



**AGENDA**  
CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN  
TOWNSHIP BOARD – BOARD RETREAT  
April 12, 2025 8:00 am

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1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INTRODUCTIONS
3. ROLL CALL
4. CITIZENS ADDRESS AGENDA ITEMS AND NON-AGENDA ITEMS
5. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
6. BOARD DISCUSSION ITEMS
  - A. Township Board Retreat
  
7. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC
8. OTHER MATTERS AND BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS
9. ADJOURNMENT

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All comments limited to 3 minutes, unless prior approval for additional time for good cause is obtained from the Supervisor.  
Appointment of Supervisor Pro Tem and/ or Temporary Clerk if necessary.

Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact the Meridian Township Board by contacting:  
Township Manager Tim Dempsey, 5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864 or 517.853.4258 - Ten Day Notice is Required.  
Meeting Location: 5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864 Township Hall

# Township Governance Retreat

for the Charter Township of Meridian  
Board of Trustees and Management  
Participant Guide  
April 12, 2025  
8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.



Presented by Larry Merrill, Consultant

## Overview

*Governance relates to the decision-making units of the organization and the relative powers, authorities, and responsibilities that each possesses. It also involves the way in which they exercise those powers, authorities and responsibilities. Governance is also affected by the behavior of the individuals that compose groups with decision authority. The aggregate of their behavior both guides, and is guided by, the governance culture of the enterprise.*

--Glenn Tecker

**Retreat Objectives:** Clarity and consensus as to:

- What the Board aspires to be;
- How the Board conducts its business;
- Delegation of authority to the Manager;
- Monitoring compliance with Board expectations;
- Commitment to and process for implementing retreat decisions.

### **Consultant's Role:**

The Consultant will facilitate normative group discussions on Meridian Township's current approaches to governance, how individuals see their jobs, and the jobs of others. The consultant will also introduce additional principles for participant consideration. These discussions will provide a foundation for participants to establish a consensus regarding the respective roles of the Board and Manager, the governance principles to which participants will be expected to adhere, and a group commitment to implement agreed-to changes.

## **Welcome and Introductions**

### **Affirm retreat objectives and rules of engagement**

#### **The Board's current governance**

- What are our mental models of governance? How does the Meridian Board differ from our mental models?
- What does the Board do that makes a difference?
- How does the Board spend its time?
- What principles currently guide the Board's governance?
- What do we expect of the Manager?
- What authority is delegated to the Manager?
- What potential actions by the Manager would be unacceptable?
- How does the Board communicate its expectations?
- How does the Board monitor operational performance?
- How does the Board assure accountability for compliance with its expectations?

## **Identifying our desired governance**

- Stakeholder engagement and accountability
- Defining organization success, intended outcomes and priorities.
- Board holism.
- Board meeting structure and conduct.
- Board member behavior and conduct.
- The board's position relative to staff in the chain of command.
- Clarity of delegated authority.
- Limitations on managerial authority.
- Managerial discretion and policy interpretation.
- Documenting the township's principles of governance.
- Monitoring and evaluating compliance with governance principles.

How will we adopt and enforce our governance principles?

Who do we hold accountable for adoption and enforcement?

What key performance indicators could we use to monitor progress toward adoption and enforcement of our governance principles?

## **Wrap up**

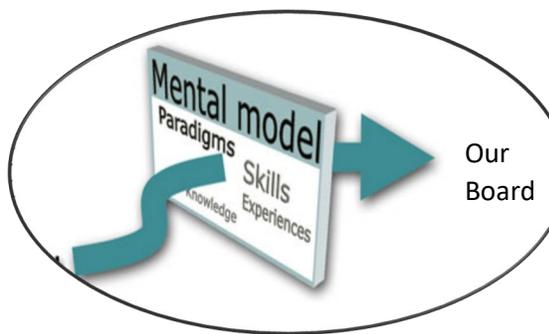
## **Participant Rules of Engagement**

- One topic at a time.
- Thorny topics may be put in the "parking lot" for another time.
- Be present in the moment.
- Only one meeting—no side conversations.
- All viewpoints are valid, even if we do not agree.
- Anyone can tactfully intervene to ensure we achieve outcomes.
- Our discourse will be respectful, collegial, nothing personal.
- Express disagreement verbally.
- Know where your point is going before you start—comments relevant to issue being considered.
- Raise concerns and objections at meeting, rather than after.
- Help facilitator keep meeting moving.
- We will end on time. Board engagement and consensus will drive progress to complete agenda.
- Anything else?

# How Do We Currently Govern?

Discussion Scenario

## Mental Models



### Introspective:

From what sources—public sector organizations, private businesses, individuals, readings, education, experiences—do you derive guidance on your role and responsibilities as well as the board, supervisor and manager?

What are the similarities and differences between your “mental models” and actual roles and responsibilities?

How Does the Board “Add Value” (effective, meaningful impact to the township’s success)?

**What Current Principles Guide the Board's Governance as to How it Conducts its Business?**

- Expressing diverse opinions
- Board meeting participation
- Meeting preparation
- Interaction with the public
- Role of the Supervisor, Clerk and Treasurer as Board members
- Others

### How Does Our Board Spend its Time?

- **Strategy:** The board is focused on the long term, strategic direction of the township. Regularly discusses changing township environment. Board focuses on “what’s next.”
- **Policy:** The board is focused on giving coherent, thoughtful direction to those who report to it. The board focuses on goals and objectives.
- **Management:** The board is focused on planning, organizing, directing, supervising and evaluating the township functions
- **Operations:** The board is focused on directing the township workforce, including receiving reports of township activities and critiquing methods. The board provides detailed instructions on potential actions and decisions that will be made by township employees and volunteers.

Function	Current time allocation	Ideal time allocation
Strategy		
Policy		
Management		
Operations		

## **What Current Principles Guide the Board's Governance Regarding the Township Manager?**

- What are characteristics of decisions that are delegated to Manager?
- Is delegation clear?
- What can't the Manager do?
- How does the Board know the Manager is acting consistent with its expectations?
- Does the Board insulate the Manager from political influence?
- Does the board routinely seek the Manager's input?

## **What Does Governance Excellence Look Like?**

## How Does our Governance Need to Change?

- Stakeholder engagement and accountability
- Defining organization success, intended outcomes and priorities.
- Board holism.
- Board meeting structure and conduct.
- Board member behavior and conduct.
- The board's position relative to staff in the chain of command.
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How will we adopt and enforce our governance principles?

Who do we hold accountable for adoption and enforcement?

What key performance indicators could we use to monitor progress toward adoption and enforcement of our governance principles?

## **Appendix**

### **Current Meridian Township Vision and Mission Statements**

Our vision is to achieve and maintain a sustainable and welcoming community with the highest quality of life for our residents. This encompasses protecting our natural environment and our health and safety, and enhancing our prosperity, cultural heritage, diversity and recreational opportunities.

Our mission is to provide a safe and welcoming, sustainable, prime community.

Microsoft Word - Board Policy Manual Revised 2-04-2014

## What Governance Excellence Looks Like

<b>Conventional</b>	<b>Excellence</b>
Issues arise ad hoc	Board ongoing scans environment; identifies emerging and potential issues
Board focus is primarily reactive	Board focus is primarily proactive
Governance is a relatively small part of a board meeting	Governance is the predominant board meeting activity
Board seizes on first acceptable option	Board systematically looks at, evaluates and crafts a consensus-driven option
Opportunity costs seldom considered	Other potential projects and approaches are simultaneously evaluated
Little use of benchmarks, metrics or measurable results	Board establishes key performance indicators and regularly monitors progress
Results seldom evaluated	Result evaluations are routine
Priorities heavily influenced by those well-organized or the township political elites	Board seeks stakeholder input on a regular, systematic basis
Budget is incremental, focused on "inputs" (what we buy)	Budget is focused on projects or results
Short-term perspective driven by budget calendar, terms of offices	Long-term perspective driven by stakeholder input, aspirations, resource availability, realistic timelines
"Majority rule" drives conflict resolution	Board strives for consensus-driven resolution; what can everyone live with
Board debates and deliberates, but seldom "dialogues"	Dialogue in workshop informality to find shared meaning and consensus.
People who show up at meetings are primary source of insights; limited to agenda items	Engage in two-way community linkage
Boundaries and expectations learned from trial and error	Responsibilities, authority, expectations, accountability articulated in written policies, job descriptions.
Organization culture is determined by staff; board routinely defends staff when public complains	Provide oversight; set morale tone, controls, monitor, evaluate manager and board
Manager's perceptions of board's expectations gleaned from informal communications	Board speaks with one voice through written policies and strategic plan

## Conventional

## Excellence

Boundaries and expectations learned from trial and error

Boundaries respected. Responsibilities, authority, expectations, accountability articulated in written policies, job descriptions.

Capacity and competencies addressed when things go wrong

Ensure necessary resources; staff leadership, finances, public image, capable board

Individual board members vie for influence over manager's priorities and actions

Board members may "coach" but manager can disregard individual input. Board speaks with "one voice." Manager has one "boss."

Boundaries and expectations learned from trial and error.

Boundaries respected. Responsibilities, authority, expectations, accountability articulated in written policies, job descriptions.

Board policies authorize managerial actions

Board policies proscribe operational worries; what is not permitted.

Planning tends to be operational, project-based

Strategic plan emerges from environmental scan

Annual or short-term timeline

SMART goals emerge from a shared vision, mission, and values

Reviewed and updated sporadically, rather than ongoing

Timeline is long-term (3-5 years).

Heavily staff driven

Stakeholder input

Continually monitored, evaluated and updated.

Board deliberates and debates, but does not dialogue

Engages in "generative thinking"

Learning takes place off-site, general topics

A critical source of leadership for the organization

Agenda focuses on current issues, resolving conflicts, apportioning resources among competing needs and wants

Reflect collectively on shared experiences, impressions, frames and perspectives

Shared experience moves to shared meaning to commitment to act on that shared meaning

**Township  
Governance Policies**

Policy Number:	Title: <b>Style of Governance</b>
Date Adopted:	Category: Board's Own Governance

The Township Board will govern with an emphasis on the Township's strategic direction rather than focusing on managing internal operations. The Township Board will avoid inserting its opinions and preferences into administrative matters for which the Board holds the Manager accountable, without first attempting to develop policies acceptable to the majority of the Board that are the least intrusive on the Manager's prerogatives.

Because policies of the Township Board should reflect the broadest possible community perspectives and values, the Board will make reasonable effort to accommodate all reasonable perspectives in its decisions.

The Township Board, not the staff, is responsible for its own governance excellence. Consequently, it is the Board's responsibility, rather than the Manager's, to set its own agenda. The Board is responsible for its own discipline to avoid acting as a management committee and for prioritizing Board meeting time to address issues that are most important to the community.

Prior to their first Board meeting the Township Supervisor and Manager will offer new Board members an orientation to Township and serving on the Township Board.

At its first meeting following the beginning of the Township's fiscal year, the Township Board shall plan its governance activities for the fiscal year, including:

- Schedule of regular meetings to be held no less often than monthly;
- In-house professional development (training) topics and tentative meeting dates;
- Comprehensive review of the Township Strategic Plan.

The Board will evaluate itself prior to the conclusion of each meeting to determine:

- Issues discussed were worthy of the Board's time and attention;
- Discussions were focused on the agenda items and were efficiently processed;
- All points of view were given an opportunity to be expressed;
- Could any aspect of the meeting be handled better.

Monitoring Method:	Frequency:
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