As soon as protocols are in place, will be seeing employees receive the vaccine. Just received word from the Health Department that they will be eliminating neck gators, bandanas, and masks with vents on the side of them from the safety protocols and will send this information to employees when it has been officially received from the Health Department.

Parks and Recreation Director Maisner reported the department has continued to engage with the community through this Pandemic.

- The Fitness Over 50 senior exercise program of approximately 60 seniors moved from inside at the Meridian Mall Food Court to outside to the Nancy Moore Park basketball court. The seniors wear masks and bring their chairs for the exercise program and recently when the weather turned, they moved into the Central Park Pavilion where staff was available to install the walls. The group met for the last time today and will resume in the spring time next year.
- Stewardship Coordinator Campbell was able to continue the outside work days with individual families and offered virtual trainings. The Harris Nature Center offered private nature lessons for families following the curriculum from the area schools. They are also offering virtual Chipmunk Story Time for toddlers and walks in the woods such as Howl at the Moon with dogs.
- The Deer Management Program has 75 hunters on 2,000 acres and to date they have harvested 160 deer and donated 2,200 pounds of venison to the community.
- The Department has brought back the Drive Thru Santa Program under the direction of Recreation Specialist Devlin. Families register online, send information to Santa for their 12-minute car visit with him. The children stay in the car, are masked, visit with Santa and then are given a small gift and a picture is also sent of their visit. Staff is working with the Communications Department on a Santa video program where the children send in a video and then Santa sends a video back to the family.
- Since mid-May, the Farmers' Market has been operational outside in the Meridian Mall parking lot adjacent to the Marketplace on the Green site. Staff has successfully managed the necessary protocols with the vendors and visitors. There have been occasions when the Market has been visited by over 3,000 people.
- The small dog park was open last year and the large dog park was open this year with over 500 members. The seniors have continued to play Pickleball safely. The parks and land preserves have been open for visitors who needed to get outside for some recreation. Although the youth and adult sports were discontinued this year, the Department has successfully been engaging the community.

- The Meridian Senior Center has been hosting virtual celebrations, education and exercise programs and well-check phone calls to all the members every two weeks.

Police Chief Plaga reported six employees have contracted the COVID virus and five of them are back to work and one is on the mend. Although some of the tasks are hard to do remotely, they have been taking calls and utilizing on line services. They have been following safety protocols of wearing masks, cleaning vehicles after every shift, and adjusting the shifts to avoid overlap in officers where possible.

Fire Chief Hamel reported one confirmed COVID case who is back to work and one pending case. Have been successful in following the safety protocols in working with patients and assisting neighboring jurisdictions. The Department has been working with HR on testing the First Responders. Under the direction of EMS/Training Chief Priese, this program has been work well with Tri-County who oversees the safety protocols and this program has gone viral and copies around the State. They are working with a local facility to implement a rapid test program where employees are tested in the morning and by mid-morning will know if they are positive and can react accordingly. Staff is gearing up for the holidays and the run volume is up due to COVID.

Economic Development Director Clark reported the major project status for the Village of Okemos is they have started the demolition phase and plan to have it completed by end of January and hope to have occupancy permits by the end of 2021 and grand opening in January 2022. Klingemann's is on the same time line and have been suffering setbacks because they have not been able to receive product which is the same story for the Mattress Source. With respect to Buddy's Pizza, Staff has been waiting for word from the engineers since the November meeting but plan to reach out to them. Word is that Cooper Creek is working on their site plan submission and hope to start development in 2021.

Community Planning and Development Director Kieselbach reported the building season in 2020 has not been as anticipated from 2019. There was a two month shutdown this year and some of the project staff had anticipated would be completed this year have been postponed or will not be built. At the end of November in 2019, the Township was at \$55.4 million dollars in construction value and this year, the Township is at \$48.8 million dollars. What it relates to is permit fees which are based on construction value and this results in the Township being down \$158,000. There are two new single developments ready to submit plans after the first of the year, Cooper Creek on Haslett and Silverstone on Powell Road. Overall, the cost for construction has increased and the Township is even on single family starts but are down on the number of permits. Last year the average construction costs for a single family house was \$330,000 and this year, it is \$440,000. Manager Walsh stated it was a good decision not to fill the open Planning position this year.

Finance Director Mattison reported the House has voted on Thursday to extend the shutoff period to March 31 and believes the bills is on the Governor's desk and the Township will follow her protocols. It was believed the Township would be approximately \$500,000 short on State Revenue Sharing but with the changes and purchases, the Township may be down only \$50 - \$100,000 which is better than as anticipated at the beginning of the COVID process.

Treasurer Deschaine stated the 75 days from December 1 to February 14 are the days the Township collects the tax revenue and this goes to everyone but the non-education people. It is important that in spite of the lock-down, the Township has stayed open for these tax payments. Staff has created a new envelope for residents to use and residents can indicate if they want an electronic or a mailed receipt. The walk-in traffic is down 95% from last year which is what was

hoped. Thank you to the IT and DPW Departments a safe reception area has been set up in the Town Hall Room to be used by staff when interacting with residents and visitors. Staff is working with safe protocols to make sure it is safe for residents and employees.

Manager Walsh stated this is the report from staff on the Township's ongoing COVID response.

Discussion:

- When asked if there are any non-public safety employees who have tested positive for COVID, Manager Walsh replied yes, two or three employees and they have recovered.
- Supervisor Styka asked to be kept in the loop about water shutoffs and funding if the Governor does not sign the new bill.
- Trustee Opsommer proposed moving the water shutoff date until the end of June. The OMA extension for virtual meetings and water shutoffs have already been extended until March 31 and this appears to be the trend. The legislature has been conservative but suggested to extend Meridian water shutoffs until end of June. Supervisor Styka stated he can issue an emergency order in January for both virtual meetings and water shutoff.

B. Meridian Township Small Business Relief Fund

Manager Walsh asked the Board to consider round two of the Small Business Relief Fund Grants that the Board initiated several months ago. The core piece was around \$50,000 and the Township awarded \$37,400 grants to help small businesses. The requirements was stringent four months ago and the proposal today is less stringent. It is being recommended to use \$500,000 of the \$700,000 Meridian Redevelopment Fund with the same format as four months ago. If this is approved the funds could be in the hands of Meridian's small businesses within three to four weeks.

Director Clark stated the criteria changed so it could be extended to include as many businesses as possible. It does mean there may be many applications but the committee that was established for Round I will review them on a case by case determination of award.

Discussion:

- When asked why cap it at \$7,000, Manager Walsh replied the cap award in Round I was \$4,000 and it was recommended to increase it to \$7,000 which will allow the Township to help more businesses. If it was increased to \$10,000, then it limits the number of businesses that can be helped.
- When asked how many businesses staff believes will be assisted, Manager Walsh replied that is unknown because not all businesses will receive the full \$7,000 because it is based on the business size, number of employees, etc. He anticipates between 70-90 businesses.
- When asked how many were assisted in Phase I, Manager Walsh replied 37 businesses at \$4,000 each.
- When asked about the limit of 50 employees, Manager Walsh replied this has been discussed with staff and it was recommended if the employee cap was removed, then the grants be open to any business in the Township other than home-occupations that can apply. The committee will look at a large supermarket differently than a small mom-pop restaurant.
- Support removing item #2 and remove the cap on employees and have it open to franchises such as Douglas J and Biggby.
- When asked if any non-profit applied during Round I, Director Clark replied yes, Nokomis Learning Center received funds from Round I and from LEAP.

- It was suggest to add two questions to the application. Questions 1) please explain how your business has been adversely affected by the Pandemic. Director Clark stated they did not add this question because based on the recent business survey over 80% of the respondents indicated they had requested some sort of financial support and a majority of those responses were in the restaurants, bar or hospitality industry. They were concerned that a business may not be able to show proof of how negatively this has impacted their business but the question can be included. It was suggested a description on how their financial situation has changed could be included.
- The second question suggestion was what other relief funding has been received, the source, date and amount. The Township should know what other funding sources they have received to explain the specific and unique impact that the business has encountered.
- Supported the inclusion of the two questions because it will give the Township information on why they are asking and what other assistance they are receiving.
- Suggested a third question could be how will this keep you in business but this may be hard to define but the more information will assist in determining their grant amount.
- Support the first two questions because it will justified the financial award decision.
- When asked if Round II is discounting limits such as supporting employees, rent and utilities, Director Clark stated those items are not included in this round. Then the first two questions should be included.
- Supporting including question three because it will give additional information such as supporting employees and keeping the facility open and could help justify the grant award.
- Support including question three but suggest it be asked in such a way to not pressure or over think the answer because if the answer is operating in the red, that is an acceptable answer or if they need to take out credit loans to keep the business going, that is an acceptable answer.
- Suggest a general question asking how the use of the funds will be used to help the business may be enough because this would not put pressure on the business about answering such questions. We do not want to discourage them from applying but want them to share their information.
- Director Clark suggested: Please share in general how you plan to utilize the awarded funding. Your response will not affect the award determination.
- It was consensus to change the last phrase to say: Offsetting business loses does not deem businesses ineligible. This way we are not forcing businesses to have active payrolls because there is no demand for it.
- It appears that Round II is supporting local business in Meridian Township and that the owner does not have to live in the Township.
- Question was raised on whether any Board Member should be involved in the decision-making process. Support this suggestion but we are the ones hearing from the businesses. Manager Walsh stated the committee membership from Round I shared their thoughts, took votes and the process went well. If Board Members are removed, he will make recommendation to fill the seats with the Finance Director, Deputy Manager or someone in Community Development who deals with businesses.
- Support removing the board members and trust Manager Walsh to make the appointments.
- While do not believe the Round I was not influenced politically in any way, do think with increased funding amount in Round II, would like to suggest removing board members in order to avoid putting them in a difficult position. When asked, Manager Walsh stated that while this might mirror the Road Program, the Board is entrusted and elected to spend a budget of \$500,000, then it should be entrusted in making these decisions.
- It was the consensus not to remove Supervisor Styka or Trustee Jackson from the committee.

- Manager Walsh suggested the applications can be shared with all board members. Supervisor Styka replied he would be concerned about being in violation of the open meetings act.
- When asked what outreach will be used to notify about the grants, Director Clark stated she will be sending an email blast to the businesses that applied during Round I, will be sharing with the regional partners (LEAP, etc.) and on social media.

Trustee Wisinski moved to suspend the rules to act on this item today. Seconded by Trustee Opsommer.

VOICE/HAND VOTE: Motion passed: 6-0

Trustee Wisinski moved to strike eligibility criteria number #2 that requires businesses that have employees that have 50 or fewer and also move to add the three questions to the application with respect to impact the funds received and how they would use the funding. Seconded by Trustee Jackson.

Discussion:

- Suggested Director Clark change the method of how to get the word out since the Board is changing the criteria for applicants. Director Clark stated she will discuss it with the Communications Director. It was suggested to share the information with Chamber, LEAP, and networking all other organizations with directories.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEAS: Treasurer Deschaine, Trustees Jackson, Opsommer, Wisinski, Supervisor Styka, Clerk Guthrie

NAYS: None

Motion carried: 6 - 0

Trustee Opsommer move to authorize use of \$500,000 of the Meridian Redevelopment Fund to fund Round II of the Meridian Small Business Relief Program and release the grant application on Monday, December 21, 2020 with the documents as amended during this meeting. Seconded by Trustee Jackson.

Discussion:

- When asked if the employee cap has been removed, Supervisor Styka replied yes.
- When asked if the application process will be the same as Round I, Supervisor Styka replied yes.
- Staff was thanked for their work on Round II of this program

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEAS: Trustees Jackson, Opsommer, Wisinski, Supervisor Styka, Clerk Guthrie, Treasurer Deschaine

NAYS: None

Motion carried: 6 - 0

8. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Supervisor Styka Opened Public Remarks at 1:06 pm

None

Supervisor Styka Closed Public Remarks at 1:08 pm

9. OTHER MATTERS AND BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

10. ADJOURNMENT

Trustee Deschaine moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Trustee Wisinski.

VOICE/HAND VOTE: Motion carried: 6 - 0

Supervisor Styka adjourned the meeting at 1:09 pm.

RONALD J. STYKA,
TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR

DEBORAH GUTHRIE,
TOWNSHIP CLERK