

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
REGULAR MEETING ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION –**DRAFT**-
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos MI 48864-1198
517.853.4000, Township Hall Room
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4TH, 2025, 7:00PM

PRESENT: Commissioners Laura Belisle, Tom Frazier, John Sarver, Richard Miksicek,
Cynthia Peterson, Harrison Batten and Trustee Nickolas Lentz

ABSENT: Chair Bill McConnell

STAFF: Deputy Township Manager Dan Opsommer, Project Engineer Jack Hughes

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Vice Chair Lee called the June 4th, 2025, Township Environmental Commission meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

2. ROLL CALL

Project Engineer Hughes called the roll of the Commission.

3. PRESENTATION

None this month.

4. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS

No public comment.

5. COMMUNICATIONS

Meridian Township was able to submit the *2025 Green Communities Challenge* application in time for consideration. Staff thanked the Commission for their timely reminder. Michigan Green Communities plans to announce the results in June.

6. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Vice Chair Lee proposed to approve the agenda.

Without objection, the adopted agenda was approved unanimously.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

May 7th 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes were approved as amended with a few minor corrections.

Without objection, the minutes for the May 7th meeting, as amended, were approved unanimously.

8. NEW BUSINESS

None at this time.

9. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. 2025 Green Grant Award Recommendations

The following organizations had their requested grant amounts approved in previous meetings: Girl Scout Troop, Montessori Radmoor School, Pine Creek Condo Association, YMCA Parkwood Branch

Two grants await a final decision:

Cornell Woods Homeowners Association

Original Request of \$5,000 to \$7,000 for native planting areas, specifically focused on a green space in the northeast corner of their lot area.

They agreed to open their bioswale to the public, particularly for school groups from Cornell Elementary and Okemos Public Schools to use the site for educational purposes. They are on board with installing educational signage explaining the project and local species. They were not keen on reducing the size of their footprint to create a drainage retention area for the township's benefit, so the plan remains focused on native species.

Recommendation from staff is to award the full requested amount of \$7,000.

Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy

Initially requested \$5,000, but reduced it to \$2,500 in their completed application for Native plantings throughout Meridian. This is a continuation of similar grants they have received and successfully executed in previous years. While there are minor discrepancies in their final report regarding the exact number, they planted between 600 to 900 trees. Given that their previous Green Grant was for only \$700, their investment in plantings alone (not including labor) far exceeds the grant amount. This makes them potentially the most impactful recipient in terms of return on investment among all Green Grant recipients. The recommendation from staff is to proceed with awarding the \$2,500 grant, as the project is deemed to be in good hands and consistent with prior successful initiatives.

With all 2025 Green Grant applications now finalized, including the reduced request from the Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy, the total recommended grant awards come to approximately \$18K. This figure falls within the allocated budget of \$20K, leaving a small surplus. As a result, staff is recommending that the Environmental Commission approve and fully fund every Green Grant project for the amounts requested by the applicants.

A question was raised about ensuring the suitability of native species for planting sites to maximize growth success. It was suggested that the Environmental Commission work with the Township, possibly Emma Campbell, to review species lists.

The idea of conducting site visits to past Green Grant project locations was proposed and well-received. These visits would help assess the health of trees and plantings, confirm signage presence, and inform future project planning based on success rates and challenges.

Concerns were voiced about the long-term guarantee of trees planted on private property, particularly if property ownership changes. It was acknowledged that while current owners are enthusiastic, it's difficult to enforce the continued presence of trees over time. There are no "claw back" provisions in the agreements, as such clauses would be difficult to enforce legally.

The possibility of geo-locating planted trees was discussed to better track their location and quantity. While beneficial, current Township staff resources prioritize civil infrastructure mapping over Green Grant plantings. It was suggested that grant recipients, specifically the Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy for their tree planting project, could be asked to collect and provide this data. This would be a simple task for them and would allow the Township to import it into their GIS database.

The commission discussed the need for greater clarity on the Green Grant program's overall impact, especially concerning plantings on private land and their benefit to the broader community. The current model is reactive, relying on applications from HOAs, the YMCA, and other associations, where labor is almost entirely volunteer. This limits the Township's control over long-term project outcomes, especially on private property where trees might be removed.

It was agreed to have past Green Grant recipients present to the commission on their completed projects and to look into conducting site visits to past project locations to assess performance and long-term impact. A broader discussion will be held before the next grant cycle to review the program's history, its objectives, and how it aligns with other funding sources and the overall Climate Sustainability Plan. This will help inform potential revisions or pivots in the program's direction to maximize community benefit and long-term impact.

Without objection, a motion to approve full funding of the Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy and Cornell Woods HOA Green Grants, was approved unanimously.

10. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Staff

None at this time.

B. Liaisons

Trustee Lentz provided an update from the Township Board.

The Township Board has begun setting its 2026 Township Goals. Unlike previous years, where environmental consciousness might have been a specific "actionable goal" there's a compelling argument to shift this to a "value statement" for 2026. This means that instead of a checkable item, environmentalism would be an overarching principle guiding all Township activities. This approach acknowledges that while specific projects (like achieving 100% green energy for Township buildings by 2035) are actionable goals, sustained environmentalism is a broader value.

The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission has completed a feasibility study for a regional lime recalcination project. This project would involve the ELMWSA Treatment Facility (used by Meridian Township) and nine other facilities sending their water-softening waste to be "recalcinated." This process has several environmental and economic benefits.

The Tri-County Annual Report indicates a positive trend for non-motorized transport and transit infrastructure. The amount of money recommended by Tri-County and applied for in grants for these areas has tripled over the last ten years. This is seen as an encouraging sign, reflecting increased engagement in regional surveys, even though recommendations don't always guarantee immediate results.

The Township Board voted to approve a ballot initiative regarding the Senior and Community Center, which will appear on the August ballot this year. More information, including financial details, estimated costs based on home taxable value, ballot language, and early voting information, is available on the newly launched website.

The 2026 budget has not yet been approved. This year, the Township has flipped its process, starting with setting goals before finalizing the budget. This aims to ensure the budget aligns with the Township's objectives. Staff-level work on the budget is just beginning, and it will be presented to the Board in late August for adoption in September. The Environmental Commission expects to discuss Climate Sustainability Funding to address any roll-forward of previous funding.

As Chair McConnell was absent, the update from the Planning Commission was skipped.

Commissioner Lee provided an update from the Land Preservation Advisory Board. New educational signage funded by the Climate Sustainability Fund has been installed at five or six different parks. These signs include QR codes that link to the Township's wetland ordinance. There was a suggestion to invite Emma Campbell to present on the Township's wetland education efforts given the funding provided. Additionally, a couple of controlled burns at Davis Foster and Red Cedar Glen reportedly went well.

Commissioner Sarver provided an update from the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority. On May 8th, the primary topic of discussion was the proposed changes to the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Affordable Housing policies and procedures. The Authority had no issues with the proposed changes. That same night, the Township Board approved the changes to the Brownfield Program, which now includes the TIF Affordable Housing option.

Commissioner Miksicek provided an update from the Parks Commission. The meeting began with a presentation from Sue and Dave Patton on the Meridian Cleaning Initiative. This program, similar to one discussed previously, gathers produce and food from local vendors and the Meridian Township Farmers Market to deliver to local food pantries and kitchens. The Pattons reported impressive results from their efforts. Director Wisinski presented the May Stewardship and Parks and Recreation calendars. She also provided an update on the Parks and Recreation budget for the prior two months.

A significant item was the update on the Red Cedar Multi-Jurisdictional Water Trail Program, which was presented to the Board of Trustees on April 29th. This program appears very promising, aiming to improve water quality and enhance opportunities for paddling and recreation on the Red Cedar River.

C. Teams

Commissioner Sarver provided an update from the Energy Team.

Commissioner Frazier provided an update from the Green Team.

No news from the Food Composting Team.

No news from the Green Burial Committee.

D. Haslett/Okemos High School

Commissioner Batten provided an update from the High Schools with input from Commissioner Peterson.

E. Other

No reports.

11. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No public comment.

12. OTHER MATTERS AND COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commission discussed moving the July meeting as many travel that first week. However enough members plan to be in town this year to hold the regularly scheduled meeting.

13. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:15pm.