

Keene Township Board Meeting

Minutes from February 11, 2025

Wojcik called the meeting to order with the pledge of allegiance at 7:00pm

Roll Call:

Present: Nate Wolff, Christine Hendrick, Corey Wojcik, Holli Melton.

Absent: Sandy Smiley,

Recognition of Visitors:

There were approximately 10 members of the community present along with Zoning Administrator Jeanne Vandersloot.

Approval or changes to the Agenda:

Hendrick wanted to add an election commission question during the clerk report, As well as Adding PC wages to the agenda.

Motion to approve the agenda with changes by Wolff 2nd by Hendrick All in favor. Motion carried 4-0.

Approval of last meetings minutes – January 14th, 2024

Wojcik stated he will have minutes available for guests on the table at future board meetings.

Hendrick motioned to approve the minutes, Wolff 2nd. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0.

Public Comment on items related to the agenda.

No comments from attendants.

Treasurer's Report:

Copies of the Investment schedule are available on the table.

She will be at the hall on Feb. 14th and 28th from 9am to 5pm to receive tax payments and issue receipts.

She and Wojcik and herself are meeting with MML on 2-12-25 to go over liability risk.

2-13-25 BS&A IT will start extracting information from QuickBooks to begin the process of transferring our financial system to their program and will go live on 8-4-25. Tax and Assessing set-up will go live on 3-24-25. Training for treasurer, treasurer deputy, clerk and deputy clerk will be done by the time the financial portion of the BS&A goes live.

Taxes are wrapping up, Final date for receiving property tax payments is 2-28-25. They will be considered delinquent if not paid by 3-1-25 and payments will need to be sent to the county.

Online payments for collecting taxes have been quite active and have gotten a lot of positive feedback. BS&A will also be set up for online payments for taxes and misc. which will give the township the ability to receive zoning application payments and the like online.

A couple people stated that they were unable to print receipts when paying online.

Kim Newell stated that they fixed a lot of the problems with online property tax payments.

Hendrick has been researching a postage machine for the township. \$30 per month rental for a basic machine would save \$.05 per stamp. By her math, If it were only used for tax purposes we would break even. Therefore, using it for all mailings would save us money.

There was much discussion between Jeanne, Wolff, Melton, Gay Haddix (guest) and Wojcik about ease of use and cost savings.

Postage spent on tax bills \$.30 County, \$.69 Post office = \$550 and multiples of 2 or more together are \$430 for a total of \$980.

We purchased a large lockable mailbox out front of the hall for mail instead of using the P.O. boxes. Cancelling the P.O. boxes will also save the township money. There was discussion about putting a hold on all mail for 30 days and installing the mailbox when the ground thaws.

Clerk's Report:

Activity since January 15th

Elections: Melton Looked over and signed the Kent County Election Coordinating Committee Agreement for Lowell Schools. She signed the agreements for Belding and Saranac Schools back in January.

Training: She is finishing up training on the Qualified Voter List Website. Her deputy Kim is also doing QVF training currently.

Misc.: She investigated the free ballot box from the state of Michigan. Keene township does qualify for a new ballot drop box free of charge. The state may also cover some reasonable installation expenses.

She, Christine, and Kim looked over the brochure. They were looking at ASC M400 (200 ballot capacity wall mount) or ASC M450 (500 ballot capacity, pedestal mount) and leaning towards the wall mount.

Hendrick made a motion to order ASC M400 (wall mount) 2nd by Wolff. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0.

Communications: She received a few phone calls; one was from Credos or DTE regarding new rates for natural gas. However, she must have made an error by reaching out to me. She did ask if she knew of any new natural gas lines that were being run in our area, and she stated that she has no information.

The other was from a funeral home looking into a cemetery plot. She gave him the plot fees and referred him to our Sexton. She took care of an email from a resident who requested a new Voter ID.

Notices: Melton set up a notice in the Ionia Sentinel Standard for the March Board of Review Meeting Schedule. It will be in the paper and in their online publication the weeks of February 14th, 21st and 28th.

She also dropped off the voting machines at the early voting site in Ionia for software upgrades and maintenance and will pick them back up on Thursday.

Bills: Melton stated the accounts payable register is available for viewing on the table. And went over the bills. There was some discussion about Nosko accounting between the board and Gay Haddix (guest).

Hendrick made a motion to pay the February bills, 2nd by Wolff. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0

Planning Commission report:

Wolff Stated that they have had 2 meetings since the last board meeting. They are using the ordinance sent by the board as outlines . However they are carefully going over details for what is best for our township. They have made good progress on the wind ordinance. They added a 2-26-25 meeting and a 3-24-25 meeting as well as a 3-31-25. There were concerns with some residents about the time and extra meetings and the cost of that. He feels it is time well spent. There was discussion about the cost of Foster Swift to write the ordinances for us and the concern about the time the PC is taking to rewrite what the lawyers wrote. Wolff stated that the PC chairperson is directing the PC to take the time to look over details. Melton questioned the PC Chairperson's reasoning behind waiting to vote on the renewable overlay district ordinance since there are no details to hash out in that ordinance. Wolff stated that they haven't talked about changing the overlay district ordinance and from his point of view, he believes that is what they are sticking with. Wolff stated that the overlay district ordinance is planned for the last review after the wind energy and battery storage ordinances are completed. Hendrick stated that the attorney recommended one overlay district for all 3 renewable energy systems. Melton agreed that is what the board voted on and sent to the PC. He stated that he will make a motion to vote on that ordinance as is at the next PC meeting.

Zoning Administrator report:

Permits: Jeanne stated that she issued one zoning permit #2025-1 On 1-31-25 I to Dylan Haan for a 1 story storage building of 24' by 24' to be located at 160 N Montcalm Ave, Lowell.

Planning Commission: They met on January 6 to hold a public hearing on a new commercial solar ordinance and 3 commercial moratoriums including solar, wind and battery storage.

They sent recommendations to the Board, who later adopted all 4 ordinances. They met

on January 22 and 27 to review and work on amendments to the wind energy

ordinance. They will continue that work at the February 4th meeting. They elected

officers and set this fiscal year's meeting schedule. The next regular meeting date is February 4, 2025.

The other meetings for the fiscal year are March 10, May 12, August 11 and November 5 and February 3, 2026. They added some special meetings on Feb. 26, March 10, 24 and 31.

ZBA: Her report on the Zoning Board of Appeals was that a variance application was just received, and a meeting date is being worked on for the first week of March.

Land Divisions: She approved a land division On 1-15-25 to Mary Benedict to split a 77.32 acre parcel into a 31.34 acre parcel and a 45.98 acre parcel located at 1455 N Marble Rd, Belding.

Other: There were various phone calls by appraisers and residents with miscellaneous zoning related questions.

Junk Ordinance: Rickert Rd and S Lee Rd will be checked in the spring.

The board looked over her report on the past 15 or so years showing zoning permit breakdown to compare.

OLD BUSINESS

Applications for zoning board of appeals alternate position: No applications came in. Hendrick and Melton volunteered. Wojcik referred them to the application on the website.

Applications for board of Review alternate position: No applications came in.

Applications for Planning Commission position: One applicant, Nick Schmidt. Nick gave a brief summary of his experience, qualifications and residency here in Keene township. There was much discussion with the board regarding his experience with renewable energy applications. Wojcik made a motion to appoint Nick Schmitt on the Planning Commission to get the number of members up. There was discussion from the board about bringing the PC down to 5 members from 7. It was brought up that Ray is termed out but is still on the PC as long as it's a board of 7 members. The motion was tabled. Jeanne stated that since 1989 when zoning was adopted in the township, we have had 7 people. Hendrick stated that as a board we can change that ordinance with a vote and public hearing. Melton stated that the more people on the PC seems to make things move slower. Hendrick voiced her concerns about the current members who are ineffective and show up unprepared. Everyone agreed that Nick seems like He would be helpful on the PC. However the number of PC members needed are in question.

Potential Grants for the Township: Hendrick and Wendy went to a meeting regarding township funding. She explained the different types of income for townships including general operating revenue currently .6 mills, extra voted millage like road and fire. Special assessments like drains, Fees like hall rental and zoning application fees. The other is grants. Grants require a lot of time and research in applying for them. She and Sandy are looking into certain grants that would be beneficial for the township.

NEW BUSINESS

Employee personnel manual: The board looked over the manual, removed fundraising, vacation time, Holiday, and Dress appearance. Discussed illegal harassment and disciplinary action being done by the board in a closed-door session. Access of user files and correspondences, voice mail policy, social media etc. It was decided to fix some things and vote on it at the next meeting.

Cemetery Trust fund:

Hendrick explained that the funds made by fees associated with the cemeteries are currently in the general fund. She proposed separating out the \$8,850 into a separate account, using the interest made on the ARPA money to replace the cemetery money that has been spent, invest it and use the interest made on it to help offset the cost associated with maintaining the cemeteries.

Jeanne noticed that the list we have only went up to 2012. Melton offered to reach out to Brian Vanderhoek to get his log of fees taken in from the cemeteries since 2012.

Melton made a motion to put the funds of \$8,850 associated with the Cemeteries into a trust account, invest it and use the interest revenue to offset the cost of maintenance. 2nd by Wojcik. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0.

Investment Policy and Budget Policy: We have 2 CDs that are expiring on the 8th and 14th which she moved to a money market account temporarily. Hendrick would like the ability to shop around for investment opportunities and make decisions to move money around without waiting until the next board meeting for approval. She put together an investment policy. Wojcik stated that there should be a cap or maximum amount of money that can be moved at a time without board approval. The board discussed and all agreed on \$100,000.

Melton made a motion to accept the investment policy with a cap of \$100,000 per transaction allowed to be moved by the treasurer without the board's approval, 2nd by Wolff. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0.

Finance Section of Keene Township Operating Policies: Hendrick explained that the Township does not have an operating policy in place for financial processes and procedures. Financial oversight is very diminished and requires more checks and balances among board positions and the public for optimal transparency. She presented the financial section of the operation policy which covers awards, credit cards, fund balance, purchasing, property tax fundraising, ACH transactions, payments, identity theft and user fees and fines policies. The board discussed the township credit card and agreed that one card with a limit of \$1,000 is to be shared by the treasurer and clerk and if needed another card can be taken out with a limit of \$1,000 and shared between Zoning, Tech, and Supervisor for necessary purchases. Hendrick made a motion to approve the finance section with the edit to the credit card section of "one card with a limit of \$1,000 is to be shared by the treasurer and clerk and if needed another card can be taken out with a limit of \$1,000 and shared between Zoning, Tech, and Supervisor for necessary purchases." 2nd by Melton. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0.

CLASS: Hendrick recommended joining CLASS Michigan Cooperative Liquid Assets Securities System to invest funds for township. She would like to invest the earmarked fund ie. Whites Bridge, Fire and Cemetery funds where they can be managed by the pool to gain the best returns. There was discussion about the numerous municipalities that already invest with them, no annual fee, not being federally insured because it's an investment that fluctuates with the stock market, no penalties for removing money, no transaction fees. Wolff Motioned to approve the resolution for Christine to invest the earmarked funds in Michigan CLASS 2nd by Hendrick. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0.

Annual Meeting of Electors: Hendrick stated that the township act, The annual meeting of electors was abolished in 1989. If we decide to hold one the only thing that the meeting of electors can decide is salaries for the board. After discussion, Wojcik stated that the upcoming meeting has been noticed for close to a year so we should hold this March meeting and decide afterward on ending it for the future years.

Hendrick made a motion to observe the annual meeting after the previously scheduled meeting on March 11, 2025, 2nd by Wolff. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0. Jeanne suggested asking the residents attending the march annual meeting their feelings on discontinuing it.

Approval of contracts with Ionia County Road Department: Determine which roads we feel are our priority. Lock in the rates/cost of gravel and brine. Wojcik and the board discussed the roads that the ICRD drivers recommended for adding gravel. The roads suggested were Whites Bridge south of Sayles Rd, Rickert Rd east of Lee to Hawley and Marble north of Sparks to Harkness Rd. Discussion was made about the challenge of judging roads this time of year. Rickert Rd. needs the gravel pulled from the shoulder. Price per yd for gravel and price for brine went down. Melton suggested instead of just spreading more gravel on roads that don't seem bad to spread limestone in strategic transition areas like Pinckney just north of Centerline where it goes from pavement to gravel, Sayles east of Marble where it transitions from pavement to gravel and Marble north of Potters where it transitions. Wojcik stated that there are some intersections on some dirt roads that always seem to have potholes and large bumps. Hendrick voiced her concern about the current county road mileage, our township paid in over 91k to roads and the money is not spent on our roads. Wojcik stated that these funds are only used to maintain paved roads and grade gravel roads. Melton suggested doing Whites Bridge and Rickert, leaving Marble alone and using the money saved to pay for limestone in transition areas. Wojcik stated he will lock in the rate, talk to the road department about looking at the roads when they're not snow covered and ask about limestone in transition areas. Wolff made a motion to lock in rates and scheduled 2 applications of brine for the gravel roads 2nd by Melton. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0.

Acknowledgement of Mike Welch for flag donation: Mike was not in attendance, Kim Newell stated that he is not doing well and will probably not be able to make it to a township meeting anytime soon. Wojcik decided we will send him a card.

Supervisor Report

Saranac Fire Department: Wojcik discussed the meeting He, Smiley and Wolff attended for the Saranac fire department. He went over the percentage of costs Keene township is responsible for. The projected major expenditures are as follows... 2025-2026 800k which we already started paying. 2026-2027 update lights and sirens on tender truck \$30k, 2029-2030 replace engine 5 \$550k and Medic 5 \$88k 2030 self-contained breathing apparatuses \$200k. Wojcik investigated utilizing Belding fire department more and Saranac less, He discovered that Keene would not save any money to do this. He discussed his frustration with the cost of Saranac fire dept. He also discovered that the Saranac fire dept. is calling a phone call for a controlled burn, a run. Hendrick stated that she feels that they are double dipping when it comes to charging the township and will ask the lawyers to investigate the contract we have with them. PPE went up \$4k from last year. They are hoping with grant money it will go down. Fire Hose is required by Osha, T3 treatment will last 3 years, tools and equipment went up with inflation, radios and pagers get broken, tires every 10 years \$10k. Most calls for us were EMS, next were controlled burns. From Sandys notes, engine 5 appraisal \$150-\$170k, Invoice for computers which we just paid, motion to approve the budget was 4 yes and 2 no.

Township Cleanup Day: It was discussed that later would be better. Wojcik will check availability for April 26th or May 3rd or May 10th. The 26th is a conflict for Hendrick.

Pinckney Cemetery Update: Power will be run underground along Pinckney to the new house.

Budget: Wojcik has been working on it with the help of Hendrick and Robert Simpson. He proposed a special budget meeting.

Ionia Road projects: Hawley Hwy from Center line to Rickert will be worked on in 2025. Ionia Road Dept. hired an outside firm to inspect bridges and culverts. Where the shoe tree is that will be a T stop, the shoe tree will be cut down.

Public Comment:

Gay Haddix commented about the \$26k spent to pay Nosko Accounting services and asked where the auditor was and why the missing money wasn't caught by him.

Wojcik stated that Larry the auditor must have missed seeing the missing money.

Kim Newell asked if the accountant Diane Nosko is related to the former supervisor Bob Schafer. The board answered that she is Bobs sister.

Hendrick stated that when she reviewed the minutes back when it was decided to hire her that initially it was a small task that turned into a much larger one. The previous board did not have a contract with her so there were no limitations in place. Hendrick stated that as soon as the new board realized how much she was costing the township we put a contract in place to stop her investigation, limit expenses she can charge and set an end date for her services. We took QuickBooks back from her and She is now only needed for payroll until BS&A is live. Once BS&A is live everything will be transparent and easy to manage.

Kim was happy the Meeting agenda was ready on Friday and asked if it could be available to the residents for every future meeting.

Wojcik stated that he will try to have the agendas posted on the website on Mondays prior to each board meeting.

Jeanne asked where the survey book is, Hendrick has it and will bring it back.

Brad Potter asked about microphones so the audience could hear us better.

Wolff responded that they tried them at the last PC meeting and one of the microphones was broken but the system worked well.

Next meeting March 12th

Motion to adjourn at 9:48 pm by Wolff, 2nd by Melton. All in favor. Motion carried 4-0.