



June 10, 2025 Township Board Listening Session

SUMMARY

Since 2022, the Meridian Township Board has established a goal to enhance communication and outreach to the Township's 45,000 residents. To help meet this goal, the Board scheduled three Listening Sessions in 2025:

- **Tuesday, June 10**
 - 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm at Central Park Pavilion (5151 Marsh Road, Okemos)
- **Tuesday, September 30**
 - 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm at St. Luke Lutheran Church (5589 Van Atta Road, Haslett)
- **Thursday, November 13**
 - 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm at 2|42 Community Center (2630 Bennett Road, Okemos)

After each listening session, staff will provide a written summary with information about what was discussed. If a resident is not able to attend a session, they can provide feedback online at <https://bit.ly/ListeningSessionsForm>.

The June 10, 2025 Listening Session was attended by over 80 individuals. The Listening Session commenced just after 6:00 pm with a welcome from Township Supervisor Hendrickson, and introducing the Township Board: Clerk Angela Demas, Treasurer Phil Deschaine, and Trustees Nickolas Lentz, Kathy Ann Sundland, Peter Trezise, and Marna Wilson.

Staff then provided brief updates on three topics:

- Road construction from Deputy Township Manager Dan Opsommer
- Public safety from Police Chief Grillo
- Community and Senior Center proposal from Community Planning and Development Director Tim Schmitt

After those updates, the Supervisor opened the floor to the general public to ask questions. Questions and comments were primarily about the proposed Community and Senior Center, but also included topics regarding pathway maintenance, the Village of Okemos, and the upcoming special election on August 5. Additionally, the Township Board stayed beyond the official end time of 7:30 pm to continue answering questions from constituents. A summary of the topics covered follows.

LOCAL ROADS PROGRAM

The 2025 Local Roads Program is underway, with reconstruction currently taking place in the Tacoma Hills neighborhood. Work in the Lac Du Mont area will also be done later in the summer. The program will also treat over 14 miles of recently paved roads with asphalt rejuvenation. This approach extends the useful life of the roads at a substantially lower cost than repaving. Handouts, including a map of the [2025 road projects](#) and [local roads FAQ](#), were made available.

Clarification was also provided regarding roadway responsibilities. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has jurisdiction over East Saginaw Street (Business 69) and Grand River Avenue (M-43). All other roads in the Township, with the exception of private roads, are under

jurisdiction of the Ingham County Road Department (ICRD). Both entities are responsible for routine maintenance (pot holes, plowing, etc.), speed limits, and signage. The Local Roads Program is an exception to ICRD control where the Township has taken on the reconstruction and the associated costs.

POLICE UPDATE

The Meridian Township Police Department (MTPD) will finally reach full staff this summer with 42 sworn officers. This increase in staff is due to the Public Safety retention program instituted by the Township Board in 2024. The goal of this program is to increase first responder compensation rate in order to attract and retain officers.

The most common public safety issue expressed by Meridian Township residents is traffic safety. With the increase in staffing, MTPD has tripled traffic citations since 2023. This coincides with an increase in traffic stops. The MTPD does deploy electronic speed signs and is utilizing traffic count tools, which helps the department utilize a data-driven decision making process. Residents noticing recurring traffic safety issues are encouraged to utilize the Traffic Concern Form on the [Police Department website](#).

COMMUNITY/SENIOR CENTER PROJECT

The current Meridian Senior Center is being demolished with the renovation of Chippewa Middle School. The Township Board appointed a Task Force that worked from September 2024 to March 2025. The Task Force recommended two options, a joint Community and Senior Center and a stand-alone Senior Center. The Board approved a joint center of approximately 40,000 square feet in size, a reduction in size from the Task Force's recommendation. The building and site improvements would cost \$24 million, with \$5 million paid for through a State of Michigan grant. A conceptual layout was made available for attendees to review.

The proposal is now before voters in two separate millage questions for the August 5, 2025 special election. The proposed millages include the construction bond (0.5576 mill) and an operating millage (0.3475 mill). The construction bond would cover \$19 million of construction expenses. If passed, the total millage rate increase would be 0.9051 mill. The construction bond would be for 20 years and the operating millage, unless extended, would be for 10 years.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

The balance of the meeting was focused on resident questions and feedback. The primary topic was the Senior and Community Center, along with several other topics.

Senior and Community Center

A wide-range of questions and comments were provided by residents. Comments included both those expressing opposition and support. The answers to the questions below include both responses provided at the meeting and additional information for clarity.

Were other sites, such as the Meridian Mall, considered?

Yes, other sites were considered, including sites inside the Meridian Mall and undeveloped sites around the Meridian Mall. The initial work group, which included Township staff and Board members, evaluated various options in 2023 and 2024. This work group ultimately developed a proposal to purchase the former Younker's anchor store at the Meridian Mall and renovate it into a

Community and Senior Center. However, that proposal was going to require a larger property tax millage, as there were costs associated with acquiring the land. Additionally, the former Younker's store is approximately 95,000 square feet, which is larger than the Township needs.

The current plan before voters at the August 5 special election does not require land acquisition costs since the Township already owns the land. The two millage proposals would construct a facility that is 39,593 square feet. That represents a 58% reduction in facility size compared to the Younker's space, which would also lower the operating costs for the facility.

The most recent Task Force also considered 10 different sites. To view those sites, please visit page 17 of the [October 22, 2024 Senior/Community Center Task Force packet](#).

What other restrictions does the State grant have?

The most significant restriction is the deadline to expend the funds by September 30, 2026. The State grant can be used to acquire land and construct a community center, a senior center, or a combined center, as proposed. According to the conditions of the State grant, the Township must either own the property or have a leasehold interest in the property for at least 50 years.

However, all options involving leases carry the risk of the center being displaced with little notice to the Township. This concern is particularly relevant given the upcoming demolition of Chippewa Middle School, which the Township is currently addressing. The only way to ensure that the center remains secure and is not displaced is for the Township to own both the land and the facility.

Could the debt or operating millages ever be reduced?

Yes, both millages could potentially be reduced under certain circumstances. For the debt millage, if the growth in taxable value within the Township exceeds the projected 1% growth, which it has historically done, then revenue will be generated faster than projected. This allows for the possibility of paying down the fixed amount of principal debt earlier than 20 years.

For example, this scenario occurred with the Central Fire Station debt millage (0.2 mill), which was originally projected to be levied for the last time on the December 2027 tax bill. Because the growth in the Township's taxable value exceeded initial projections, the Central Fire Station debt millage was levied for the last time on the December 2024 tax bill at a rate of 0.0624 mill, three years ahead of schedule.

For the operating millage, there is a possibility that it could be lowered during the Township Board's annual budget approval process. If revenue generated by user fees from the proposed center is sufficient to cover a portion of the annual operating expenses, the Board could decide to lower the millage rate. The Township Board has approved an operating millage that could fund all operating costs of the center, keeping the option open for a very low fee structure. However, no decision has been made regarding a potential fee structure at this time.

How big is the proposed Senior Center component compared to the existing center at Chippewa Middle School?

The existing Senior Center is approximately 8,000 square feet. The Senior Center portion of the Community and Senior Center is approximately 11,540 square feet.

Did the Township consider partnering with any neighboring jurisdictions to operate a jointly owned center?

Several community and senior centers across Michigan were examined to learn about programing, fee structures, operating expenses, and related issues. However, the Township did not discuss partnering with neighboring jurisdictions to form a jointly operated facility.

Many of the neighboring jurisdictions already have existing centers. Therefore, it would likely require the Township to invest in a facility that is not located in the Township. The Township has not explored if this would be legally permissible to invest millage funds in a facility located outside the Township.

Has the Township considered private development and/or management of a Community and Senior Center?

Private development and management are not financially feasible alternatives to a publicly owned and operated center. Community and senior centers offer a public service that relies on property tax revenue to keep user fees affordable for all. Private operators would need to charge fees at a level that would not be competitive with other public centers and would exclude a large percentage of potential users due to the cost of the user fees.

How will operations be funded after the 10-year operating bond expires?

While the revenue generated by fees may help offset some of the operating expenses, they will not cover all the operating costs under any reasonable fee structure. The Township would need the millage to be renewed and/or explore using the Township General Fund to help support the operating costs of the facility.

Besides the \$24 million in construction costs, what are the other expenses?

Interest and bond financing costs for the construction of the proposed center are estimated to be \$10.4 million over twenty years. Combined with the \$24 million in construction costs, total construction and debt service will be \$34.5 million. The State grant will cover \$5 million of the construction costs. Annual operating costs would be just over \$1.1 million per year, or \$11.4 million over ten years.

What percentage of the property taxes that we pay go to the Township?

About 20% of the property taxes paid by Township property owners are used to support Township services. The remaining 80% is distributed to schools, CATA, Ingham County, and other public services that rely on property tax funding. For a visual representation of how tax dollars are allocated, please click this link: [Meridian Township Tax Bill Summary](#).

For more information on the Community and Senior Center, see the Frequently Asked Questions document that has been extensively updated and is now available on the [Community and Senior Center Proposal webpage](#) under the blue FAQ tab. The current conceptual plans for the project are also available on the webpage.

Village of Okemos

The Village of Okemos property owner currently has it listed for sale. In addition, the owner is simultaneously exploring the potential for a new development concept. This is the top redevelopment priority for the Township.

Pathway Maintenance and Safety

The Township is seeking county trail millage funding for trailhead signage at Grand River Avenue and Park Lake Road, Shaw Lane and Hagadorn Road, Campus Hill Drive and Grand River Avenue, and Gaylord C. Smith Court and Okemos Road. Mile markers also being considered along with trail blade (smaller) signage for the MSU to Lake Lansing pathway. To enhance pedestrian safety of the area, the Township will recommend a crosswalk on east side of the Park Lake Road and Grand River Avenue intersection when MDOT makes future improvements to Grand River Avenue.

Another topic raised was vegetation clearance on the pathways. Pathway vegetation clearance primarily occurs in the fall. Residents were encouraged to submit any immediate concerns via email to dpw@meridian.mi.us.

Election Information

The special election is scheduled for Tuesday, August 5, 2025. In-person early voting will be held Friday, August 1 through Sunday, August 3 at the Meridian Township Municipal Building. Absentee Ballots will be available beginning Thursday, June 26. More information is available on the [Meridian Township Election Information webpage](#).