

MINUTES
BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP
JOINT MEETING with BOARD of TRUSTEES
And PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, January 12, 2016 --- 7:00 p.m.

Big Rapids Township Fire Department, 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 Department on Tuesday, January 12, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL:

Present: Philip Keating, Mark Sweppenheiser, David Hamelund, Gordon Oliver, Carman Bean and Jim Shane. Michael Hults is excused. The record shows a quorum is present. Also Present: Brent Mason, Recording Secretary.

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

IV. STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP ADDRESS:

Good evening, and thank you so much for coming. Fellow board members, I thank you for allowing me to move ahead with this idea, and, to the planning commission, thank you for allowing us to take up your meeting time. To each special guest, thank you for coming. To our really special guests, the township residents, thank you for coming out tonight and an even a bigger thank you for allowing us to serve you throughout the year.

About three months ago Brent Mason and I were talking in his office, and he showed me a website from another township. One thing that caught my attention was they had a video of their State of the Township address on there. I pulled up the website and listened to their supervisor deliver it. Somehow this hit me, and I wondered why we couldn't do that. Of course, that would really be stepping out of the box for me because I am not a public speaker and feel much more comfortable talking to a small group. But, after prayer and consideration, I decided that I wanted to start an annual tradition for Big Rapids Charter Township.

Tonight I would like to share some of the accomplishments we have achieved this past year as well as backing up and sharing some from the last three years. Then I would like to present some of the items that I would like to see our board look at in the coming year. When this board was elected three years ago the township was not broken, and we did not have to come in and fix a lot of things. So this allowed us to move ahead and help make the township a better place to live. That is some of the reasons we have done what we have.

The first year I came into office I took a hard look at the financial strength of the township. The township did have a good fund balance and nothing was really out of whack, but, with the board's help, we were able to save our residents over \$100,000.00 by refinancing some bonds, getting some interest rates corrected, and changing some of our street lights.

The next year we started looking seriously at our roads. If we are to attract quality people to our community, we need to look at some of the things most people look when moving to an area. They are the quality of roads, the quality of schools, and the medical care available. We have two of the three in this community, but we are seriously hurting with our roads. So, if that is what people moving to an area look for, why shouldn't we be providing the best for the people that are already here? With the help of the voters we were able to add 1.5 mills to our tax base strictly for roads. Even with this amount we will need additional funding just to keep up the paved roads we have. Our gravel roads also need some help, and eventually

it would be nice if we could pave more of the roads in our township. We added another \$100,000 from our general fund last year, and we do have additional general fund money in the budget this year for roads. Hopefully this can be approved and added to the roads fund this year so we can do a little more. Actually, what the taxes raise is less than a third of what we really need. So, if we can save some general fund money and add to this it will definitely help. The new roads bill the state passed will also help a little with this difference, but it will take a couple of years before we will see any of it.

Other items that we have taken care of in the last few years was the rebuilding of the Perry Street lift station pumps and the negotiating with a local farmer to help to keep the industrial park property clean of brush. We have continued on with the fall cleanup and even cut out about a third of the cost of doing so. Thanks to the board and volunteers for all your help in keeping this event so popular. This not only gives our taxpayers a way to dispose of unwanted items but helps to keep the township looking nice.

One small thing we started was a fall newsletter to help keep everyone informed of what happens in the township. I have tried to add small things to the tax notices and use the fall newsletter for other items that I feel help the community to be more informed of what we do.

This past year has been a good year for the township. We were able to repair more roads to the tune of a little more than \$300,000.00. We added three generators to our sewer system. We now have generators on six of the nine lift stations. With a power outage our contractor still must move a portable generator around to the last three stations, but they are not used that much and allow us more time. We have also relined over a half mile of sewer pipes that were almost 50 years old and had many broken areas and roots growing in them. This had been allowing ground water to seep or, should I say, run in. Then we paid the city to process this as sewage. This fiberglass liner should provide another 50 years of service. Another item for the sewer system this year was a major repair at the Perry Street lift station. We were very fortunate that our contractors caught this soon and no major damage was done. Another improvement for our utilities system this year was to add smart meters to those using our sewer system. This was done in cooperation with the city who supplies the water to a lot of these customers. Something else we started to do this year for our sewer system is to locate what we have so, in the event of a problem, we know what we are looking for. We have hired the engineering firm we work with to locate these and get them on the GIS system. This was started several years ago when the township had a full time utilities person, but, upon his leaving, nothing was continued. I have also been working downstairs as time has allowed organizing all of our drawings.

Another big item improved this year was our web site, thanks to Rene and her team. We are now putting more information on the web so that the people in the community can see what we are doing. If there is something you think we need added, please talk to Rene Fountain or Linda Osborn.

This year the board was also able to pay off two loans for sewer improvement that were made in 2010. This will save our residents over \$30,000 dollars in interest.

One of the most time consuming things for me this past year for me has been the Perry Street sidewalk. Our engineers have the design almost done, and it will be out for bids within a month. Unless there is a big glitch, this should be a reality by mid-summer. This has truly been a joint effort between Ferris State University, the City of Big Rapids, MDOT, and us as well as the local businesses in the area. How often do you get four government agencies working together? We did pass a special assessment along to the businesses, and all but one has been very cooperative. We are still working with Venlo to see if they will pay what we feel is their fair share.

As many of you know, committees are very important to me. I wish I could remember how many times I have heard, "He loves to go to committee meetings." That is not true, but I do realize how intelligent I am not and that we need a lot of help from people a lot more intelligent than me. This also involves a lot more of our residents in the township. We, as a board, are generalists---kind of like your primary care doctor. We know a little about a lot of things but are not often specialists in any one area. Some may have more experiences in certain areas than others, but we are still in primary care of your township. With committees we can appoint specialists in different areas that make recommendations to the board for our final decisions. By law we do need a few committees or commissions, but we are allowed to add many advisory committees. For those of you that serve on these committees, thank you. Because we have our own zoning and building department we are required to have a planning commission. We must also have a zoning board of appeals and a construction board of appeals. The law also states that we have a board of review and an election committee. Terms and how members are appointed to these positions are directed by the state.

All the rest of the committees we have are advisory ones that we have set up. The three main ones that meet regularly are the cemetery, fire, and utilities committees. These all help with oversight and act as a liaison between the departments and the board. These people put in a lot of time. Thank you so much; it is very obvious that your hearts are into helping improve the township. This year we had a few glitches at the cemetery, and many pitched in to help. This will be better next year. Most of the committee members spent time out there helping and working alongside our staff.

The members of the utilities committee are experts in their area. Thanks for all you have taught me and for your patience.

Talk about experts, when I came into this job I didn't even know what a Pazer rating was or how it was used. The roads committee members use this all the time, so I attended a seminar on how roads are rated so that I could at least talk the same language as our roads committee. They also taught me how important it is to keep up the good roads we have so we don't spend extra money on them. The board and community owe this team a big thank you.

The township has grown over the years and more ordinances to govern the township were needed. Some additions and changes had to be on the fly. For the last couple of years we have had a committee working on organizing these ordinances. We even hired a company that specializes in this area to help us, and within a couple of months this task should be completed. I have now asked the committee to go back and look at our policies. These are in pretty good shape but need to be looked at every couple of years to keep them that way.

This past year we established an investment committee that is looking at your money. It will make recommendations to the treasurer about how best to invest the township money. This year it was recommended that we pay down some debt, and you, as a board, approved. We also resurrected an old revolving loan fund that will be used to fund the sidewalk.

We also had several other committees this past year. This year we have also established a wage committee. This committee will look at the wage packages for elected positions as well as employee packages. I looked at who would have the experience to serve on this committee, and every one I considered was very busy, but I was hoping they would serve. It took only six phone calls to get five people. What an amazing group of residents we have.

Well, that is enough of committees.

What would I like to see us accomplish as a board this year? Number one is the completion of the sidewalk. Another area that we have been working on since I came on the board is helping the city with funding of the library. I have had meetings with other townships, the city, and the library, and we have talked about many options and even a district library. At this point, the board has approved putting .2 mills for six years on the August ballot to support libraries in our district. This would allow the people to decide if they want to support the library without a major expense. Two tenths of a mill on a \$150,000 home would only cost \$15.00 per year and bring continuity to funding.

Besides finishing the sidewalk and the ordinances, I would like to have the board take a serious look at an addition to the fire hall. We have been in this building for 30 years and have outgrown it. A few years ago the committee asked that we look into it. I told them we needed to save up the money first from their budget. They did that and a year ago came before the board. You, the board, needed more time to look at other options. The need is still here, it's a new year, and we still have the same situation. It is tight for vehicles and does not allow for all things to be inside. It is tight for training. The township is not what it was 30 years ago, building materials are different, and we now have multiple housing units. We are not the rural area we were 30 years ago, and keeping our constituency safe is ever changing. This group has worked together, they have worked well with the city, and they are working with other townships. They have improved our fire rating because of their hard work. Let's recognize this and work together to meet the need of our community.

Another thing I would like to push this year with your help is some long-range planning. Where do we see the township in 5 years, 10 years or more? I know some of you have thrown out the idea of a township superintendent. Another idea is to contract everything over to the city and let them run it. Personally, I would like to see each board member set aside 5 days per year for training. To help jumpstart this idea I have asked Mr. Keating to lead us tonight with a visioning session. We will set a time limit and just let everyone throw out some ideas.

Townships are a very important form of government. In Michigan we have 1240 townships. We are the grass roots system along with villages and small cities. We live here, and we listen to your ideas. State and federal governments are too removed from reality and more politics are involved. As townships we work together as well as independently. We have a great township association that helps us keep in line. As for Big Rapids Charter Township, we only have about 20,240 acres, about 12% less than the average township. We are one of the smallest in Mecosta County in land area, yet we have the second highest population with over 4200 individuals residing in this township. Our SEV value (our tax base) this year could surpass the City of Big Rapids. The reason many prefer living in the township is our lower taxes. We pay a total of 45.3 mills compared to the city which has a total millage rate of 60.1 mills, and 18 mills less are paid on homestead properties. Now, to be fair to the city, they do offer more services but have a higher overhead. The other problem the city faces is so much of their property is tax exempt schools, county government buildings, churches and others. This means the cost of operating is put on a lot less people and is therefore much higher.

When I took over as supervisor I had a few things that I definitely wanted to do. One was to keep the township going in the positive directions that had been previously established by hard work. I wanted to make sure we didn't give away any property that belonged to the people of our township; my first two days were spent going over minutes from the previous 12 years. I didn't want to make any big changes. The second main thing I wanted to accomplish was to have a better working relationship with the City of Big Rapids and surrounding townships. The third, and most important, was to be true to our residents. I think, as board, we have done a good job of all three.

One of the reasons we have been able to accomplish so much is because of the employees we have and their support. Brent Mason has been outstanding in the office and overseeing the building department. In the last three years we have seen the addition of The Flats, Aldi, and The Brook completed. The Lerner, Csernai and Fath Building should be open within a month, and the Hampton Inn has started. Besides these commercial buildings many residential homes have been added to our community. Thank you, Brent, George, Ken, and Steve.

Many of you do not see David Kirwin very often, but he is doing an excellent job with our assessing. As I sit in on the board of review meetings, I understand why this committee speaks so highly of him. Jim Tubbs and Perry Douglass have done a wonderful job in turning the fire department around and adding a lot of training as well as cooperation from other departments in our area. One thing that I would like to encourage the board to do is hire good people, pay them well, and keep them. They are the ones that hold this township together; we are only here for a limited time.

And also, a big thank you to each that serve on this board. It is truly a privilege to serve with each of you. What we have is a board that thinks on its own, and that is what we want. If you all thought the way I do, you wouldn't be needed, and we would be in a big mess. Thank you for respecting the opinions of others when they don't agree with yours.

What has amazed me the most over the last few years is how many residents visit the township hall. It is a privilege to serve you and to have the opportunity to listen to you. Keep stopping in; talking to you is the most important thing I can do. When in my office you may notice a couple of items that are usually on my desk besides the mess my wife worries about. One is the MTA handbook; I use that a lot for questions on guiding this township. The other is my Bible. I try to come in early and read that most days; that gives me guidance in running my life.

Speaking of my life, over the last two years I have been very blessed going through a serious battle with cancer. This has involved chemo, other infusions of drugs, a stem cell transplant, and more infusions. At this point I am cancer free and taking the infusions for four more months as a preventive maintenance measure.

Thank you for the privilege of serving. The state of the township is good; actually, the state of the township is very good.

V. RECOGNITION OF SERVICE:

Mr. Stanek turned the meeting over to Mr. Keating for the purpose of recognizing Mrs. Vivian Smith for over 32 ½ years of service to Big Rapids Township, starting as deputy clerk, clerk, township board member and finally as a member of the Planning Commission. Mrs. Smith was not able to be present for the recognition. We will be presenting her with a plaque to thank her for her many years of service and as a real resource for the township.

VI. VISIONING TIME:

Mr. Keating started the visioning time by giving some brief instructions about what this time is for. It will be an informal time open to anybody to share their interest and reason behind the interest so that these items can be brought to the Board of Trustees and the Planning Commission for further discussion. Dan Tuuri came forward to assist Mr. Keating by scribing the comments on the white board. Alice Bandstra shared some information she recently read in the Detroit Free Press about what services citizens want provided by their communities in order to have a successful community. She believes the Public Library and the Perry Street Sidewalk are big things that need to be supported. Gary Gawne requested that the subject of light pollution from new construction be looked at. Carman Bean submitted a list of questions regarding the addition to the fire hall that he feels the Board of Trustees, the Supervisor and the Planning Commission should consider before any decision to add on to the fire hall is made. Mr. Stanek requested Fire Chief Jim Tubbs share info on the preliminary plans and cost. Mr. Tubbs stated that the cost of the construction would be approximately \$140,000.00 to \$160,000.00 and the cost of grade improvements would be approximately \$50,000.00 for a total project cost of \$200,000.00. Brandon Maneke stated he would like to see the sidewalk on Northland Drive south of the City be improved as it receives a lot of pedestrian traffic. Wayne O'Neil knows we are working on our roads but he feels that we should concentrate on roads that are in worse shape instead of the ones that cost less to fix, because some roads will deteriorate to the point that they won't be able to be fixed. He said, ultimately it is the Township Board that has the ultimate responsibility to decide which roads get fixed, not the road committee. He also mentioned that the cul-de-sac at the end of his street is not being plowed, and is concerned that a fire truck might not be able to get turned around or get stuck there. Mr. Stanek suggested for the audience to think "outside the box." Bruce Jacobs mentioned that we should be looking at a new bridge across the river besides the two that exist in the city. He suggested off the end of 14 Mile Road or something like that. Jerry Everett asked questions about the library and alternative ways to support the library for the long term, especially if the township millage doesn't pass. William Stanek wondered about utilities (water and sewer) being provided across the expressway to provide for expansion to the west. Mr. Stanek advised the audience where the current water and sewer services are provided. Penny Currie also stated that a long range goal for the next 10 to 20 years would be to extend water and sewer services to the 19 Mile Road interchange in Green Township. Big Rapids Township's water plant would be more than capable of providing water services to that area. The township water plant needs users to help offset the cost of operation. Dan Tuuri asked about the balance of the townships growth between residential, commercial and industrial. Mr. Keating mentioned the Master Plan and the fact that the Master Plan is updated every five years, showing where we believe future growth should occur. Mark McIver wondered if any thoughts have been given to future traffic flow plans for the area. He feels that State Street and Perry Avenue are too busy for this community and other traffic routes should be considered. Wayne O'Neil would like to see the township get rid of the industrial park. Jerry Everett asked if the township had any ordinances in place that would control the development of wind turbines, cell towers and fracking wells. Mr. Stanek agreed that would be a good thing to look into. Wayne O'Neil mentioned that any future towers need to allow multiple user to "cohabitate" on the tower to prevent the need

for so many towers in an area. Wayne also requested that a thorough study be done along with the neighboring governmental entities to determine what the actual needs are for fire services before we commit to this addition. Mr. Stanek advised that we have been working with the other townships and the city to make sure we are proceeding in the right direction. Carman Bean spoke about his list of questions and how it will help the officials make sure they are looking at the project in the right light. Bruce Jacobs would like to see some of the costs of Highbanks Park upkeep be provided for by licensing fees from the commercial entities that use the park for profit making ventures. This could help with the offset of maintaining the park for the residents. Also, Jerry Everett wondered if a speed limit on Roosevelt Road approaching the park could be considered so the traffic could be slowed down for safety reasons. He continued to wonder why it is so difficult to get speed limits changed when the rationale seems so reasonable. Mr. Stanek advised that it is very difficult because law enforcement needs to be involved and recommend all the changes. Mr. Keating brought up the idea of township wide garbage pick up and Alice Bandstra suggested that curb-side recycling should also be considered. Mr. Stanek invited the citizens to look over the proposed plans for the Fire Department addition. The Board of Trustees meeting was adjourned at this time and the Planning Committee was recessed for approximately 15 minutes at 7:56 P.M.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

VIII. RECONVENE OF PLANNING COMMISSION:

Mr. Keating called the Planning Commission back to order at 8:12 P.M. with the same members present as at the start of the meeting. He officially welcomed Mr. Sweppenheiser to the commission.

IX. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

The minutes of the December 08, 2015 meeting were reviewed and Mr. Keating requested a motion for approval. Mr. Hamelund made the motion to approve the minutes as submitted, seconded by Mr. Bean. The motion carried unanimously with 6 yeas.

X. ELECTION OF OFFICER FOR 2016:

Mr. Keating requested that the commission consider nominations for the officer position on the Planning Commission. Mr. Shane made a nomination of Phil Keating for the Chairman position. Mr. Bean seconded that nomination. Mr. Shane motioned to close the nominations for chairman, seconded by Mr. Bean. No discussion occurred. The vote in favor of Mr. Keating as Chairman for 2016 was unanimous with 5 in favor, and Mr. Keating abstaining.

Mr. Shane nominated Carman Bean as Vice Chairman, seconded by Mr. Oliver. Mr. Shane motioned to close the nominations, seconded by Mr. Oliver. No discussion occurred. The vote in favor of Mr. Bean as Vice Chairman for 2016 was unanimous with 5 in favor, and Mr. Bean abstaining.

Mr. Bean nominated Mr. Sweppenheiser as secretary, seconded by Mr. Shane. No discussion occurred and the vote in favor was unanimous with 5 in favor, and Mr. Sweppenheiser abstaining.

The meeting schedule was set as presented in the provided 2016 Planning Commission Meeting Schedule by a unanimous vote of 6 in favor. See Attached.

XI. OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Keating requested that Dean's Excavating be invited to the February meeting to review their mining license and get a report from them. He also requested that all pertinent information be sent out to the Planning commissioners in advance of the next meeting for review.

XII. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no other business before the Planning Commission, Mr. Keating entertained a motion to adjourn at 8:23 p.m. The motion was made by Mr. Bean and seconded by Mr. Shane. Motion carried with 6 in favor.

Motion to approve the Planning Commission minutes of January 12, 2016

By: Mr. Bean, Seconded by: Mr. Oliver. Roll call vote carried with 6 yeas:

Philip Keating, Chairman
BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION

Date Approved