

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
REGULAR MEETING ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION -**DRAFT**-
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos MI 48864-1198
517.853.4000, Township Hall Room
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2025, 7:00PM

PRESENT: Harrison Batten, Laura Belisle, Tom Frazier, Yu Man Lee, Nickolas Lentz, Bill McConnell, Richard Miksicek, Cynthia Peterson, and John Sarver

ABSENT: None

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

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair McConnell called the February 5, 2025, Township Environmental Commission meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

2. ROLL CALL

Deputy Manager Opsommer called the roll of the Commission.

Commissioner Batten, Commissioner Belisle, Commissioner Frazier, Commissioner Lee, Trustee Lentz, Chair McConnell, Commissioner Miksicek, Commissioner Peterson, and Commissioner Sarver present at 7:01 p.m.

3. PRESENTATION

None

4. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS

No public comment.

5. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair McConnell proposed to amend the agenda by adding agenda item 6.D Discussion of Future Presentations ideas.

Without objection, the agenda, as amended, was approved unanimously.

6. NEW BUSINESS

A. Financial Overview of the Green Grants, 2021-2024

Deputy Manger Opsommer presented a spreadsheet that provided a historical overview of all Green Grant awards from 2021-2024, including:

- Recipient
- Year of Award

- Award Amount
- Amount Paid
- Remaining Funds
- Project Status

The spreadsheet also provided the Commission with a cumulative table by year.

Trustee Lentz asked what timelines the award recipients are under with the grant. Deputy Manager Opsommer shared that the grant agreement requires recipients to complete their project by December 30 of the award year and that grant recipients have the ability to request extensions when necessary.

Commissioner Miksicek asked if there would be preference given to school districts applying if the total amount of funds requested from all applicants exceeds the total annual funding.

Chair McConnell suggested that the Commission transition to agenda item 6.B given that the discussion is more germane to this agenda item.

B. 2025 Green Grants

Deputy Manager Opsommer referenced that the 2024 Green Grant materials were in the Commissions packet and suggests that the Commission weigh in on the following subjects:

- What organizations should be eligible? Are there any types of organizations that the Commission believes should not be eligible?
- What types of projects should be eligible?
- Should we score projects using specific criteria? Should we weight certain criteria higher than others, such as weight environmental or sustainability criteria higher than community place making criteria?

Chair McConnell offered a fourth subject for the Commission's consideration: Do we want to provide funding guidance to applicants?

Commissioner Sarver stated the first year the major priority was to fund projects associated with school districts and that this opportunity was expanded in the second and future years. Commissioner Sarver asked if there has been any burden on staff to administer the Green Grant program and if there are any legal issue in terms of what types of organizations can receive funding.

Deputy Manager Opsommer stated that the Township's only legal constraint in terms of awarding grants is that the grant recipient must expend those funds to serve a public purpose. For example, a grant to install a welcome to Haslett sign in the Haslett Road right-of-way, does serve a public purpose.

Commissioner Sarver stated that he had heard that the Township Board would like to have more interaction with homeowners associations (HOA) and inquired what the intent was behind that?

Trustee Lentz stated that the Township Board heard from many residents that they didn't feel like the Township Board was reaching them where they are at. HOAs are neighborhood

focused and serve as a conduit for the Township to engage residents at a neighborhood focus.

Deputy Manager Opsommer stated that the administration of the Green Grants is not a burden on Township staff.

Deputy Manager Opsommer also shared that many HOAs in the Township have open space parcels due to the Township's zoning ordinance, specifically the PUD portion of the zoning ordinance. These open space parcels can be negatively impacted by the spread of invasive species, just as the Township's land preserve can be. Therefore, allowing HOAs to apply for Green Grants does make sense from the vantage point that HOAs have to steward open space acreage.

Chair McConnell asked Commissioner Sarver how he believes the evaluation of the grant applications has evolved over time and that his understanding is that the Green Grant Committee meets to review all applications, develops scoring, and then makes a recommendation to the Environmental Commission.

Commissioner Sarver stated that three scoring criteria have historically been used: environmental impact, outreach to the community, and is there a viable plan for the project. Outreach to the community is important because these grants are often funding small projects that can be used as a demonstration to the larger community. Overall, Commissioner Sarver has used broad criteria when scoring applications. There haven't been that many applications in prior years, which has allowed the Environmental Commission from having to not fund projects due to a lack of available funds.

Commissioner Belisle asked how many projects have not been awarded funding in prior years.

Commissioner Sarver stated he is not aware of any applicants who have not been awarded funding in prior years. Commissioner Sarver stated that Township staff have helped applicants submit reasonable proposals to avoid situations such as this.

Commissioner Sarver speculated that demand for these grants could increase over time as the community becomes more aware of this opportunity.

Chair McConnell asked how much volunteer labor and in-kind donations, such as plants, have been factored into the Green Grant Committee's decision-making.

Commissioner Sarver stated that nearly all of these projects have had volunteer labor and/or donated materials involved.

Commissioner Frazier noted that the materials do state that match funding, volunteer labor, and in-kind donations are encouraged.

Commissioner Lee suggested that we consider encourage applicants to bring forward projects that align with Meridian Township's 2023 Climate Sustainability Plan.

Chair McConnell stated that he is skeptical of ranked scoring criteria.

Chair McConnell asked who would be willing to serve on a small subcommittee to bring forward a proposal for changes to the Green Grant materials.

Chair McConnell asked Township staff for a recommendation on timelines.

Deputy Manager Opsommer suggested a timeline of getting the grant materials released to the public in about 2 weeks so that applications could be due by the end of March. Township staff and the Green Grant Committee could then meet to review and score the applications, and bring a full recommendation to the Environmental Commission at their April meeting.

Commissioner Sarver and Commissioner Miksicek offered to serve on the subcommittee to update the grant application, instructions and agreement.

Chair McConnell thanked Commissioner Sarver and Commissioner Miksicek for serving on the 2025 Green Grant Committee.

Deputy Manager Opsommer stated that Township staff would try to maximize the number of days that the public is able to apply.

Commissioner Lee asked if we want to list the average size of previous awards.

Deputy Manager Opsommer stated the Committee could look at listing suggested amounts for applicants to apply for based on the historical data.

Deputy Manager Opsommer also suggested that the Committee could look at asking applicants to share more information regarding in-kind donations and volunteer labor hours so that could be quantified a little more in the future.

C. Resolution in Support of Meridian Township's FY26 CDS Grant Application

Project Engineer Hughes gave the Commission an overview of the FY26 CDS Grant opportunity through Senator Gary Peters' Office, the nine projects that the Township evaluated, and an overview of the solar concept plan the Township has developed for the Public Safety Building, which is being recommended as the project that the Township applies to receive grant funding for.

The proposed project for which the Township is seeking funding is the addition of solar arrays to the roof of the Public Safety Building and the parking lot to the north of this building. This project would include a 204.22 kilowatt system, producing 244,677 kilowatt-hours annually. Upon completion of this project, we estimate that we would be able to produce just over 100% of the annual energy consumption of the Public Safety Building.

This project would tie into the existing Public Safety Building solar infrastructure, which is connected to the electrical grid, so we can supply the grid when we produce more energy than we consume.

Commissioner Sarver shared that the Energy Team is aware of this grant opportunity and is thrilled. Commissioner Sarver stated that the fact that Township has adopted a Climate Sustainability Plan that sets a goal of obtaining 50% of electricity used for Township operations from renewable energy sources by 2025 and 100% by 2035 may help us with our grant application.

Trustee Lentz shared the Township Board did support a similar resolution on March 4. Trustee Lentz also stated that Township staff had presented the Township Board with an update on where we currently stand as it relates to those goals. Trustee Lentz stated that the

data shows that we are currently at 28 percent of our energy coming from renewable resources. This, if approved, would put us at about 53%, only about 1 years behind our goal for obtaining 50% of electricity used for Township operations from renewable energy sources by 2025.

Commissioner Miksicek as if the Township has identified funds for the 50 percent match that is required for this grant.

Deputy Manager Opsommer shared that he had spoken to the Township Manager and the Township is prepared to provide the matching funds through the Township's General Fund.

Deputy Manager Opsommer asked that the Commission amend the third whereas clause so that it conforms to the version of the resolution that the Township Board adopted on March 4.

Chair McConnell adopted the amendment without objection.

The Resolution in Support of Meridian Township's FY26 CDS Grant Application was approved unanimously.

D. Discussion of Future Presentations

Chair McConnell stated that he has some future presentations he would like to propose:

1. Food Rescue, a local nonprofit that has expressed a desire in presenting in the past
2. Presentation that overviews Township wetland data
3. A presentation from the Ingham County Drain Commissioner's Office regarding the Okemos Consolidated Drain Project, past projects, and future projects
4. 2025 Green Grant recipients for project updates

7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

8. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Staff

Deputy Manager Opsommer updated the Commission on the staffing transition the Township is currently working on for the Commission.

Due to an upcoming retirement, the Commission will be staffed by Project Engineer Jack Hughes moving forward. Deputy Manager Opsommer stated that he would be assisting as the Township makes the transition.

The Commission and staff also discussed future agenda items to discuss the current status and future uses of the remaining Climate Sustainability funding.

B. Liaisons

Chair McConnell shared that the Planning Commission was working on modernizing our Township's parking schedule in the Zoning Ordinance.

Commissioner Lee stated that the Land Preservation Advisory Board has not met since her most recent report.

Commissioner Sarver shared that there are currently no updates for the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority.

Chair McConnell noted that he is working to establish liaisons with the Park Commission. Commissioner Miksicek stated he is available to serve as the liaison.

The Commissioners discussed the benefits of the Joint Meeting of the Township's Boards and Commissions and how wonderful it is to see the engagement we have across the community.

C. Teams

Commissioner Sarver stated that he has sent on the Energy Team items from the Climate Sustainability Plan to the appropriate Township staff.

Commissioner Sarver shared that there would be an upcoming Solarize Meridian meeting held on April 9 from 6:30-8 p.m. at Henry's Place in Okemos. This event was added to the Township's website.

Commissioner Frazier stated that the upcoming Farmer's Market would include a Green Team event that would include interactive components for children.

Commissioner Frazier shared that the Township's Spring Recycling event would be held on Saturday, April 26.

Commissioner Frazier stated that the Green Team meets on the second Thursday at 4 p.m. at Schuler's Book Store in the Meridian Mall.

No update from the Food & Composting Team.

Commissioner Frazier stated that the Green Burial Team was working to finalize a presentation for the Township Board.

D. Haslett/Okemos High School

Commissioner Batten stated that they are working to schedule a field trip to the East Lansing Recycling Center.

Commissioner Batten also shared that they are pursuing a grant rechargeable batteries for classroom supplies and working to help find volunteers for the upcoming Green Team event.

Commissioner Batten stated that Haslett Key Club is working to obtain a grant to renovate the courtyard at Haslett High School.

E. Other

No reports.

9. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS

No public comment.

10. OTHER MATTERS AND COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Trustee Lentz shared that the Township Board approved a resolution in support of another grant that the Township is pursuing. The grant application is to secure funding to prospectively construct a trailhead for the MSU to Lake Lansing Trail at 5280 Okemos Road, a Township-owned property adjacent to the entrance to Nancy Moore Park.

Commissioner Batten shared that he would be presenting at the Michigan Science Teacher Association's event on Friday.

Chair McConnell shared an excerpt of an email he sent to the Township Supervisor as he reflected on all of the positive from the Joint Meeting of the Township's Board and Commissions.

11. Approval of the Minutes

Commissioner Frazier noted two corrections to the February 5, 2025 meeting minutes.

Without objection, the minutes of the February 5, 2025 meeting, as amended, were approved unanimously.

12. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:26 pm.