

Approved 3/31/21

WATERSMEET TOWNSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING  
JANUARY 20, 2021  
6:30 PM  
Community Center  
[www.watersmeet.us](http://www.watersmeet.us)

The virtual meeting of the Watersmeet Township Board was called to order by Supervisor Rogers at 6:30 pm.

Attendance roll call: Mike Rogers, yes – Julie Mathiesen, yes – Alan Piel, yes – Paul Kempainen, yes – Peter Lievense, yes.

Absent: None

Others Present: Dan Kline, Zoe Coleman

Virtual Attendees: Mel and Bob McGuffin, Carol Mason Sherrill and David Sherrill, Dan Hance, Yvonne and Greg Clark, and Beau Goehle.

A motion was made by Paul Kempainen, with support from Alan Piel to approve the minutes of the December 16, 2020 regular meeting as presented. Motion carried.

Appearances: Carol Sherrill appeared before the Board, beginning with the question “why live in Watersmeet Township?”. She summarized the characteristics that draw people to the community and stated it was everyone’s responsibility to maintain those desired qualities by following the principles of Good Governance: Participation, Rule of Law, Transparency, Responsiveness, Consensus Oriented, Equity and Inclusiveness, Effectiveness and Efficiency, and Accountability.

Ms. Sherrill stated the Township Board receives a failing grade for good governance based on past and current actions, most notably the December 2020 re-appointment of three long-time members to the Planning Commission. She provided examples for each of the eight principles, including the Township Supervisor’s lack of responsiveness to the applicants, pre-determination of the re-appointments with no consideration for the applicants, ongoing animosity toward lake residents, the lack of active participation by the three re-appointed members, and the frequent absenteeism of two of the three re-appointed members.

Ms. Sherrill reminded the Board of the detailed presentation she made at the November 2020 regular meeting during which provided examples of women’s contributions to society and the need for diversity on appointed committees. She had urged the Board to consider appointing more women and members of the LVD community to the Planning Commission. Ms. Sherrill feels the decision to re-appoint three existing Planning Commission members without interviewing other candidates demonstrated a lack of regard for the concerns she raised and the interest of the other candidates. She asked the appointments be rescinded and the Board interview all those expressing interest in serving on the Planning Commission.

Public Comments:

Yvonne Clark had 3 items to present to the Board:

1. She repeated her request that the agenda to be posted one week in advance of the meeting so that residents have time to register to attend virtually. Supervisor Rogers commented it is difficult to post that far in advance because issues that require discussion often come up right before the meeting. He added the agenda is posted as soon as it is finalized.
2. Yvonne also informed the board that she had received an e-mail yesterday from Jerry Wuorenmaa of Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development with information regarding the availability of grants available for small businesses who have been affected by the Covid 19 situation. Unfortunately, there is a very short window of time to submit applications, which are due this Friday. Yvonne contacted Nordines, Tangles and the Watersmeet Trout Hatchery to inform them of the grants. She requested the Board and residents attending the meeting to attempt to inform as many other businesses as possible.
3. Finally, Yvonne also expressed her disappointment with the process for the re-appointments to the Planning Commission and the general lack of acknowledgement of other candidates.

Dan Hance presented 3 items to the board:

1. After the last Planning Commission meeting was abruptly cancelled, Dan asked what process is available for notifying the public of the cancellation as well as the date of the re-scheduled meeting.
2. Dan iterated previously expressed interest in improving the availability of reliable internet throughout the Township and questioned whether the Board and/or the Planning Commission have plans to address the situation.
3. Finally, Dan indicated he was very disappointed his application for appointment to the Planning Commission was not considered by the Board, given the active interest he's taken in the community. As with previous commentors, he felt the failure to acknowledge and interview other candidates damaged the integrity of the overall process.

In response Zoe Coleman (Watersmeet Meeting Moderator) stated she sent cancellation notices out when the Planning Commission meeting was canceled and will inform all as to when the next meeting will be held.

Supervisor Rogers responded to some aspects of the public comments and Ms. Sherrill's presentation, noting that "lake people" have demonstrated animosity towards "locals" and provided an anecdotal example of "locals" being called "riff-raff" by their neighbors after purchasing a lake lot. He also noted that members of the LVD Tribe have been appointed to the Planning Commission in the past, but they typically leave after serving a short amount of time. With regard to internet, Mr. Rogers encourage residents to attend Planning Commission meetings to contribute to discussions.

Old Business: None

New Business:

1. PA. 152 Opt. Out for 2021-2022 – Public Act 152 created a hard cap on the amount a public employer may contribute to a medical benefit plan for its employees and/or elected officials. For 2021 it is \$ 7,043.89 per employee/official. However, the Act also provides an option for the employer to “opt out” and pay for employees’ entire coverage. The opt out decision must be made on an annual basis. Clerk Mathiesen noted there is a third option to annually elect an 80% contribution cap rather than the hard cap. She indicated this might be something for the Board to consider, given the rising cost of insurance. Clerk Mathiesen further noted monthly health care insurance is based on the age of each covered employee. The individual premiums are totaled for a monthly rate; the Township does not receive any “group” rates for having multiple employees on the plan. The highest premium is ~ \$1200/month under current rates. If the Township were to opt for an 80% cap, that employee would pay \$240/month for health insurance. People researching insurance costs in recent years would recognize that figure as a very reasonable rate.

Additional discussion was held based on the above information. The consensus of the board was to opt out this year and re-consider any changes to be made next year. Paul Kempainen motioned with a second by Alan Piel to opt out for this year. Motion carried with all in favor.

2. Approve Poverty Exemptions - Household income levels for property tax poverty exemptions were presented. As in previous years, the Township again proposed allowing exemptions for slightly higher income levels than recommended federal guidelines. Alan Piel motioned, with support from Peter Lievense, to approve the poverty exemption guidelines as presented. Motion carried with all in favor.
3. Approve Public Hearing for Road Millage – Supervisor Rogers presented the idea of levying a millage dedicated to road repairs. The Township can levy a ½ mill without going to public referendum but would first need to conduct a public hearing. Most road repairs by the County are funded by the Township and County in a 60:40 ratio. Levying ½ mill would generate approximately \$86,000 for the Township. Using that as the 60% match, the County would need to contribute \$57,333 towards roads. Assuming the State contributes \$38,000, that would make \$181,000 available annually for road repairs. Mr. Rogers proposed establishment of a 3-person Township “road commission”, comprised of 1 person from a lake district, 1 from town, and 1 from Recreation and Forestry (R&F). Discussion ensued covering the following points:
  - The County and State’s ability/willingness to dedicate the stated funding amount on an annual basis.
  - Limiting the millage to roads only posed a concern. It was suggested it could be a general millage for public safety, with roads as the focus. In the event the County could not provide matching funds, the money could go towards general public safety needs, e.g. fire and police.
  - Do the current condition of Township roads warrant such action and realistically, how much road work could be accomplished with the assumed funding?

It was suggested the Township board should reserve further discussion until a future public hearing. It was proposed said hearing be planned in conjunction with the February 17, 2021 regular Board meeting, with required public notice. This will be contingent on the Covid restrictions in place at the

time. The latest possible date for the hearing in order to include the millage in the winter tax bills would be the March Board meeting. Motion to proceed along this plan by Alan Piel, with a second by Peter Lievense. Motion carried with all in favor.

4. Approve Appropriation for Veterans Affairs 2021 - Supervisor Rogers presented a letter from the Gogebic County Council of Veterans Affairs, indicating the Township's share of the Council's 2021 budget would be \$6,391, a slight reduction from last year. Paul Kemppainen motioned with a second by Alan Piel to approve the appropriation for the Veterans for 2021. Roll call: Mike Rogers, yes – Julie Mathiesen, yes- Alan Piel, yes – Peter Lievense, yes – Paul Kemppaine, yes. Motion approved.
5. Review Part-Time Officer Compensation – It was noted the compensation for the part-time police officer did not address pay for holidays or extended work shifts. After discussion, it was decided the part-time officer should receive pay at 1.5 times the regular rate of \$20/hour when working holidays. Peter Lievense motioned with a second by Alan Piel, to approve the holiday compensation rate. Motion carried with all in favor.
6. Zoe Coleman, Township Meeting Moderator, indicated the Blue Jeans meeting software currently in use by the Township is cumbersome and confusing for some users. She suggested research into a product like Zoom, which is more widely used. She also presented a proposal for the equipment needed to improve the visual and audio capabilities of the virtual meetings, so that it would be easier for the public to interact with the board. Estimated cost is \$1200. Supervisor Rogers suggest a cap of \$1500, which would allow for extras such as connecting cables, batteries, etc. Peter Lievense made a motion, with a second by Alan Piel to purchase the items as presented. A roll call vote is as follows: Mike Rogers, yes – Julie Mathiesen, yes – Paul Kemppainen, yes – Alan Piel, yes – Peter Lievense, yes. Motion carried.

#### Approval of Bills:

A motion to accept the bills as presented was made by Alan Piel, with support from Paul Kemppainen. Motion carried with all in favor. Approval for General Fund Check Nos. 40343 – 40366, Waste Water Fund Check Nos. 4283 – 4284, and Water Fund Check Nos. 3464 – 3466.

#### Reports:

Supervisor Report: Supervisor Rogers informed the board that the Road Commission would be crushing gravel in the Old US 2 East gravel pit for about 1 week, beginning at the end of the month. Their plan is to crush 20,000 yards, which should last for about 3 years.

Supervisor Rogers read the monthly report from Officer Leuzzo, who could not attend the meeting. Officer Leuzzo stated in this report that the part time officer, Collin D'Antonio is working out well for the department.

Treasurer Report: All accounts are reconciled, with about 30% of the taxes disbursed. The Board also had some further discussion on updating the IT systems for the Township, Fire and Police Department equipment (Ski-Doo snowmobile and Polaris Sportsman ATV) purchased with the Cares Act money provided by LVD. The LVD Tribal Police Department is also willing to donate a used patrol vehicle to the Township for use by the Police Chief when traveling between home and office. This would allow him to respond to calls if necessary when off duty. The Township is in the process

of acquiring a new truck for the Police Department. However, exact delivery date is uncertain due to delays resulting from the Covid 19 situation.

Clerk Report: Clerk Mathiesen reported that all Township Board and committee members are able to register and take on-line training through the MTA Premium Pass purchased last year. Many of the classes are available for viewing at their own convenience. She also has spoken with The Computer Doctors regarding the age of our computers and server. Per Computer Doctors' records, the desk top computers and server currently in use were purchased in November 2013. Microsoft will cease supporting the server in October 2023. Given that and the age of the equipment, the Township should begin planning to update. E-mail security and reliability are also of concern and should be addressed sooner, rather than later.

Clerk Mathiesen brought a request from Lori Kopsi regarding online classes for EMT re-certification credits and whether the Township would be willing to cover the cost of the classes. Supervisor Rogers assured the township would cover all costs for the classes.

Other reports: Peter Lievense reported to the board that he had purchased a home outside of Watersmeet Township and would not be able to continue with his position on the township board. His last meeting would be by the February meeting. There was some discussion on the process for appointing a replacement. Peter must submit a formal resignation letter as part of the process.

Correspondence: Supervisor Rogers read a letter of thanks from the Land'O Lakes library expressing their appreciation for the support the Township has given them. A mural and book purchases were a few of the items that were part of the funds provided by the Township.

Dan Kline gave the board an overview of the building report for the 2020, including totals for permits, and total activity for the year. Activity included construction of 10 new homes, 2 home additions, 24 garages, and 25 miscellaneous (docks, decks, renovations, demolitions). Total estimated valuation increase for the Township is \$3,272,343.00.

A motion to adjourn was made by Peter Lievense, with support from Alan Piel at 8:22pm. Motion carried with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Mathiesen, Clerk