

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
REGULAR MEETING TOWNSHIP BOARD -**APPROVED**-
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos MI 48864-1198
517.853.4000, Township Hall Room
Sunday, April 21, 2024, 10:00 am

PRESENT: Supervisor Jackson, Clerk Guthrie, Trustee Hendrickson, Trustee Sundland, Trustee Trezise, Trustee Wilson

ABSENT: Treasurer Deschaine

STAFF: Manager Walsh

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Supervisor Jackson called the April 21, 2024, Special Township Board meeting to order at 10:00 am.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INTRODUCTIONS

Supervisor Jackson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

Clerk Guthrie called the roll of the Board. Supervisor Jackson, Clerk Guthrie, Trustee Hendrickson, Trustee Sundland, Trustee Trezise, Trustee Wilson present at 10:01 am.

4. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Supervisor Jackson opened comments from the public at 10:01 am.

Mike McCurdy, candidate for Township Clerk, expressed need for transparency from the Township Board.

Supervisor Jackson closed comments from the public at 10:04 am.

5. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Trustee Trezise moved to approve the agenda as presented. Supported by Trustee Wilson.

VOICE VOTE: YEAS: Supervisor Jackson, Trustees Hendrickson, Sundland, Trezise and Wilson

NAYS: NONE

Motion carried: 6 – 0

6. ACTION ITEMS

A. Resignation Agreement

Trustee Hendrickson moved to accept the letter of resignation from Frank Walsh and approve the resignation agreement with Frank Walsh as presented this morning. Supported by Wilson.

ROLL CALL VOTE YEAS: Supervisor Jackson, Clerk Guthrie, Trustee Hendrickson, Trustee Sundland, Trustee Trezise, Trustee Wilson.

NAYS: NONE

Motion carried: 6-0

B. Consultation Agreement

Trustee Trezise expressed the need to retain Mr. Walsh for the budget season and possible development of a community center for continued smooth operation of the Township. Trustee Hendrickson added that the consultation agreement broadly covers what Mr. Walsh will be consulted upon over the next eight month, but it does not cover the manner in which these items will be accomplished, and more discussion needs to occur regarding these logistics. Clerk Guthrie asked for clarification about how Mr. Walsh will communicate through Board Members. Trustee Trezise clarified that the Board Members will not be the sole source of communication for Mr. Walsh, that he will communicate with department heads and other staff, through their department heads, as necessary.

Trustee Trezise moved to accept and approve the consulting agreement with Mr. Walsh to continue on as a consultant as well as working on certain key issues for the balance of the 2024 year. Supported by Trustee Wilson.

ROLL CALL VOTE YEAS: Supervisor Jackson, Clerk Guthrie, Trustee Hendrickson, Trustee Sundland, Trustee Trezise, Trustee Wilson.

NAYS: NONE

Motion carried: 6-0

C. Appointment of Interim Manager

Trustee Wilson detailed Director Schmitt's capabilities that led to the decision to appoint him to this Interim position.

Trustee Wilson moved the appointment of Community Planning and Development Director Timothy Schmitt as Interim Manager of Meridian Township. Supported by Trustee Hendrickson.

ROLL CALL VOTE YEAS: Supervisor Jackson, Clerk Guthrie, Trustee Hendrickson, Trustee Sundland, Trustee Trezise, Trustee Wilson.

NAYS: NONE

Motion carried: 6-0

D. Other action as the board deems appropriate

Trustee Hendrickson made a statement on behalf of the board. Beginning August 2023, Board Members sought legal counsel for review and recommendations regarding complaints about Mr. Walsh. The investigation involved interviews with current and former employees and former Manager Walsh. A report was prepared and returned to the Township Board in Mid-February. The Township Board met with the investigator and the Township attorney in closed session on March 17 to discuss the confidential legal opinion. When the Board returned open session, the Board instructed the investigator and Township attorney to follow up on that discussion with Mr. Walsh. On April 16 at Mr. Walsh's request, the Board discussed this matter in closed session. At the conclusion of the meeting, two Board Members were appointed to negotiate the terms of a resignation agreement with Mr. Walsh. The Township Board commends Mr. Walsh's service to the community over the past 11 years. The Board is confident that this decision will serve the residents now and moving forward, and thanked residents and staff for their patience as the investigation has moved forward. The Board expresses their support for and confidence in Director Schmitt as the Interim Manager.

7. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Supervisor Jackson opened comments from the public at 10:20 am

Michelle Prinz, speaking as a resident not as an employee, expressed her disappointment that the board has not been transparent, and there was no packet provided today allowing residents to see the consulting agreement, the resignation letter, or the resignation agreement. On behalf of the employees, the lack of communication between the Board and the employees has been extremely poor. Would like to know when the investigation report will be made public.

Carol Hasse, speaking as a 15-year employee of the township, expressed her concern that the process to select a new manager be done sincerely, correctly, in a valid way, and the most appropriate way for residents and employees. Individuals feel like they have not been heard through the investigation process.

Samantha Diehl, speaking as the Communications Manager for Meridian Township, expressed her frustration with the silence and lack of transparency and concern that the board has failed to protect employees by creating a consulting agreement with Frank Walsh after his resignation. Expressed concern that work conditions will be uncomfortable while Frank Walsh continues working for the Township. Employees are upset by the long and difficult process, and do not feel supported.

Milton Scales expressed disappointment with the lack of transparency, the lack of a packet even though there must be information in writing. Asked that information be provided to residents about what has been done and what will be done moving forward.

Mike McCurdy returned to the podium to state his support for Township employees and expressed concern that the news reports stated that employees wished to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation. Wants more information about the payments Mr. Walsh will receive regarding both his resignation agreement and his consulting agreement to ensure that there will be no double-dipping.

Supervisor Jackson closed comments from the public at 10:31 am

8. OTHER MATTERS AND BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Trustee Hendrickson agreed with residents and employees regarding the need for the contents of the agreements to be made public and stated that the consulting agreement and resignation agreement should be put into a packet. Stated that the Board placed the privacy and anonymity of employees, including Mr. Walsh, as priority.

Clerk Guthrie, speaking as both a staff member and elected official, stressed the need for transparency, communications, DEI initiatives, sensitivity training, and healing. Apologized to staff, that how communication was handled was unacceptable.

Michelle Prinz was invited back to the podium by Supervisor Jackson. Asked the Board why Mr. Walsh is being contracted to work on the Community Center project when retired Parks Director Maisner has already been contracted lead the project. There are current and former staff that have all the tools and abilities to complete the budget. Would like more information on why the Board required an employee to resign and then engaged in a contract with the same employee. Expressed concern about the ability to move forward if Mr. Walsh is still working with the Township.

Trustee Wilson reiterated the priority of employee privacy and anonymity while conducting the investigation and that the report from the attorneys will not be made public. Stressed that both retired Director Maisner and former Manager Walsh are critical to completing the Senior & Community Center project, and that he will not be in the building while performing that role. It is helpful to have Mr. Walsh in the budget process because he has 11 years of experience creating the Township budget.

Frank Walsh was invited to the podium by Supervisor Jackson. Apologized for his contribution to this issue. Spoke of events and instances where he led the Township through difficulties. Asked people to remember 3 things: leadership, team building, and community. Will donate \$20,000 to Meridian Cares. Stated his appreciation for the Meridian Township team.

Trustee Wilson added that the resignation contract, the consultation contract, and board comments will be made available after the board meeting.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Trustee Hendrickson moved to adjourn. Seconded by Trustee Wilson

VOICE VOTE

YEAS: Supervisor Jackson, Clerk Guthrie, Trustee Hendrickson, Trustee Sundland, Trustee Trezise, Trustee Wilson.

NAYS: NONE

Motion carried: 6-0

The meeting adjourned at 10:57 am



Patricia Jackson
Township Supervisor



Deborah Guthrie
Township Clerk