



ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, July 1, 2020 7:00 PM

PRESENT: Bill McConnell, John Sarver (Chair), Jim Kielbaso, Ned Jackson, Courtney Wisinski (Trustee Liaison), Rose Vadnais (Vice Chair), Susan Masten, Tom Frazier,
STAFF: LeRoy Harvey, Stephen Gebes, Samantha Diehl, Emma Campbell
GUESTS: John Esser, Phil Deschaine (Treasurer)

Welcome New Commissioner: Tom Frazier expressed his gratitude for being appointed to the Commission. Frazier works with the MI Township Association (MTA) as a Legislative Liaison. He works on environmental legislation and is MTA's representative to the Green Communities Network.

Approval of Agenda: Agenda approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes approved with two corrections.

Public Remarks: Resident John Esser, who is also running for a Township Trustee position expressed his interest in environmental issues and his desire for the Township to do more in this area and set an example for other communities. He shared his website johnesserformeridiantrustee.com

Treasurer Deschaine expressed his enthusiasm for the work of the Tree Community and the potential to plant hundreds of trees this fall. The Board is looking forward to a successful project and report.

New Business:

Environmental Commissioner Application: Luca Wisinski has applied to be a student representative on the Environmental Commission. Sarver will send an email to Supervisor Styka recommending the appointment.

Vegetation Amendment: Trustee Jackson asked for the E.C.'s comments on an amendment to prevent weeds, grasses, brush or other vegetation from growing to a height greater than 8". McConnell suggested a simple language addition exempting "vegetation planted for environmental or stormwater management" (bioswales, raingardens, butterfly gardens). Masten and Sarver expressed some concern that 75' seemed excessive. Vadnais asked if this is addressed in the Master Plan. Trustee Wisinski mentioned that the amendment was motivated more by conditions in some blighted commercial areas. Masten also mentioned issues of trash in blighted areas. LeRoy will put together a note to Trustee Jackson and Trustee Wisinski will help communicate our comments.

Sustainability and Racial Equality: Masten shared a draft of a resolution declaring racism as a public health crisis (prepared with assistance from Jackson). Trustee Wisinski mentioned that the Board recently joined Ingham County Health Department in declaring racism as a public health crisis in Meridian. She is working with Trustees Jackson and Opsommer to develop a

diversity, equity, and inclusion plan. She mentions formation on a committee to work on this and welcomes the environmental justice perspective. McConnell offered a friendly amendment. Resolution passed unanimously. A copy of the latest draft is attached below.

Regional Environmental Meeting: Sarver proposed a Zoom meeting to facilitate regional collaboration (mentioned in the Climate Sustainability Plan) with local governments (Lansing, East Lansing, local Townships, etc.). Harvey will arrange a date and time.

Old Business

Environmental Review of Ordinances: Harvey mentioned various levels of involvement in the Sustainable Building Study Group's initiative to review the Code of Ordinances and other environmental policies and procedures. Public Works Director Derek Perry suggests that we might start with the Green Infrastructure Audit with assistance from Tri-County Regional Planning Commission and Mid-Michigan Environmental Action Council.

McConnell mentions recent challenges regulating development and stormwater management on projects regulated by multiple jurisdictions (County, State, Federal) using various interpretations of FEMA's 100 year Flood Map. Vadnais mentions that our Study Group could meet with representatives from the Planning Department.

Harvey will set up meetings with TCRPC to proceed with the Green Infrastructure Audit and another meeting between Planning Staff and the Sustainable Building Study Group.

Staff Report: Harvey shared [a report](#) by email. Click link or request from harvey@meridian.mi.us

Commission/Liaison/Workgroup Reports:

Energy: Sarver reported Solar Tour in October, RFPs for two solar projects on the Farmers Market and the South Fire Station with a deadline in early August.

Environmental Justice Study Group: Vadnais suggests one more meeting. Masten invited Cindy Roper from the Natural Resources Defense Council to speak at a future Green Theme to report on the NRDC report: <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/local-policies-environmental-justice-national-scan-tishman-201902.pdf> Harvey mentions related themes of community engagement and empowerment. Harvey will set up a meeting with the Study Group (Vadnais, Jackson, Masten, Wisinski, Sarver)

Green Team/Green Networking: Harvey mentioned the Green Networking meetings on Wednesday mornings and invited all to participate. He invited people to share environmental stories and news on the [Green Meridian Page](#) and [Group](#) on Facebook.

Land Preservation Advisory Board: Kielbaso reports that the LPAB will meet next week at the Pavilion to discuss another millage for Land Preservation. Campbell also mentions development of the Conservation Corp. She's been working on signage responding to invasive species calls. Parks and natural areas are getting a lot of traffic.

Planning: McConnell reports that two meetings have been held. Hearings included a business in Haslett and a provisioning center on Northwind Dr. The big item was a special use permit

which is the 3rd phase of the Hanna Farms development at the east end of Hannah Blvd. There are a number of wetlands on the site and a special use permit. This development inspired McConnell's earlier comments about multi-jurisdictional regulation of flood planes. Jackson mentions that we should require a pedestrian bridge or expansion of railroad bridge. There is ongoing concern about the amount of impervious services (from Hannah Farms and from the Mall) entering the river in this vicinity.

Transportation: The Transportation Commission met and got a nice update on Twp Road Projects. McConnell's issue about a crossing at Campus Hill Apartments may be addressed in the M-43 plan.

Tree Team: Michelle Beloskur has submitted a proposal to assist with a large tree distribution at the market and a school project. Kielbaso reports a very recent conversation with Kevin Thayer who provides guidance on our Tree City designation. He asks if there is a current ordinance related trees on City-owned property. Harvey will check with the Planning Department.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:23pm

Next Meeting: August 5th at 7pm on Zoom

Remaining Meetings

- September 2 Town Hall Room, Zoom or Municipal Building
- October 7 Town Hall Room, Zoom or Municipal Building
- November 4 Community Room, Zoom or Main Fire Station
- December 2 Town Hall Room, Zoom or Municipal Building

A resolution declaring racism a public health crisis in the Charter Township of Meridian

WHEREAS, the Environmental Commission advises Township boards and staff on issues related to environmental protection, pollution prevention and the preservation of natural areas, and

WHEREAS, the Environmental Commission of the Charter Township of Meridian, recognizes that the scourge of racism, operating on systemic, institutional, and interpersonal levels through time and generations, has led to a public health crisis calling for urgent attention and action; and

WHEREAS, across the United States, race is the most significant predictor (more than socio-economic status) of a person living near contaminated air, water, or soil. This environmental imbalance creates and amplifies racial and social disparities across key indicators of success, including health, education, criminal justice, and economic security; and

WHEREAS, the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) defines environmental justice as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies; and

WHEREAS, the race-specific prevalence rate of COVID-19 for Asian and Black residents of Ingham County is more than 3 times that for white residents¹; and

WHEREAS, despite the increasing racial diversity in the US, the percentage of people of color in environmental organizations, foundations, and government agencies is approximately half that in the technology sector; and

WHEREAS, the Environmental Commission seeks proactive, transformational environmental solutions that connect to and create economic and education opportunities and redress past systemic injustice so that all communities can thrive; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION OF THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN declares racism to be a public health crisis that demands attention and action from all levels of government and ranks of civil society.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Environmental Commission dedicates itself to honest and open debate, discussion, and analysis of racial inequities in considering the effects of our recommendations for actions in our community; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Environmental Commission recommends that the Township Board and all township departments work with residents, especially those of color, to

- (a) collect data on racial disparities in staffing, procurement, contracting, representation on Township Boards and Commissions, and in receipt of government intervention/benefits,
- (b) review and revise policies and procedures with the goal of eradicating bias and ensuring equity; and
- (c) identify and implement policies and practices that intentionally eliminate racial disparities and foster a more equitable community.

¹ Ingham County Health Department COVID-19 Update, June 26, 2020