



ACME TOWNSHIP SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
ACME TOWNSHIP HALL
6042 Acme Road, Williamsburg MI 49690
Monday, January 14, 2013, 9:00 a.m.

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER WITH THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AT 9:01 a.m.

Members present: C. Bassett, C. Collett, A. Jenema, G. LaPointe, P. Scott, D. White, J. Zollinger
Members excused: None
Staff present: N. Edwardson, Office Assistant
T. Henkel, Buildings & Grounds Manager
N. Lennox, Zoning Administrator
D. Plude, Assessor
S. Vreeland, Township Manager/Recording Secretary
S. Zollinger, Deputy Clerk

A. LIMITED PUBLIC COMMENT: None

B. SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS:

- 1. Informal discussion between Board, staff members and officials' deputies about day to day operations and job responsibilities. ([Current job descriptions](#) attached as background):** This meeting was suggested by Jenema at the last board meeting. Zollinger suggested framing the discussion around how the customer interacts with the township.

Discussion started with Edwardson, who is usually the first contact a person has with the township. She greets the public in person or on the phone, collects taxes, answers some basic zoning questions, generally handles any question she can or refers them to someone who can help. She offers hospitality. Edwardson also accepts passport applications. She also creates a spreadsheet of all receipts daily, retaining a copy and giving another to the Deputy Treasurer. The Deputy Treasurer processes the receipts and creates a similar document. Edwardson compares the two to ensure they match. LaPointe asked what happens if someone pays cash. Two individuals count down the cash and place it in a sealed and initialed envelope. The taxpayer also receives a receipt. The only time a significant amount of cash remains overnight at the township hall is if it arrives very late in the day.

LaPointe asked how we know that we have received all the taxes we should. Collett has to "settle" with the County at the end of the year, and Vreeland also watches for significant variances during the year while monitoring budget performance. Collett notes receipts on an official receipt book with serial numbers, and provides them to the Clerk to enter into the accounting software, and the Clerk and Treasurer ensure that they stay in balance regularly.

Once Edwardson gives payments and the related spreadsheets to the Treasurer's Department, checks are scanned directly into the bank account with a special scanner. At the end of the process the bank provides an e-mail report verifying the deposit, which is reconciled back to the internally-generated spreadsheets.

Customers making a payment to the township always receive some sort of document indicating receipt by us of their funds. It might be a receipt, or it could be the return of a portion of a tax bill stamped with the date of receipt and signed or initialed by the individual who received the payment. Funds received are deposited to the bank one or more times per day. If a payment comes in very late on a business day it might be locked up until the next business day on-site.

When a Land Use Permit application is received, Edwardson takes and processes the check

and the permit paperwork is given to Lennox to process. The fee is also recorded on a spreadsheet Edwardson prepares. All incoming funds flow through the Treasurer's department. Land Use Permit fees are deposited into the General Fund to a specific line item. It was noted that special use permit or variance permit application fees are an entirely different category of activity that is handled separately and through the Trust and Agency Fund rather than through the General Fund. These escrow accounts and processes related to them will be discussed separately. We are trying to file things in our electronic document storage system and in other computer programs as appropriate rather than maintaining paper copies which take up precious office space, although Lennox operates in a more paper based way because it is more familiar to her from her last position where less technology was employed. Permit activity is reported to the Planning Commission and Board monthly; there was some discussion about reporting dollar amounts as well. A copy of the Clerk's Report from the January 8 board meeting was circulated so Board members could see how these figures are already reported.

Edwardson takes minutes at citizen advisory meetings and the Zoning Board of Appeals, and also manages Saylor Park shelter reservations. When people calls she puts their reservation on a Google calendar anyone in the office can access, and fills out a 3-part form. She gives one copy to the customer to confirm the reservation, matches one copy with any fee payment, and gives a manila copy to Henkel. He takes them to Saylor Park and puts them on clipboards along with a monthly copy of the Google calendar. Either he or summer part-time parks worker Clifford Mannor places the reservation form on the applicable shelter the day of the reservation. The night before the reservation the shelter is cleaned and tables washed. Mannor works only at Saylor Park, and Juan Hernandez works at Bayside Park. Henkel opens the parks in the morning Monday – Friday, the other parks workers close the parks daily and open them on the weekends. Postings are removed and destroyed after they are used. Shelters may be used by anyone in the public if there is no reservation form posted. The question of what happens if there is a cancellation came up. If someone reserves dates and does not show up when other people would have wanted to rent the shelter, this is a difficulty. There was discussion about setting up a new line item in the Trust & Agency Fund to receive refundable shelter deposits from township residents, as they are a liability and not a revenue to the township. Shelter reservations are taken for the current calendar year only starting January 2. Many years ago a prior parks manager took standing year-to-year reservations.

Edwardson assembles meeting packets working in cooperation with other individuals who generate the materials. This involves not only copying files onto paper, but linking PDF files to the agenda document that is loaded to the township website. There has been discussion about setting firmer deadlines farther in advance of the meetings so that packets can get out to the public bodies with enough lead time as possible, but it can be difficult when we are waiting for materials from an outside source and it is critical for an issue to be discussed on a certain date. LaPointe and Scott were less concerned with receiving materials farther in advance than with receiving the entire packet at once. Collett and Jenema would prefer to have materials before the Friday before the meeting to have sufficient time to really read, understand, and double-check information. Large packets can be a lot to get through in just a weekend. Lennox noted that if people have a question about Planning and Zoning materials up for board discussion, she only works certain days per week. She doesn't usually work on Fridays. Scott also expressed concern about the length of meetings when things keep getting added on, offering that once a meeting goes past 10:00 people may not be at their best for decision-making. Scott also mentioned that receiving changed materials the night of the meeting can be confusing, especially trying to compare editions to identify the changes.

Plude's responsibilities are generally governed by the state Department of Treasury and the State Tax Commission. She maintains office hours on Wednesdays and is available by cell phone all week. Many people call her cell and receive what they need without a face-to-face meeting. If needed, she may arrange to meet with them on a day other than Wednesday. Plude is both a township contractor and a township employee due to IRS regulations. LaPointe

stated that what the township pays on a per-parcel basis is a very good deal compared to what East Bay Township is paying on a per-parcel basis. Plude deals with landowners and attorneys about the tax impacts of property transfers. If someone wants to appeal their tax assessment, they can make an appointment to meet with the Zoning Board of Appeals. They speak to Plude first, and she makes every attempt to resolve their concerns short of them having to come to the appeals board. Zollinger asked if the BOR makes many changes to valuations. Plude perceives that the number has been rising. She advises that any adjustments be made relative to one or more specific features of a property, rather than just deciding to reduce the value of the property by a certain dollar amount. Having BOR members with diversified experiences is helpful. Last year all three were Realtors; this year the board composition will be two Realtors and an appraiser. Plude is also scheduling three days this year instead of two so that the board will not rush through the decision-making process.

Plude works most closely with the Treasurer's office. There are linked assessing and taxation software packages so that any change Plude makes to the database carry through to both. She is the primary point of change to the database to make sure people are making changes at cross-purposes.

Plude also works with the Manager and/or the Zoning Administrator to process land division requests according to applicable ordinances.

Henkel has worked for the fire department for 41 years. In 1988 he became the first full-time township employee. Early on the job involved being present to go on fire calls and assisting the parks manager at that time. He became the Chief of the local station at the age of 25. When he started there were just Bayside and Sayler Parks and the cemeteries to care for. Now there are approximately 500 total acres of parkland to care for. Henkel is responsible for township infrastructure maintenance and operation. He does most mechanical and electrical repair, outsourcing as needed. He also outsources roof repairs. He works with the Park & Recreation Advisory, and assists the Clerk's department and Sexton with finding gravesites. Some of the township's older cemetery records were lost in a fire, and accumulations of dirt can obscure grave markers. He manages plowing, lawnmowing, and most tree trimming. If more than \$300 needs to be spent he obtains approvals. He obtains bids for larger projects, shopping locally and on-line for needed goods.

In the wintertime he clears and salts the parking lot at the township hall with assistance from the fire duty crew. There is paperwork to be done, mostly on Mondays. He works in his shop to repair picnic tables, and also obtains continuing education. Right now he is learning more about hazard tree identification. He has become certified in shoreline management and has assisted with managing annual Phragmites eradication. In the summer he opens the parks, monitors trees, mows. He files his daily reports on the network. Henkel also does three kinds of water testing. Annually he has to test the drinking water at the township hall and the parks. He performs monthly creek water quality testing to provide a baseline for measuring the impacts of land development. There are 14 testing sites on Acme and Yuba Creeks and 3 we handle for Whitewater Township per an agreement. He gathers the results but does not analyze them. He uploads the data and the Manager prepares reports for analysis. The contract with Whitewater should be reviewed to see if they want to continue it, and if we are due any money. The testing takes approximately 3.5 hours a month. Vreeland puts the data in a more user friendly format periodically and provides it to township officials and The Watershed Center.

Henkel has installed the fencing around Acme Cemetery and will be doing the same for Yuba Cemetery. Time management has been a growing challenge, as there used to be 4 properties to manage and now there are 14. He tries to monitor each property daily to notices any changes or potential concerns. The part-time employees work from mid-May through September annually for approximately 15 hours per week. Hernandez works a few more hours than Mannor. Henkel calculated that the two workers combined are currently working

0.9 FTE hours. Henkel may need to work any day of the week based on conditions. In part he manages his time based on when the weather is favorable for the tasks needing to be done, or when weather dictates that a task like plowing needs to be done.

Collett mentioned that someone has been leaving items such as tables and chairs at one of the linear township parks on Deepwater Point. Henkel and Lennox have been discussing how to address the situation; Lennox has not received clear direction on how to proceed. These parks are subject to the township's police power parks ordinance. The items are being left in violation of the ordinance, so the township could remove them, and/or fine the individuals responsible once they are identified. We generally attempt to educate and notify the public to achieve voluntary compliance first. Over the years we have found that people have planted or removed vegetation in these park areas, or tried to make them difficult to access to keep them private. We work to better educate Realtors or landowners who are under the mistaken impression that these are private access points. Henkel has suggested putting bright orange tags on items, similarly to what is done with abandoned cars on roadsides, warning that they will be removed at a certain point in time. He also noted that there has been talk about having new boundary surveys performed and having the corners re-monumented. There was discussion about putting up some modest signage to help inform the public that would not draw undue attention to the parks that might create an intrusive situation for the neighbors. Jenema observed that it is common for there to be private encroachment issues on similar public easements. One of the park easements contains a large culvert that is part of a county drainage easement, and several have seawalls and a significant drop off in elevation.

White asked about the potential for a policy that would allow Henkel to spend to a higher level without additional approval in general and/or in emergency situations. Zollinger is working on a proposed redrafting of the existing policy. There was discussion about the need to move quickly on potential public hazards, such as the broken willow tree limb at Bayside Park last spring. Many members of the public felt that situation took too long to resolve.

S. Zollinger covered the plot purchase system for the township's two cemeteries. If a funeral home needs to perform a burial in Acme they call the Clerk's office. She works with the family to determine which plot is to be used if the family owns more than one, when they want to have the service, and whether cremains or a casket will be interred. She communicates this with the Sexton, Ernie Keech, who then prepares the gravesite for the burial. S. Zollinger also works with funeral homes regarding setting headstones on foundations for individuals already interred. The family is asked where they wish the stone located. Henkel and/or one or both of the Zollingers then visits the site to verify the location of the plot boundaries and ensure that the appropriate spot has been marked with a flag. Once verified the family is cleared to have the headstone foundation poured. This process is in place because foundations have been poured in the incorrect location before, including in the middle of a pathway. Only Acme property owners or residents may purchase cemetery plots or lots. The owner may designate who may be buried in their plots, such as family members who are not township landowners or residents.

In Yuba Cemetery metal lot and plot corner markers are in place that can be found with a metal detector. It would be beneficial to do this in Acme Cemetery as well. S. Zollinger has completed a walking inventory of Yuba Cemetery to ensure that the records in the township cemetery management software are accurate. A similar inventory needs to be performed for Acme Cemetery. Acme Cemetery is nearly sold out, and there is space available in Yuba Cemetery. Some of the surveyed spaces there may need to be cleared of scrub vegetation. Graves are hand-dug here, while in many surrounding areas heavy equipment is used. Acme Cemetery has a significant clay layer that is difficult to dig.

S. Zollinger also maintains the voter registration records for the township along with managing the cemeteries.

Lennox is the Zoning Administrator, responsible for handling all land use issues whether commercial or residential. She is responsible for violation enforcement. An applicant would receive necessary forms and information from Lennox or Edwardson, and Lennox will sit down with them if possible to talk about their project and what they need to successfully complete the process. The requirements to follow are found in the Zoning Ordinance, which includes the zoning map. She advises them as to other local agencies from which information or permits are also required. Depending on the type of application she will complete the permit process or bring the application to the Planning Commission and/or the Board for review and approval. She staffs the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals and attends their meetings. One element of assisting the public is helping them to assess whether they are likely to gain approval based on township standards so they can decide whether or not to proceed. She assists with drafting new ordinances or master plan updates, and assists the Planning Commission Chair with preparing the meeting packets and with Edwardson in having them copied and distributed. If there is an ordinance violation she seeks to bring the situation into compliance. She issues sign permits and monitors signage ordinance compliance, working with the public in person, by phone or computer, and by letter as needed. She helps to answer the phone and with walk-in customers along with the rest of the staff. She performs compliance inspections as needed. Lennox normally works Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Jenema asked if Lennox performs inspections to ensure that LUP applicants have done what they pulled a permit to do; she said that she does. There was additional discussion about the difference between LUP fees and escrow payments required for various items. Lennox had noted a recent site inspection at the new Goodwill store as an example of her activities. Vreeland noted that SUP and variance applicants are required to provide funds for the actual costs of processing those permit applications. Once those permits are obtained as required, they would then obtain an LUP. When a project is required to have an SUP, in order to obtain the LUP for actual construction they are also required to provide some sort of financial guarantee that allows exterior site improvements such as paving, stormwater control, and landscaping to be completed by the township if the applicant does not complete them according to permit requirements. Most SUP applicants choose to provide a bank letter of credit, but occasionally they choose to place funds in escrow with a closing agency, bank or even at the township. In those cases, agreements are signed and as work is completed the applicant contacts the township informing us of what has been done and how much it cost, and requesting a construction draw on the escrow account. Lennox performs a site inspection and funds are released as appropriate. While we are holding the escrowed funds they are a liability to the township and not an asset, so they are held in the Trust & Agency Fund separate from other township funds. Each separate escrow has its own line item.

LaPointe asked what the best process would be to ask questions, and ensure that all interested parties learn the answer. He has many questions about the township funds, how they operate, and how to track what is happening in them. He is concerned about meeting his fiduciary responsibility and understanding the financial reports. Zollinger suggested that some of these questions could be discussed at education sessions at Board meetings. Scott noted that he often e-mails or calls a question in to the township, and the answers back could be copied to everyone. LaPointe suggested submitting questions before a meeting for a response at the meeting after appropriate research. He suggested submitting questions to be answered by the March meeting. They could be sent to Vreeland, who could coordinate with others to prepare responses, which would be provided by a document made part of the agenda and available to the public as well. Zollinger encouraged concurrent one-on-one communication with applicable staff to answer questions on an on-going and open basis.

Lennox maintains the planning and zoning files both in paper and electronic formats. She attaches land use permits to the assessing database and notifies Plude so that she can start assessing follow-up activities. The Zoning Ordinance currently requires a Land Use Permit (“LUP”) to be obtained for any increase in land use of 100 sq. ft. or more, including but not

limited to sheds, garages and decks. There has been some talk around the office of suggesting an ordinance amendment that would require an LUP to be issued for any land use expansion regardless of size, but to not charge a fee for sizes under 100 sq. ft. This might enable us to better provide the documentation that the County Construction Code Department requires, and to more uniformly ensure compliance with zoning requirements and that the assessing department is aware of any changes they need to consider.

Zollinger noted that so much more happens on a day-to-day basis than can be covered in this type of meeting, and encouraged people to maintain open communication, including one-on-one, on an ongoing basis.

LaPointe is curious about the payables process. Perhaps starting some upcoming board meetings early would allow for some comfortable time to address these questions. It was suggested that particular topics be defined for upcoming sessions. Another special session similar to this one might also be desirable. Scott can be available on Monday or Tuesday mornings at 9:00 or shortly thereafter. LaPointe will be going on vacation shortly. Monday, February 11 from 9:00 -11:00 a.m. was identified for the next special meeting.

C. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Gene Veliquette, Elk Lake Road in Whitewater Township, noted some earlier comments about potential zoning ordinance changes. In the past he has objected to proposed and/or adopted zoning ordinance amendments as having been drafted by a law firm that he characterized as specializing in stopping development. Mr. Veliquette believes that if the township wishes to encourage growth the ordinance needs to be revised. It can be challenging when people come to the township and encounter a long list of requirements to be met before a hearing can be held or an application can be approved.

LaPointe noted in the current budget, in the Board of Trustees cost center, there is a line item for insurance. He was curious why significant money is budgeted in this line item when the Trustees are not eligible for health insurance. Vreeland explained that prior to 8 years ago, all retirement plan and healthcare benefit costs for all employees were accounted for in general fund departments separate from the other departments. About 8 years ago, it was decided that it would be easier to understand at-a-glance the total employment expenses the township experiences for each separate function if the retirement and insurance costs were budgeted and recorded in the cost centers where the related employee wages were budgeted and recorded. Because the Manager and Office Assistant work generally for the township as a whole, their wages and benefits are recorded in the Board of Trustees cost center, and it is their healthcare insurance costs LaPointe noticed.

LaPointe also asked a question about what would happen if a Board member were to be sued as an individual by a member of the public because of a decision or action they had taken on behalf of the township in the performance of their duties. Would the township's general liability insurance cover the costs of their defense of such a suit? Vreeland believes that it would not cover these costs based on actual recent history. Several members of the prior administration were sued as individuals for actions taken in their official capacity. They were not represented by the township's legal counsel, and they bore the costs and responsibilities for their defense of these cases, which are sometimes referred to as SLAPP suits. She will obtain additional information from the township's attorney and our township general liability insurance agent for the next Board meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 11:26 p.m. on a motion by Jenema with support by Scott.