

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
REGULAR MEETING ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION –**DRAFT**-
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos MI 48864-1198
517.853.4000, Township Hall Room
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6th, 2025, 7:00PM

PRESENT: Chair Bill McConnell, Vice Chair Yu Man Lee
Commissioners Tom Frazier, John Sarver, Richard Miksicek, and Trustee
Nickolas Lentz

ABSENT: Commissioners Laura Belisle, Cynthia Peterson, Harrison Batten

STAFF: Project Engineer Jack Hughes

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair McConnell called the August 6th, 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

Great Lakes Renewable Energy Association’s “Solarize Michigan” Program

4. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS

No public comment.

5. COMMUNICATIONS

None at this time.

6. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair McConnell entertained a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Lee moved, Commissioner Miksicek seconded.

Without objection, the agenda was approved unanimously.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

July 2nd 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes were approved as amended with one minor wording change. Commissioner Sarver moved, Commissioner Lee seconded.

Without objection, the minutes for the July 2nd meeting, as amended, were approved unanimously.

8. NEW BUSINESS

None at this time.

9. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Succession Follow-up

Chair McConnell proposed having other members of the commission conduct segments of the monthly meetings in order to gain experience in leading should the Chair be absent. In conducting official business however, the pre-defined structure will be followed so that the proper positions (Chair or Vice Chair) are entertaining and approving of motions. He reminded the commission that Chair elections will be held in January for any who are interested in running.

10. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Staff

Project Engineer Hughes shared that Meridian Township officials met with Consumers Energy to discuss a renewable energy program that could help the township reach its goal of using 100% green energy by 2035. This program would allow the township to pay a small monthly fee to subscribe to green energy, rather than building and managing its own solar facilities.

Meridian Township currently just barely meets the minimum requirement of 'one million kilowatts' to join. If the provided projections are accurate, the Township would pay extra for about six years, break even in the seventh year, and then start to see financial benefits for the remainder of the 20-year program.

Applications are due by September 30th, but the program could fill up sooner. Township officials are requesting more details on the estimated financial returns. They are also concerned that if they move forward with their own planned solar projects, they might fall below the kilowatt threshold and become ineligible for this program.

The Township plans to have more information to share at the next meeting. They believe this year is the best time to join the program, as they would not be kicked out for falling below the kilowatt threshold in the future once enrolled. The Township is planning to do solar installations at the fire station and the historic village, as well as on the public safety building within the next few years.

Project Engineer Hughes then provided an update on the progress of the Green Grants. This year, six grants were awarded, and the first payments have been sent out to four of the recipients. The grant payments are structured in two parts: 50% upfront and the remaining 50% upon completion of the project.

Recipients who received their first payment:

Cornell Woods Homeowners Association, Montessori Radmoor School, YMCA, Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy

Recipients with pending payments:

Girl Scouts Troop: Their payment is on hold because of an error on their W-9 form. The applicant's name was used instead of the troop's organizational name, and this needs to be

corrected before the payment can be processed.

Pine Creek Condo Association: The agreement for this grant is being slightly re-worded. Although the condo association is the applicant, the work will be done by a company called Reclaimed by Design, and the agreement and W-9 form need to reflect this partnership.

The Township plans to have the Girl Scouts' W-9 corrected and the Pine Creek Condo Association's agreement finalized by the next meeting.

Trustee Lentz noted that Meridian Township has applied for a grant through Senator Slotkin's office to help fund the fire station solar tiles. If the grant is approved, the project's expenses would be covered by the grant rather than by Meridian Township taxpayers. The earliest the project would be installed is 2027.

Vice Chair Lee asked for clarification on if Meridian Township did get accepted into that program, would we then meet that goal of 100% renewable energy by 2035?

Project Engineer Hughes noted it would, and elaborated that subscribing to such a program is a good option for municipalities like Kalamazoo, which are too densely populated to build their own solar farms. This program allows them to 'go green' without needing to install the equipment themselves. While this is a faster way to achieve 100% green energy, it doesn't offer the same PR benefits that come with having local solar panels.

Meridian Township is interested in using its own green space to install solar panels. While the financial benefits of doing so are up for discussion, having visible solar panels, like those on Marsh Road, would serve as a public beacon of the township's commitment to green energy. In contrast, subscribing to a program through a facility located elsewhere in the state is less tangible for residents.

The Program primarily uses solar and wind power. It acts as a way for Consumers Energy to secure funding to build large-scale renewable facilities. By having municipalities like Meridian Township and the East Lansing Meridian Water Sewer Authority (ELMWSA) agree to a 20-year commitment, Consumers Energy can build new solar facilities without needing to take out loans.

Lentz, a non-voting board member of ELMWSA, noted that the proposed facilities would be located on land owned by Consumers Energy, likely in the area north of the 127 highway. He also clarified that no solar panels would be built in Meridian Township specifically for this project.

The first six years of the program would cover the upfront costs. If a municipality were to leave the program after this period, it would be a shame because that is when they would begin to see the financial benefits. However, a municipality has an opt-out clause. If the program's final cost comes in 10% higher than promised after the facilities are constructed, the township can leave the agreement.

Consumers Energy keeps the exact locations of the new facilities confidential until just before development. They have sites planned for 2026, 2027, and 2028. The East Lansing Meridian Water Sewer Authority is the largest municipal consumer of electricity east of Lansing. Lentz believes the program would provide a significant benefit to ELMWSA.

B. Liaisons

Trustee Lentz provided an update from the Township Board.

The Township Board approved a reduction in parking lot minimums. This decision continues a trend that began eight years ago and is seen as a positive step toward reducing the amount of land dedicated to parking spaces.

A project to build a lime recalcinator, a facility that would turn waste lime into reusable lime, has stalled. It was a long-term project that required support from major players like the Lansing Board of Water and Light and the City of Ann Arbor. Since their full support is now in question, the viability of the project is being re-evaluated. The Tri-County Regional Planning Board approved a \$30,000 study to see if the project can proceed without them.

Meridian Township's drinking water won the regional "best tasting water" competition and will now compete in the state championship on September 26th.

Meridian Township voters rejected a millage proposal for a new senior and community center. The Township Board will discuss what this means for the project's future, as a grant for the center, which must be spent or allocated by the end of October, is still available.

Chair McConnell provided an update from the Planning Commission.

The Planning Commission is pleased that the Township Board approved the reduction of parking minimums. They are now working on the finer details, such as the required amount of landscaping, the type of plants, and the permeability of parking lot surfaces.

The commission is also addressing complaints about roosters in residential areas. The current ordinance only allows roosters in rural residential large-lot districts, but due to historical zoning "anomalies," some people are keeping them in more densely populated areas. The commission is working on a recommendation to the Township Board to update the ordinance and "regularize" the rules.

The commission is also looking at two specific ordinances to make them more efficient.

Staff are considering how to allow minor impacts (de minimis) to wetlands and floodplains to be handled through an administrative review, rather than a more extensive process.

The commission is reviewing an ordinance that requires a special use permit for any building equal to or greater than 25,000 square feet. This rule often creates an extra layer of bureaucracy for projects that are already regulated by zoning. The commission is looking to clarify the purpose of this rule, which is meant to address public safety and nuisance concerns, and to fix confusing language, such as what constitutes a "group of buildings."

Commissioner Lee was absent from the recent Land Preservation Advisory Board site visit in July so no update was available.

Commissioner Sarver provided an update from the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority.

The Haslett Village project is moving forward. The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and the Board of Trustees have both approved an amendment to the Haslett Village Brownfield plan to include affordable housing. According to the developer, assuming all approvals are in place, infrastructure work could begin this year. Construction on the buildings is expected to start next year.

Commissioner Miksicek provided an update from the Parks Commission.

The feedback on the recent Celebrate Meridian event's display, which replaced fireworks with a drone show, was split about 50/50. The drone show had benefits like a lower environmental impact, less noise, and was easier on pets and people with sensory issues. However, many people

still missed the "nostalgia and spectacle" of traditional fireworks. This feedback will be used to plan for next year's event.

Commissioners discussed updating the current park and facility naming policy, which dates back to 2008. The existing policy favors naming facilities after people who have made significant financial or land contributions. The commission agreed that the policy needs to be clarified and simplified. They also want the policy to include other forms of recognition, like plaques, and to better align with naming policies for preserves in the Township's Land Preservation Project.

The Commission received updates on several park improvement projects:

New playscape equipment is being installed at Towner Road Park and the Ottawa Hills Inclusive Playground. New 'EZ' Docks are being installed for paddlers on the Red Cedar River. One at Wonch Park will be fully ADA accessible, while the one at the Harris Nature Center will not be ADA compliant due to the riverbank's steep slope.

The Commission also discussed the resurfacing of the parking lot near the Meridian Marketplace on the Green. The Township Board will decide whether to share a portion of the cost. If they do, a commissioner noted that the Township should have a say in improvements to pedestrian access and traffic flow for that area.

C. Teams

Commissioner Sarver provided an update from the Energy Team.

A recent "Solarize" event was held at Edgewood Community Church. The event, which focused on encouraging non-residential entities like businesses, churches, and non-profits to consider solar power, had a good turnout. Organizations that attended will now review proposals from Absolute Solar to decide whether to participate in the program.

Commissioner Fraizer provided an update from the Green Team.

The Green Team has two upcoming events planned for this season. First, the Green Fair will take place at the Farmers Market on August 16th. Second, the annual Electronics Recycling Event is scheduled for September 20th. The location for this event has changed; it will now be held in the parking lot near Chili's, at the other end of the mall from the Farmers Market. The Green Team will meet again next week to continue planning both events.

No news from the Food Composting Team.

Commissioner Fraizer provided an update from the Green Burial Committee.

The Green Burial committee does not have any new updates to report. The committee had hoped to present to the Township Board in July, but this was postponed due to scheduling conflicts. They still aim to make their presentation sometime this month.

D. Haslett/Okemos High School

No News as the High Schools are out of session.

E. Other

No reports.

11. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No public comment.

12. OTHER MATTERS AND COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Vice Chair Lee asked for an update on the township's budget for next year, specifically wondering about the climate sustainability grants.

Trustee Lentz explained that while the Township's goals for the upcoming year have been approved, the budget itself has not yet been presented to the Board for discussion. Lentz suggested that if there are any significant changes planned for the budget compared to last year's, they should be added to the agenda for discussion sooner rather than later. For now, he believes there's no expectation of a major change to the township's funding structure.

Since the Environmental Commission has a light upcoming agenda, Chair McConnell suggested that the members review the 2023 Master Plan for potential projects to champion. He noted that the plan contains many "shovel-ready" objectives that the Environmental Commission could take on. He specifically pointed out the need to create a bicycle and pedestrian plan, which would involve public engagement to understand how the community views the current system and what it would like to see in the future. McConnell suggested this type of project falls within the Environmental Commission's mission and could be a good fit.

In response to a question about electric car charging stations, McConnell clarified that the Planning Commission has discussed them as an incentive for applications but has not considered making them a requirement in the parking ordinance.

13. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:23pm.