

# MINUTES BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, January 10, 2017 --- 7:00 p.m.

Big Rapids Township Fire Hall, 14212 Northland Drive, Big Rapids, MI 49307

## I. CALL TO ORDER: 7:00 P.M.

Supervisor William Stanek called the joint meeting of the Big Rapids Charter Township Board of Trustees and Planning Commission to order at the township fire hall on Tuesday, December 13, 2016 at 7:00 p.m. Mark Gifford lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

## II. ROLL CALL:

Board of Trustees: Present: Penny Currie, Travis Williams, Tony Geib, Jerry Everett, Carman Bean, Rene Fountain and Bill Stanek. Planning Commission: Present: Philip Keating, Carman Bean, Mary Davis, Gordon Oliver and Amanda Wethington. Mark Sweppenheiser and Zach Cook are excused. The record shows a quorum is present. Also present: Zoning Administrator and Recording Secretary, Brent Mason.

## III. STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP ADDRESS:

Mr. Stanek addressed the joint meeting and delivered the State of the Township Address. A copy of the text follows:

Good evening, and welcome to the second annual state of the township address. We would especially like to thank our residents that our here. We are here because of you; we are here to serve you. Thank you; it is a great privilege that we do not take lightly. I would also like to welcome you that are new to our board and also new to the planning commission. Michigan is one of the states that have a township form of government. Only about half of the states have townships. Michigan has 83 counties and 1240 townships. If you do not live in a city you are a resident of one of the townships. Over half the people living in Michigan live in townships. If our state were square or rectangular in shape it would be easy to divide up, but it is not, so some counties are larger than others. Most counties have 16 townships---each made up of 36 square miles or 23,040 acres. Some have more and some have less, depending if there is an incorporated city in part of the township. Big Rapids Charter Township is unique in that the City of Big Rapids is entirely within the township borders. This leaves us with a smaller township than most with 20,240 acres. Other townships in Michigan have large lakes in their townships that cut down on their land acreage. We are also unique in the fact that we use a lot of advisory committees that allow more local people to be involved in making recommendations to our board. Why is a township form of government important? It allows a lot more local control by people that are accountable to you. Most people living in a small city or township personally know their local officials. Not only does this help locally, but the majority of our representatives in Lansing started out in local government. So, for each of our elected officials, be it a township board or a city commission, one must take the job seriously and do what is best to represent and be accountable to the people that elected us. As I started to think about what I should say tonight, I thought about what we have accomplished in the last four years. Thank you to each board member that served the last term and to the many that served before us. The last board did a great job in making some positive changes. With me being new as a supervisor I had a lot to learn, and the board was very patient in helping to educate me. Thank you. What were some of the biggest accomplishments of the last four years? I thought about a lot of things, but I think the most important thing we accomplished was the personnel changes we made. When I came into office we had a lot of good people working here, but now we have great people working as a great team. My philosophy has always been to hire people a lot smarter than I am and pay them well. In my own business over the years I have done this, in over 45 years in management I was never the top person on our payroll, and it has always paid off. In government it is a little harder to pay what some people are worth, but this year I will challenge the board

to look at what we pay our help. The first big change we made was when May Emerson retired. We had big shoes to fill and I went after the best person to fill this position, and he accepted. That is Brent Mason. Brent is the face you see when you come in or call the office. He oversees the building department. When Brent started, the building department had a negative financial balance. Today we have over \$100,000 built up in this department. Of course, the economy has played a big part in it, but Brent has been able to keep up with everything. This past year Brent took over the role of Zoning Administrator. He is the secretary to the Planning Commission and keeps them on track. Besides all this, he helps collect taxes when the treasurer is not in; he answers questions on assessing when the assessor or I are out of the office. He also covers for me when I am out of the office for meetings or pleasure. Another very positive change we made was the fire chief. A township fire department is usually the biggest problem most townships face. If you have your own department or joint department with other communities or townships it is very expensive, and that usually creates friction. A fire department takes well trained personnel and the necessary equipment to keep them safe. No one wants to spend money on a fire department, but when they are needed everyone wants the best people out there protecting our people and property. Some large departments have full-time paid people that are on site when a call comes in. The problem here is that unless you are a very large department you only have two or three people on site at one time. The rest are on call and must report in. We have a part-time paid volunteer department. Coordinating a department like this and being careful not to overspend taxpayers' money while having an excellent department takes a very special type of person, and that is what we have in Chief Jim Tubbs. Jim, with his deputy chief, Perry Douglas, does an exceptional job. We are also very fortunate to have a great university so close. Ferris has a well-respected criminal justice program, and a lot of the students want experience in first responder and fire training. Jim and his team have taken advantage of this. We have a well-balanced department with local people as well as students. This department trains at least three nights a month plus a lot of Saturdays. Many of the students hang out here and study. When a call comes in they are here. Another thing Jim and Perry have done is to have a good working relationship with the city and other departments. This past year this department averaged over one call per day. Thank you to the entire team. An area that has taken a little longer to get the right person in was the cemetery, but we now have a very capable person that has a heart for the job. That is Brandon Maneke. Brandon took over mid-summer and has done a wonderful job with the cemetery. He is also keeping our snowplowing up and working on maintenance problems as well as trying to get some of our records computerized. He has worked well with our paid help as well as volunteers. We try to use as many community service people as we can as well as other volunteers. This helps us get more done with less expense. One of our goals is to computerize our records, as we do this we will use a lot of volunteer help. We have a large, beautiful cemetery that does take a lot of work; this summer between help I had the privilege of helping with the mowing. I have actually mowed over 90% of the cemetery myself and a lot of it two or three times. This has given me a much better understanding of what it takes to keep it up. Other changes were made with our water plant operator and sewer contractors. Kevin Cushway is doing a great job keeping our water facility in good operating order and Northwest Kent Mechanical is handling our sewer operations. David Kirwin has become our assessor through BS&A. David works in our area two days a week and also does a lot of teaching for BS&A. Over ninety-five percent of the townships in Michigan use software provided by BS&A for assessing. We are very fortunate to have one of the best teacher as well as assessors. This assures our residents that their property is being assessed at the proper value and everyone in our township is paying their fair share on taxes. One position we didn't change was our contract engineer. We were using a large firm out of Grand Rapids, Progressive A & E, that continues to do us a great job. The lead engineer on our projects is Mike Oezer; he is very familiar with our area and has over one hundred specialists in their firm to back him up. They worked with us on the sidewalk project as well as our sewer system. They review all of our commercial building site plans to see if they have adequate storm water retention and that they are meeting our zoning requirements. They will also be working with us on the grant we just received. Four years ago, when I came on board as supervisor, one of my dreams was to improve the working relationship with other townships and the City of Big Rapids. I have been overwhelmed by the support I have received from the city. It has been my privilege to work with Steve Sobers. Steve and I may have had different viewpoints or observations, but, we were always able to work together, and at the end of the day I always had much respect for a great Christian friend. We are going to miss Steve but are also fortunate that he was able to train the next city manager. I look forward to working with Mark Gifford and know that we will have an excellent working relationship. I had the privilege of chairing the

Downtown Business Association when Mark took over as director, and we worked together well. Mark was a natural choice for the city and has some history but will also bring in some fresh ideas that will move the city forward. Mark's heart is here and that is great for the township. If we are to succeed as a township we need the city. What is good for the city is usually good for the township. The city offers a lot of services and jobs for our residents. We need to continue to work close with the city. Under the leadership of the current mayor, Big Rapids has made the most improvement that I have seen in the nearly fifty years that I have lived here. Congratulations, Mr. Warba. What have we accomplished this past year? The biggest accomplishment has been the Perry Street sidewalk. This has been under consideration for over four years, and it was finally finished this fall. This was accomplished as a joint effort between the university, the city, local businesses, and the township. Thanks to Dave Hamelund who chaired the sidewalk committee and to each member of the committee that helped to make this possible. It is wonderful to drive by and see it being used. Another accomplishment that was underway for several years was the support for the city library. Thanks to the committee members who helped to provide all the facts and information so that we, the people, could make an intelligent decision. Thank you to all our residents that supported this millage. Libraries are changing but are still very important to every community. We have an excellent library and one that is looking toward the future. A noticeable improvement we are making each year is in our roads. We use the road millage plus what we can save from the general budget. Last year we held back a little so we could do a big project this year. We are collecting a little over \$200,000 per year millage and then averaging over \$100,000 from the general budget. This past year we were able to maintain some roads as well as redo 220<sup>th</sup> Avenue from Woodward to West Avenue, Seneca Parkway, and Glenwood Drive. We have over \$400,000 set aside in our budget for this year. Thanks to each of you that serve on the road committee under the chairmanship of Dave Molnar. This committee looks at the Pazer ratings of each of our roads and decides which ones to recommend next. At this point in time it would take about three million dollars to bring only our paved roads up to good condition, but a little at a time we will chip away at this. In our township, we have 24 miles of gravel roads, 35 miles of local paved roads and 16 miles of primary roads that the county maintains as well as 12 miles of state roads. Currently we are working on a new 25-year wastewater agreement with the city to replace the 40 year one that will expire this year. We have been meeting monthly with Green Township and the city to work out a new agreement; hopefully we are on the downside of this now. The other big item we are currently working on is the SAW grant we just received (Stormwater, Asset Management and Wastewater). This is a state grant for \$170,000. We applied for this three years ago, hoping we could get some help in putting a plan together to keep our sewer system up-to-date. At that time, we asked for a little over \$150,000 with a 10% match. We did not receive the grant, and we kind of forgot about it. This fall, we were informed that we had been granted a grant from the third round of funding and the state wanted to know if we would accept the grant without a match. After assuring them we would, we eventually received the final paperwork December 29<sup>th</sup>. None of the money can be used for construction, but this will help us with assessment and some software that will allow us to keep track of our system. The main goal of the state is to make sure local municipalities have adequate plans and money to keep their systems going. We do have many other challenges ahead of us this next year besides the SAW grant and the wastewater agreement with the city. As a new board, we need to look at this building we are in. It is over 30 years old and the fire department has outgrown it. This is one thing that we talked about four years ago, when I first came on board. Where do we need to be in the future? What equipment will we need, and how do we get there? Additional space was the biggest concern. Then the questions were: Do we add a sub-station? Do we add on to this building? Do we look at other communities for help? And, most important, where will the money come from? The need is here. Our township has changed considerably, and so have firefighting techniques. After looking at many options, the most economical improvement was to stay here and add on to this building. So, for the last three years we have been saving up money in the fire budget so we can add on to this building. We now have the money, and I would encourage you as a planning commission and board members to approve this as soon as possible so we can move ahead. Another project that we need to look seriously this year is the 1884 building at the cemetery. This building either needs to be repaired or be removed. We have had students from Ferris look at it and make some recommendations. After looking at the different ideas, I would like to suggest that the board look at remodeling it into a columbarium. This would keep the historical building and also meet a need we have in the cemetery. Currently about half of the funerals are cremations, and this number is growing every year. We need to look at some type of space without taking up full burial lots for this need. There

are many types available to purchases, but we have a building that would serve this purpose, and this would allow some income from it. This building is the historical focal point of Highland View Cemetery. Let's keep it and make it useful. How it is funded is the big question, and I think this again will need to be some type of a joint effort. I would like to ask tonight for volunteers that would sit on a committee to look at this building and how we could do some fundraising. Something else that we have to take a serious look at this year is the new marijuana law. We need to study this out and really see what is best for our township. For me this will be a hard one because sometimes we have to look at what is best for the community and not ourselves. I have been following the law closely and also talking to government officials in Colorado as well as others. This may be the biggest decision this board will undertake this year. Other things I would like board members to consider are long-term planning. A year ago, we took some time to get input from residents. We have looked at these and made some positive improvements and continue to do so. I would like to get some more input tonight when I am finished. Where do you see the township in five years, in ten years? A lot of this will fall back on the planning commission. These are just a few concerns we may need to look at. Will need to expand our office complex? We may need to add our own security department. Do we go back to our own people running our utilities? Do we need some type of rental inspections? Do we need a township manager? Do we need to hire our own engineer or assessor? These are just a few things we need to be thinking about as we continue to grow and, yes, they all cost money. What do I hope to see from a new board? Basically, only two things: first, a board that works together with respect for each other and their ideas, and, secondly, board members that are well informed and well trained and have the public interest at heart. How is that for only two items? What are my personal goals for this next term of office? To be, a good public servant, making wise decisions that affect the whole community. To be transparent with the public and to leave this township in a better condition and better organized than when I started. I ran for this position so that I could give back to the community, and, as it has happened many times in the past, whether it was serving on the board at Spring Hill Camps, serving in economic development, serving in workforce development or serving fellow businesses or serving in the church, it seems that I have always received more back from serving than what I give. I guess that just proves the old saying that you can't out-give God. A year ago, when I was up here I told you that I had just received a report that I was cancer free. That didn't last six months, and tests showed that the cancer was back. This year I have gone through some radiation and will find out tomorrow if that has been useful. My doctor did say the last time that cancer is something I will probably have to live with and will be on some type of medication for it. I am OK with it; I am very thankful for the last three years and the fact that I can stand up here tonight. I have been blessed. Thank you for your patience with me. The state of the township is very-very good. Thank you to each board member. Thank you for being here.

At this time, Mr. Stanek showed a township themed video. When the video concluded, Mr. Stanek invited Mr. Keating to host the visioning time.

#### **IV. VISIONING TIME:**

Mr. Keating started off by thanking Mr. Stanek for his four years of service to the Township as Supervisor. Mr. Keating asked for input from the audience about any items they would like the township to consider for the future. Penny Currie is interested in looking at providing service to the west side of the freeway at Perry Street with water and sewer services, and possibly extending services to the 19 Mile Road exit area. Jerry Everett wondered if the township could do anything to enhance Wi-Fi coverage to the citizens. Bill Stanek mentioned implementing an inspection program for rental units. Tom Crandell mentioned that as the township grows, the need for additional public safety resources needs to be considered. Jerry Everett asked about mutual aid agreements, and where the documents were. Jim Tubbs responded with details about how mutual aid currently works and advised that the documents were on file at the Township Hall and in the Fire Department. Mr. Stanek asked if there was anything the Township could do to help the City. Mark Warba stated that the Township could continue to do what they have been doing by communicating and cooperating with the City and Green Township in

infrastructure projects. He mentioned sharing services, such as engineering and rental inspection. Amanda Wethington asked how roads are chosen for repair. Mr. Stanek said that the road committee recommends roads to the board for approval. Mr. Stanek brought up the rehabilitation of the 1885 cemetery building. Jerry Everett said that we need to determine if it is worth keeping. Carman Bean believes that the cemetery committee should make a recommendation to the Board. Further discussion brought up the possibility of using the building as a columbarium. Cost v. revenue was mentioned. Mark Gifford echoed Mrs. Currie's statement about expansion of sewer and water services, and the possibility of the need for increased law enforcement presence as the population continues to grow. Phil Keating mentioned that it would be worthwhile for our community to have the City and township planning commissions cooperate with ordinance development and planning projects that impact both municipalities. Penny Currie asked about the development of the township junk ordinance, and why we didn't use Mecosta County's junk ordinance. Brent Mason explained that the county's ordinance did not meet our needs, as it encompassed more than the township wanted to deal with. Mr. Bean expanded on that by stating that the county did not want to provide enforcement service for the township, and Mr. Stanek mentioned that the county is having a hard time enforcing their current ordinance. Mr. Keating closed the visioning time at 7:49 p.m. Mr. Stanek Adjourned the Board of Trustees meeting, and the Planning Commission went on recess.

#### **V. PLANNING COMMISSION ELECTION OF OFFICERS:**

Mr. Keating called the Planning Commission back to order at 8:04 p.m. The first order of business is the election of officers for 2017. He advised that the commission needs to elect a chairman, vice-chairman and a secretary. A brief discussion of the duties and previous officers was undertaken. Mr. Bean nominated Mr. Keating as Chairman, Mr. Sweppenheiser as Vice-chairman and Mrs. Wethington as Secretary. Mr. Oliver made a motion that the nominations be closed and that a unanimous ballot be cast for the nominees. Mr. Keating called the question and the vote was unanimous with 5 yeas. The next item of business is the setting of the meeting dates for 2017. Mr. Oliver moved to accept the meeting dates for 2017 as the second Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. Mr. Bean seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with 5 yeas.

#### **VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Mr. Keating asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the December 13, 2016 Planning Commission meeting. Mr. Bean made the motion to approve the minutes as submitted and Mr. Oliver seconded the motion. Mr. Keating asked for any comments. Hearing none, he called the question. The motion passed unanimously with 5 yeas.

#### **VIII. PUBLIC HEARING:**

Mr. Keating gave a brief background on the Junk ordinance and some of the changes that have occurred during the development of the ordinance. Attorney Eric Williams has reviewed the language and recommended some changes that have been incorporated into the final draft. Mr. Keating called the public hearing to order at 8:30 p.m. There was no public comment made during the public hearing. Mr. Keating closed the public hearing at 8:31 p.m. Mr. Keating requested a motion be made for approval of the Junk Accumulation Ordinance. Mr. Oliver made a motion to approve the Junk Accumulation Ordinance as it is written and present it to the Board of Trustees. Mrs. Davis seconded the motion. Mr. Keating asked if there were any further comments or questions. Hearing

none, Mr. Keating asked the question. The motion was approved unanimously with 5 yeas. The motion will now move to the Board of Trustees.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT:**

Mr. Keating entertained a motion to adjourn at 8:34 p.m. The motion was made by Mr. Bean and seconded by Mr. Oliver. Motion carried with 5 yeas.

Motion to approve the Planning Commission minutes of January 10, 2017 by: Mr. Bean, Seconded by: Mr. Oliver. Roll call vote carried with 5 yeas.

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Philip Keating, Chairman  
BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP  
PLANNING COMMISSION

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Date Approved