

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
SPECIAL MEETING TOWNSHIP BOARD 2021 **-APPROVED-**
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos MI 48864-1198
517.853.4000, Township Hall Room
SATURDAY, December 11, 2021 **9:00 am**

PRESENT: Supervisor Styka, Clerk Guthrie, Treasurer Deschaine, Trustees Opsommer, Wisinski, Sundland, Jackson (9:20)

ABSENT:

STAFF: Township Manager Walsh, Deputy Manager Perry, Fire Chief Hamel, Community Planning and Development Director Schmitt, IT Director Gebes, Chief of Police Plaga, Communications Manager Yates, Director of Economic and Development Clark, Township Assessor Winstead, Parks and Recreation Director Maisner

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Supervisor Styka called the meeting to order at 9:05 pm.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INTRODUCTIONS

Supervisor Styka led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLLCALL

Clerk Guthrie called the roll of the Board.

Supervisor Styka is attending remotely from his home in Meridian Township due to health issues.

4. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Supervisor Styka opened public remarks at 9:06 am

NONE

Supervisor Styka closed public remarks at 9:07 am

5. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Trustee Opsommer moved to approve the agenda. Seconded by Treasurer Deschaine.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEAS: Supervisor Styka, Clerk Guthrie, Treasurer Deschaine, Trustees Opsommer, Wisinski, Sundland

NAYS: None

Motion carried: 6-0

6. BOARD DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Overview of 2021 Township Board Goals and Objectives 9:00am-9:15am

Manager Walsh spoke about the goals and objectives of the Township Board. He spoke about the population growth of 11% in the township and the new improvements and additions to the township over the last 10 years. He spoke of the new investments in the township during COVID-19, and how all these points attract new residents.

He stated the township's COVID-19 response was good as it acquired new grants and started the COVID-19 hotline. He spoke of the solar energy projects and of Diversity Equity and inclusion. He spoke of the Village of Okemos and Pine Village projects. He spoke of the road project and the comprehensive broadband projects. The design for the pathway project is done, but the signage in the township needs to be worked on. The website was kicked off November 15th and township pension payments are on track.

Overall manager Walsh stated he is very happy with the progress made by the township over the last several years.

B. Overview of 2021 Departmental Activities & 2022 Vision

1) Human Resources 9:15am-9:30am

Manager Walsh outlined the HR department's 2021 achievements and 2022 goals. He stated working with COVID-19 protocols is a main focus. Director Tithof is also working on contract negotiations as four collective bargaining agreements are expiring next year. The Personal Policy Handbook is being worked on for the first time since 2013. Diversity Equity and Inclusion, and retention and recruitment are on the forefront of the HR department's mind.

Treasurer Deschaine thanked manager Walsh for his presentation and spoke about the importance of focusing on employee retention and recruitment. He spoke about changing township policy to accept cashless payments.

2) Community Planning and Development 9:30am-9:45am

Director Schmitt outlined the Community and Planning department's achievements in 2021 and goals of 2022.

Director Schmitt stated his department has had a nearly 50% turnover in the last year and thanked his current staff. He further stated finishing the MUPUD Ordinance update was a big accomplishment and he is currently working on the sign ordinance. Many of his goals involve how the department works with East Lansing and Mason on building contracts and the township's contract with Mason was updated and reapproved last fall.

Further he stated overall the township has pulled through COVID-19 well from a construction standpoint. The Woodward Way project is underway, Red Cedar Manor is completed, and Silverstone and Copper Creek subdivisions have started construction. Commercial construction is underway all over the township. He stated as a community the township is moving towards acting more as a brownfield community. He stated the easy sites are gone and his focus is on how to support the new big projects going forward. His department will start to update the 5 year master plan in 2022 and will also focus on improving the process for developers and staff. He wishes to make his department less reliant on paper and to modernize the Zoning Ordinance as much of it is 50 years old. He wants to update the Zoning Board of Appeals standards and has 14 minor amendments to bring to the Planning Commission. He wants to think big and with that he wants to pursue the mall reimaging, affordable housing and how west Grand River Rd. should look.

Trustee Opsommer agreed with Director Schmitt on needing to make updates. He asked about the gas station at Marsh and Haslett and if they are having construction problems due to COVID-19.

Director Schmitt stated they were having supply chain issues.

Trustee Opsommer asked if the 5-year master plan would be created internally or use an outside source.

Director Schmitt stated they would hire an outside firm to aid in collecting public input.

Trustee Opsommer stated the Zoning Board of Appeals amendments referenced are worth looking at.

Director Schmitt stated he would address front yard setbacks and sight triangles first thing 2022.

Clerk Guthrie stated she was happy to hear Director Schmitt is going paperless, and that he should work with her office on that front. She also encouraged Director Schmitt to work with MDOT on the left turn signal on Northwind where Trader Joe's is going to be.

Trustee Jackson spoke about the lack of Greenfield and thinking bigger. She asked about the structure of his department.

Director Schmitt clarified that bigger is a way of thinking not necessarily just meaning bigger buildings. He stated his staff levels are one and a half rental inspectors, one full time code enforcement officer, 2 full time building inspectors, one building official, one admin assistant, one assistant planner, and a senior planner. He stated he has one open admin assistant position.

3) Economic Development & Neighborhoods 9:45am-10:00am

Director Clark outlined the Economic Development & Neighborhood 2021 year and goals for 2022.

Director Clark overviewed the Village of Okemos project. There is an active grant from EGLE of about \$975,000 and a loan of about the same amount. Those funds are in the name of the developer, however the funds belong to the township. While COVID-19 did have an impact, the developer shares responsibility for delays. For the developer to keep the grant and loan they must show progress moving forward according to EGLE's specifications. Should the developer retain funding, construction progress should be seen in June 2022 and the project should be finished in 2024.

In terms of other major redevelopments she would like to see the Downtown Development Authority come up with their own policies to assist. The DDA hopes to hold an art festival this year. Small business grants are over \$500,000. The community's first Juneteenth celebration was in 2021. She has worked with Director Schmitt on Brownfields, the sign Ordinance and the MUPUD Ordinance update.

Pine Village should begin construction next quarter. The project should be about \$21 mill total, \$3 mil. out of brownfields. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation has updated their Redevelopment Ready Communities status so that a term of certification is 5 years to match the master plan cycles under State law. Suggested recertifying with MEDC and will provide more information in January. Suggested arming the Corridor Improvement Authority with tools to focus on the mall.

Trustee Jackson asked when the Village of Okemos redevelopment renewal deadline is.

Director Clark replied the end of 2022 to show progress on items, and 2023 to finish those items.

Trustee Opsommer thanked Director Clark for her work. He discussed making the Corridor Improvement Authority the TIF for the mall, and the Village of Okemos project. He spoke about working with other communities that don't qualify for the Transformational Brownfield Program.

4) Parks and Recreation 10:00am-10:15am

Director Maisner outlined the Parks and Recreation 2021 and 2022 goals.

Director Maisner stated over 2000 children are participating in Sporties for Shorties. The senior exercise group meets three days a week at the pavilion outside of the township hall and the senior center is operating virtually. The Harris Nature Center had their highest number of kids attending summer camp this year, and the farmers market has had 84,000 visitors on Saturdays in 2021 and Wednesdays the summer concert series took place at the marketplace. The artificial ice rink is open and has hosted a family skating event. The Parks Department also hosted smaller events such as Howlween, Santa Paws, and Drive-Through-Santa is next. The dog parks are doing well with 1006 members. The 5 year Parks and Recreation Master Plan is being updated and due to the DNR on February 1st and they have obtained a grant to create a pathway and trail map for community use.

Acquired home on Okemos Rd. and will demolish after fire department training. North Meridian Rd. park soccer field does not have enough parking and will be expanded. Plans on installing shade structure at Towner Rd. Park for pickle ballers. Department is working

with Deputy Manager Perry on replacing park signs. Renewing community services millage will be important in 2022. Floating islands have been installed in the pond at Central Park South. Thanked Manager Walsh and the board for retention and recruitment focus.

Trustee Wisinski thanked Director Maisner for her work. She would like to see a continuing focus on developing the marketplace.

Director Maisner stated Delta Dental supplied \$4000 dollars for a box that will contain ice skates for anyone in the public to use at the new ice rink.

Trustee Jackson asked why Director Maisner would like to expand the parking lot at South Central Park.

Director Maisner stated people are parking across the street from the park and having to cross the road.

5) Deputy Manager & Public Works 10:15am-10:30am

Deputy Manager Perry spoke about the achievements of Public Works in 2021 with a focus on roads and drains. He further spoke about the goals of public works in 2022.

He spoke about replacing a water main in the wetlands close to the Grand River Rd. project. He stated only one bid came in and he is rebidding the project. Put onsite power generation at 2 lifts stations. Finalized the Georgetown payback agreement. In municipal buildings; completed HVAC project, modernized drinking fountains and HVAC controls, remodeled vacant office to be the Trustee office, replaced exterior doors and replacing lights with LED lights. Went forward with the sidewalk order to maintain project, the Powell Rd. paving project and streetlight special assessment for Silverstone. He is resubmitting a grant for the recycling center. Moving forward with Railroad quiet zone, and moving forward with an electric vehicle assessment.

Local Road Program entering its third year. Okemos bridge project is moving forward in 2022. Pathway construction will hopefully move forward. The phase three program is moving forward and the Shaw sidewalk extension has been completed. Will be repainting the water tower and branding it with the new logo. Moving forward with a project updating flow controls and Booster station modifications. Starting rehab on existing sewer mains. Starting a meter replacement project. Replacing the Public Safety Building's generator. Replacing skylights at the Service Center and the roof of the Okemos library as well as modifying the Clerk's office mail room. The solar panel project is moving forward headed by volunteers on the energy team.

Clerk Guthrie asked if any grants were available for electric vehicle charging stations.

Deputy Manager Perry replied yes there are, and more are coming.

6) Assessing 10:30am-10:40am

Township Assessor Winstead spoke about the assessment department's achievements during 2021, and goals for 2022.

She stated her focus for 2022 is to gather a few interns and inspect 20% of the parcels in the township. She is working on her level 4 assessor's certification and is going to hold an assessor's review before March Board of Review.

At this time Manager Walsh asked to cross off item 10 and 14 from the agenda.

7) Police 10:40am-10:55am

Chief Plaga spoke about his 2021 Goals and 2022 objectives.

Reaching 41 staff members is a major goal as an officer has left for Detroit, another is leaving for Midland and a potential officer failed the academy.

Chief Plaga is working on getting reaccredited and has partnered with community mental health to help 24/7 on calls.

Trustee Opsommer stated that if the township falls below 35 officers their will be a problem.

Trustee Wisinski asked if pay has an effect on officer recruitment.

Chief Plaga stated pay is part of it, but opportunity is also a big problem and there is a lack of it in the township due to staffing.

Treasurer Deschaine thanked Chief Plaga for his work. He asked about police moral being understaffed.

Chief Plaga stated most of his officers are young and have a lot of energy.

8) Fire 10:55am-11:10am

Chief Hamel spoke about his achievements for 2021 and his goals for 2022.

He spoke about the impact of COVID-19 on the township and his department. He spoke about the emergency response plan with Ingham County. He's creating a damage assessment team and rolling out a continuity operations plan early 2022. He's pushing to becoming an accredited fire department by 2023, a big part of which is standard of cover and a strategic planning process. The siren project is moving forward.

Recruiting is on the forefront of the fire department's mind as two people are leaving the department next year. Michigan does not have a sustainable amount of young people training to become paramedics so the department has been sponsoring people for paramedic school, working with LCC to meet paramedic students, sent out flyers to four states and is advertising on social media. He is also currently working on an \$180,000 AFG

grant to send four EMTs to paramedic school. He will be replacing equipment and ordered an ambulance that should arrive in September.

Trustee Wisinski discussed recruitment and retention with Chief Hamel.

9) Information Technology 11:10am-11:25am

Director Gebes spoke about the Information and Technology department's accomplishments of 2021 and goals for 2022.

He spoke about recruitment and retention in the last five years.

The Information and Technology department's focus of 2022 will be improved storage area network, IT evaluation performed by Brightline, firewall improvements, replacing network switches, expansion of software services, improving internet infrastructure, WI-FI improvements, creating connections to state public safety networks, and moving key resources to cloud based services.

~~10) Finance 11:25am-11:40am~~

11) Communications 11:40am-11:55am

Manager Yates spoke about her accomplishments in 2021 and her goals for 2022.

The township website is launched but not finished.

Communication's focus of 2022 is the township website, branding and marketing. Communications will be supporting broadband across the community. They will review and analyze their different channels. The operating policy for HOMtv has been approved. Townhall A/V upgrade will go forward in 2022.

Trustee Wisinski asked about the forms on the website being ADA compliant.

Manager Yates stated they are working on this internally with a web intern but needs to work with different departments to see which forms are still being used. She further stated Granicus has an ADA compliancy department that will also help make sure all forms are compliant.

12) Clerk 11:55am-12:10pm

Clerk Guthrie reported that when she became Clerk, there were 24 discrepancies in the 2020 November election audit while the May election audit had only one.

13) Treasurer 12:10pm-12:25pm

Treasurer Deschaine reported his goals for 2022 is to accept more payments with credit and debit card, take more online payments and to get away from press and seal tax bills as it's out of date and commonly mistaken for junk mail.

~~14) Township Manager 12:25pm-12:30pm~~

7. LUNCH BREAK

At 12:21 the board recessed for lunch.

At 12:47 the board returned from lunch.

8. BOARD DISCUSSION CONTINUED

C. Establish 2022 Action Plan & ARP Discussion

Township Manager Walsh outlined and discussed the township's 2022 Action Plan with the board.

A. **Infrastructure Enhancements**

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Infrastructure Enhancements.

Trustee Opsommer stated the Transportation Commission may bring forward a resolution asking MDOT to explore the possibility of a signalized intersection between Best Buy and Meijer.

Treasurer Deschaine asked about implementing the railroad quiet zones in 2022.

Deputy Manager Perry stated the township would have to communicate to MDOT the intent to create the quiet zones and also pay for it. He would also have to talk with MSU and make sure they are on board. He further stated the cost of the quiet zone is under \$100,000. The minimum distance you need for the quiet zone ends at Bogue St. which is part of MSU's main campus.

Treasurer Deschaine asked if we could focus on the Haslett quiet zone first.

Trustee Opsommer stated it's more cost effective to work on each quiet zone at the same time.

Trustee Jackson asked if the township would be responsible for the cost of the two quiet zones.

Deputy Perry replied yes. However MSU may help cover some costs.

Manager Walsh stated the board hasn't specifically stated they want to cover the quiet zones and it's not budgeted at this time.

Trustee Jackson stated that she would like to see it done in the next year.

Treasurer Deschaine stated he would also like to see it done as soon as possible.

Trustee Jackson spoke about working with Ingham County officials on broadband. She would like to address the survey results to find a long-term fix for the entire township.

Deputy Perry stated he brought in a consulting firm, Merit, which will focus on the survey.

Trustee Jackson asked when Merit will start working.

Deputy Perry stated after their first meeting with a county led subcommittee.

Trustee Wisinski asked if broadband can be done in regional spaces.

Deputy Perry stated they could work with Comcast to start work on problem areas. He also suggested calling broadband a public service.

Trustee Opsommer stated the township could have a special assessment to fund the broadband project.

B. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Diversity, Equity and inclusion.

C. Economic Development

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Economic Development.

Manager Walsh asked if making the Corridor Improvement Authority the TIF for the mall should be a goal.

Trustee Opsommer spoke in support of the CIA becoming the TIF for the mall.

D. Community & Planning

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Community & Planning.

E. Environmental Sustainability

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Environmental Sustainability.

F. Facilities, Parks and Grounds

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Facilities, Parks and Grounds

Clerk Guthrie stated safety for the Clerk's and Treasurer's department could be increased by adding an additional door near the mail drop off point, as well as adding plexi-glass dividers on the counter between staff and residents.

Manager Walsh stated these projects are important and in the works, but don't need to be added to goals.

G. Public Safety

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Public Safety.

H. Township Finances

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Township Finances.

I. Community Engagement

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Community Engagement.

J. Retention, Recruitment and Well-Being

The board and Manager Walsh reviewed and discussed the township's goals and action plan as related to Retention, Recruitment and Well-Being.

Manager Walsh stated that he's looking for additional retention and recruitment.

Trustee Jackson asked if employee appreciation funding is coming from ARPA.

Manager Walsh stated the funding can be taken from general or ARPA funds.

9. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Supervisor Styka opened Public Remarks at 2:08

NONE

Supervisor Styka closed Public Remarks at 2:09

10. OTHER MATTERS AND BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Trustee Opsommer

- Suggested adding ARPA discussion to next week's agenda

Manager Walsh stated he is hiring an ARPA project manager.

Supervisor Styka stated he would not add ARPA discussion to next week's meeting.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Trustee Opsommer moved to adjourn. Seconded by Treasurer Deschaine.

VOICE/HAND VOTE: Motion carried 7-0



RONALD J. STYKA,
TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR



DEBORAH GUTHRIE
TOWNSHIP CLERK