

Keene Township Board Meeting

Minutes April 23, 2025

Melton called the meeting to order with the pledge of allegiance at 6:05 PM

Roll Call:

Present: Nate Wolff, Christine Hendrick, Sandy Smiley, Holli Melton.

Absent: Corey Wojcik

Recognition of Visitors :

There were approximately 20 members of the community present.

Approval or changes to the Agenda: Changes – Sandy added Clean Up Day and the House Bill PA233 Meeting, and Holli added the Renewable Energy overlay district to the agenda

A **motion** was made to approve the agenda as amended, 1st by Hendrick 2nd by Smiley. motion carried 4-0

Approval of March 12 board meeting minutes:

A **motion** to approve the minutes was made by Wolff, 2nd by Smiley All in favor, Motion carried 4-0.

Public Comment on items related to the Agenda: No Comments from attendants.

Township Cleanup Day: (Sandy Smiley)

The Dumpsters will be located on Higgins Rd this Saturday from 7 am to Noon. Be sure to check the website about items that are permitted and items that are not, if you are not sure.

1. Dumpsters will be 30-yard size, to be dropped off Friday, with confirmation pending.
2. There are concerns about residents bringing in large amounts of garbage, including a past incident with a vehicle full of maggots.
3. Non-residents may bring waste if they act on behalf of a resident.

The board discussed the pros and cons of a voucher system versus cleanup day, with no decision to change the current practice.

1. Some townships use a voucher system for waste disposal
2. The voucher system can be cheaper than a cleanup day, but not all residents use them.
3. Revenue from steel brought in during cleanup day, helps offset the cost.
4. Some residents prefer cleanup day and look forward to it; others dislike driving into the dump due to the risk of flat tires.
5. The cleanup day helps residents adhere to zoning by removing large items.

Trailer Removal on Rickert Rd.: (Sandy Smiley)

All arrangements have been made with 616 junk.

1. 616 Junk is handling trailer demolition on Rickert, starting Friday and aiming to finish by Sunday.
2. Trailer demolition cost quoted at \$2,000, with normal cost being \$5,000.
3. Donations are being collected to cover costs; a donation jar is on the table.
4. The person being helped cannot afford the cleanup; Sandy Smiley is hiring the contractor personally to avoid township liability.
5. Habitat for Humanity's 'A Brush with Kindness' program could be a resource for future low-income cleanups.

House Energy Bill Meeting: (Sandy Smiley)

Sandy Smiley, Corey Wilber and Christine Hendrick went to Lansing on Tuesday before the house energy committee to discuss house bills 4027 and 4048, which are to repeal PA 233. Cori Wilbur

spoke from the perspective of a farmer. There were good comments on both sides. Many townships were represented. The motion passed. It was 10 to seven. So it has now passed that first hurdle in the house energy committee. From there it goes to the House, Then if passed it will go to the senate.

Renewable Energy Overlay District Ordinance: (Holli Melton)

It is feasible and beneficial to co-locate wind, solar, and battery systems on the same land, as demonstrated by real-world examples.

1. Wind and solar energy systems, along with batteries, can be co-located on the same land, contrary to some opinions.
 - Reference to 'wind integrated solar energy' (WISE) as a new concept.
 - It is more efficient because when the wind isn't blowing the sun is usually shining and energy storage (battery) for when neither is happening.
 - Example: Wheat Ridge Renewable Energy Facility in Oregon, started in 2020, has wind, solar, and batteries on the same land.
 - Reports cited: 'wind and solar are better together', 'wind turbine and solar panel combination.'

The board then discussed the setbacks from property lines in overlay district 3 and the actual usable acreage after setbacks.

OLD BUSINESS

Wind Energy Systems:

The board suggested edits to the road damage, impact studies, allowed location, stray voltage testing, extraordinary events, liability, and decommissioning plan section of the ordinance. The board also added the requirement of an oil containment system to catch potential oil leaks as well as changing words like may to shall in various sections.

A **motion** to edit the ordinance as suggested and send to Foster Swift to look over and vote on when done, was made 1st by Sandy, 2nd by Christine. All in favor, motion carried 4-0.

1. The revised ordinance and questions will be sent to the attorney for review before the board votes.
 - Aim to get attorney feedback by the 13th.

Planning Commission Ordinance for Reduction of Planning Commission from 7 members to 5 members.

The 2009 Planning Commission ordinance and their bylaws were found.

A **motion** to adopt Resolution Adopting Ordinance 25-4-23, an ordinance to amend Ordinance Number 9609-A to reduce the number of the Planning Commission members from seven to five was made 1st by Hendrick, 2nd by Smiley. All in favor, motion carried 4-0.

1. Reducing the Planning Commission to five members will improve efficiency and be more economical.
 - Keene Township's population is 1,500; Vergennes township has five members and a population of 5,000.
 - The 2009 ordinance established seven members; it was board-adopted and can be amended by the board.
 - Input received from PC both for and against the reduction.
 - Five people are going to be more efficient in decision-making than 7.
 - Paying 5 board members vs. 7 is more economical for the township.
2. The ordinance should be updated to remove references to repealed statutes and reflect the current law (Public Act 33).
 - Section 103 in the ordinance lists the Township Planning Act, which was repealed.
 - Public Act 33, MCI 125.3801, is the current statute.

Ordinances should be consolidated or cross-referenced in the main ordinance document for accessibility, while also maintaining topic-specific versions for ease of use.

1. Ordinances should be easily accessible and integrated into the main ordinance document.
 - The master plan is a big part of the ordinance but the section on forming the planning commission was missing from the 186-page document.
 - There are separate ordinances for food trucks, marijuana, etc., but some, like the planning commission, should be in the main ordinance.
 - Residents may not know about ordinances if they are not in the main document.
2. There is a need to clean up and find more missing or misplaced ordinances.

There is a need for a thorough review of existing ordinances to avoid redundancy and ensure all are up to date and properly recorded.

1. There was confusion and unnecessary expense due to not knowing an ordinance already existed.
 - Spent money to have an ordinance written when one already existed.
 - Jeannie said she did not have the original ordinance, then found it three days later.
2. There is a risk that more ordinances may be missing or undiscovered.

The township must ensure ordinances are aligned with the current statute (Public Act 33, 2008) and not outdated acts.

1. Multiple enabling acts have been repealed and replaced, leading to confusion about which statute applies.
 - There used to be three different enabling acts; the one from 1959 was the last repealed.
 - The current act is from 2008 (Public Act 33).

Saranac Fire Department Contract

The contract with the Saranac Fire Department (SFD) remains financially unsustainable, with unresolved issues regarding the negotiation of a new agreement, the method for funding fire services (special assessment vs. millage distribution), calculation of per-household costs, and ensuring fairness among residents. There is a significant risk of potential financial insolvency if the current payment structure continues. Action is needed to finalize and send a formal proposal letter, calculate special assessment costs, obtain legal counsel if needed, gather and reschedule a meeting with the Saranac Fire Department to facilitate productive negotiations.

1. The current contract with Saranac Fire Department is financially unsustainable for Keene Township.
 - In 2024, Keene Township collected \$20,041 from Saranac parcels but was charged \$42,400 for services, plus over \$60,000.00 for capital outlay by (SFD) for their area.
2. Paying for capital outlay seems unfair since the township does not own the equipment.
 - Keene Township pays 15% of (SFD) budget for capital, but the capital is not owned by Keene.
 - Other municipalities do not pay capital to their fire departments, they pay a flat rate and Capital is budgeted for by the fire Dept.
3. The ARPA funds were essential to cover fire department costs.
 - Without ARPA funds, the township would have had nothing and could not have paid (SFD) for their capital outlay (equipment and trucks) .
 - The \$100,000 fire truck bill would have bankrupted the fund balance if not for ARPA money.
 - ARPA funds were regulated federal funds given during COVID.

The board will attempt to renegotiate the contract with Saranac Fire Department.

1. Renegotiation of the contract is necessary due to financial constraints.
 - The attorney recommended sitting down with Saranac to renegotiate.

- Both parties must sign a conflict waiver for the shared attorney to draft a new contract.
- 2. If Saranac refuses to negotiate, Keene Township may need to seek independent legal counsel.

The township will send a letter proposing and seek to negotiate a new agreement, possibly using a special assessment instead of a millage, while aiming to eliminate the capital outlay obligation.

A **motion** was made to send the drafted letter asking to renegotiate our contract with SFD after farther review. 1st by Wolff, 2nd by Smiley

NEW BUSINESS

Accept Resignation of the Supervisor

Holli read aloud Corey Wojcik's letter of resignation dated 4-17.

Corey's contributions were appreciated, and the board values diversity of opinion.

1. Corey did an excellent job as supervisor and had a unique skill set.
2. Differences of opinion are healthy for the board.
3. The resignation of the supervisor is unexpected but necessary due to personal and professional changes.
4. Corey served our Township for over 18 years.
5. The resignation is not official until accepted by the board.
6. The Board has 45 days to appoint a replacement after acceptance.
7. The replacement supervisor will serve until the next general election in November 2026, as this is not a primary election year.

A **motion** was made to accept the supervisor's resignation effective 2025-04-23, starting the 45-day period to appoint a replacement who will serve until the November 2026 general election 1st by Melton, 2nd by Smiley. All in favor, motion carried 4-0.

Sandy Smiley was appointed as supervisor until the general election in 2026, with the board expressing confidence in her abilities.

1. Sandy is willing to resign as trustee to step up as supervisor.
2. Sandy has done an excellent job as a trustee and is a good fit for supervisor.
3. It is easier to find someone to fill a trustee spot than the supervisor role.
4. Sandy has a good connection with the community and is familiar with township processes.

A **motion** was made to appoint Sandy Smiley to serve as supervisor until the general election in 2026 1st by Melton, 2nd by Hendrick. A roll call vote was made, 3 in favor, 1 Abstain (Sandy Smiley) motion carried 3-0-1 .

The process for appointing a new trustee is underway, with applications being accepted and a 45-day deadline for appointment.

1. The board has 45 days to appoint a new trustee after the supervisor's position is filled.
2. Applications for trustee will be made available on the website and at the back table.
3. Applicants can be interviewed at the next meeting if they express interest.
4. It is preferable for applications to be submitted before the May 13th meeting.

Public Comment: There were many comments from attendants; Congratulations were given to Sandy Smiley, and Suggestions regarding the use of vouchers vs having a township cleanup day.

Adjournment of Meeting

A **motion** to adjourn the meeting was made at 8:05pm 1st by Hendrick 2nd by Wolff. All in favor, Motion carried 4-0.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05pm