WHITEWATER TOWNSHIP BOARD
Whitewater Township Hall, 5177 Vinton Road, Williamsburg, MI 49690
Phone: 231-267-5141

REGULAR MEETING
APPROVED MINUTES
Monday, June 12, 2025, 6:30 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER: Supervisor Slopsema called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

ROLL CALL: Clerk Wendy Hoeksema called Roll.

Present:
Supervisor Linda Slopsema
Clerk Wendy Hoeksema
Treasurer Jill Koester
Trustee Tim Arends
Trustee Randy Mielnik

A quorum was established.

Absent: None.

ALSO PRESENT:
Zoning Administrator Deb Graber
Recording Secretary Kay Held
Fire Chief Joshua Morgan (via ZOOM)

SET/ADJUST/APPROVE AGENDA:
Move Chief Morgan's Grant Items to immediately after "Reports" section.

Board Action:
Ms. Hoeksema made a motion to approve the agenda as amended. Mr. Arends seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT:
Mr. Jim Gaskin: Concerned with speed limits on Church and Vinton Streets. The 25mph sign was removed and there are children and elderly on these streets. He also has questions regarding an abandoned alley and how it affects his deed.

Mr. Gary Clark: Concerned with speeding on Skegemog Pt Rd and the condition of the road.

Ms. Connie Hymore: Expressed disappointment in the board's vote to remove public comments from Zoom. $3300 spent on Zoom equipment to limit the public's access. She requests this be reinstated.

Mr. Mark Taylor: spoke with Sherriff who suggested a mobile digital speed limit sign on Skegemog Pt Rd. for the safety of public.

Mr. Charlie Davis: Says PC should use the planner they have on the board. The speeding and trucks' engine braking are out of control on Williamsburg Rd.

Mr. John King: Agrees that Skegemog Pt Rd is in need of repair and that speeding is a problem.

Ms. Julie Zenas: Wants enforcement of STR's for safety issues. She recognized the Zoning Administrator is trying to respond. She wants a board member with an STR to refrain from taking part in decisions.

Ms. Kim Mangus: Voiced her opposition to Civil infractions ordinance citing constitutional concerns and possibility of overreach.

Mr. Jerry Tomczak: Opposed proposed industrial rezoning stating that it goes against the Master Plan and will affect his adjacent property value.

Mr. Mike Jacobson: He thinks public comment should have a consistent time, not three or five minutes. He has reported a persistent blockage at Battle Creek area and feels it needs attention as this is part of Township conservancy.

PUBLIC HEARING: None.

REPORTS / PRESENTATIONS / ANNOUNCEMENTS / COMMENTS:

County Board of Commissioners – Mr. Darryl Nelson: Absent – no report.

Fire Report – Chief Morgan:
Chief Morgan reported via Zoom as he is attending the Great Lakes HOT Fire Conference. His May report is in the meeting packet; however, April's report is not; due to a technical difficulty. It will be in the July packet.
- There were 33 Service calls in May, includes 15 EMS and 15 Fire calls. The average response time 6 minutes, 7 seconds which is well within industry standards
- A notable VASA Trail complicated rescue, Chief publicly commended all firefighters/EMT's for teamwork especially Bartnicki, Strine, Hatfield and Morey for their excellence.

Fire Department Grant Applications;
Cosgrove Foundation Grant-Kubota UTV Replacement for Rapid Wildland and Off-Road Firefighting:
The Fire Department's Kubota UTV is nearing the end of its 20-year lifespan and lacks critical safety features. The Thomas Cosgrove Foundation has proposed a 50% matching grant for the purchase of a new UTV, estimated at $35k. Chief Morgan has requested quotes from John Deere and Ginop's; the Township is eligible for government pricing.

Board Action:
Mr. Arends made a motion authorizing the Fire Department to obtain bids for a utility terrain vehicle and compatible fire/rescue skid unit. Ms. Koester seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried

Firewise – Wildland Risk Reduction and Community Fire Education Program:
FEMA is offering Fire Prevention and Safety program funds which includes Firefighter training and certification as Wildlife Risk Assessors. This is a two-year $47,250 grant with no local match required.

There was Board consensus for Chief Morgan to move forward with this grant application, which has a July 3, 2025, application deadline.

Firefighter Recruitment & Retention Specialist – SAFER Grant Application:

This is a FEMA SAFER three-year, tiered funding grant: $50,000 (100% funded) Year 1, $37,500 (75% funded) Year 2 and $17,500 (35% fund) Year 3. Total cost to Township is $45,000. Typically, departments re-apply for funding.

Chief Morgan wants to apply for this in order to hire someone with to help with firefighter recruitment and retention. This person would also assist with some of Chief's duties and be part of response team. Concerns were raised about short-term funding and training cost, the position sounding like an administrative assistant. The Chief stressed the need for help, as only 4 of 16 firefighters handle most of call and he carries a heavy workload (on-call, nights, etc.) alone. A part time option for help was also discussed.

There was Board consensus to let Chief apply for the grant by the July 3, 2025 deadline.

Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation Grant Brief (Individualized Scott C5 SCBA Facepieces):
Chief Morgan would like to apply for a $20k fully funded grant through Firehouse Subs Foundation for facepieces for each Firefighter. This PPE has a 10-year lifespan.

There was Board consensus for Chief Morgan to move forward with this grant application, which has a July 3, 2025 deadline.

Planning Commission Report – Mr. Randy Mielnik:

Public hearings were held on rezoning requests from Grand Traverse Plastics and AIS.
A Wineries and Cideries Tasting Room Ordinance is being discussed.
Formation of the Resident Outreach Sub-committee (ROS) was reviewed. PC Vice Chair Rene Stratton is spearheading this. A job description and application form have been developed. They are being published in several outlets. The ROS will initially be tasked with Short-term Rentals and the Capital Improvement Plan.

Ms. Jill Bahm, AICP and Mr. Andy Aamodt, Sr. Planner of Giffels-Webster delivered a synopsis of their Zoning Ordinance Assessment to the Board via Zoom, presenting a list of items in the Ordinance to improve upon which originate from the Master Plan. They will create a survey for the Board to rank each area and review it at the July meeting.

An application for a text zoning amendment was submitted with a proposed Ordinance for Short-term Rentals. The Zoning Administrator will be scheduling an August Public Hearing. It will be on the Planning Commission's July meeting Agenda for discussion.

Zoning Report – ZA Deb Graber:
Zoning Administrator Graber's monthly report is in the meeting packet. She additionally reported:

Seven new permits were issued last month. Year-to-date, 40 permits have been issued. The PC approved a homebased business for Uncle Bill's Orchard. Ms. Graber noted there is a complaint form on the Township website; she investigates every complaint.

ZA Graber encouraged the Board to consider a Civil Infraction Ordinance to provide a process for enforcement and reduce legal fees.

Parks and Recreation Report – Mr. Tom Bartnicki:
The Parks Report was errantly not included in packet. Lead Ranger Bartnicki reported all staff members from last season are returning.

The campground is staffed 8am-8pm with overlapping shifts. The Township may need to consider staffing at 6am for fishermen. He suggested signage to indicate the launch is not a DNR launch site. They are

working on additional signage regarding the speed limit and stop/pay fees as well as providing striping and directional arrows for traffic.

Forty yards of beach sand were brought in; this was approved by EGLE. They are looking into wood storage solutions. RoverPass has been updated to include a "tent" option for reservations. There have been positive camper reviews. Occupancy through August 31 is at 57% average with most weekends at 100%.

The electrical system will be upgraded this fall at Pine Needle and Knotty Pine loops. Bids for the project close next Monday.

He is aware of the Battle Creek blockage and trees across trail. Due to the complexity of blockage this may need a contractor.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee Report – Ms. Jill Koester:
Ms. Koester's report was in the meeting packet. She additionally reported:

A Work Bee session was held Tuesday night. They finalized a survey for their five-year plan which seeks public input. They will be finalizing the five-year recreation plan.

Three bleachers have been placed at the park. Volunteers are needed to put the backs on the bleachers and install the 21' long bleacher.

CONSENT CALENDAR – Receive and File:

Pull from Consent Calendar:
Vinton/Church Street Speed Study
Rail Project
May 29, 2025 Joint Township/PC Minutes

Supervisor Report: None.
Clerk Report: None. (added later)
Treasurer Report: In meeting packet.
Trustee Reports: In meeting packet.
PC Minutes: https://www.whitewatertownship.org/planning-commission.html
ZBA Minutes: https://www.whitewatertownship.org/zoning-board-of-appeals.html
Park & Recreation Minutes: https://www.whitewatertownship.org/advisory-committee.html
Historical Society Report: None.
Correspondence:

a. Short-term Rental: Holl, Kingma, Ferguson, Kellogg, Ford, Zenas, Shoemaker, Schroen, Beam, Balestrero, Broad, Resident, Pasney, Baker, Ford, Davis, Coburn, Hasenik, Bazzett, Guertin, Washburne, Mead, Schulte, Reider, McCraven, Chesebro, Campbell, Swoverland, Taylor, Private Citizen (3), Groesser
b. PC Sub-committee Volunteer: McKeon, Chadha
c. Civil Infraction: Beam
d. Various: Steelman
e. TC Area Rail Project (PULLED)
f. Grand Traverse Band 2% Grants
g. Vinton/Church Street Speedy Study (PULLED)

Minutes for Approval:
No Amendments to 5/7/25 Minutes.
5/29/25 Minutes pulled – not included in this packet

Bills for Approval: Ms. Hoeksema

Budget Amendments: None.

Board Action:
Mr. Arends made a motion to approve the Consent Calendar as amended. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

Items Pulled from Consent Calendar:

TC Area Rail Project:
Mr. Mielnik noted materials in the packet from a BATA workshop he attended regarding the passenger rail from downstate to Traverse City. The rail is expected to end in Williamsburg near the Turtle Creek Casino. An extensive study is underway, and there have been discussions with stakeholders in the project. There will be much more information to come regarding this.

Vinton/Church Street Speeding Study:
Supervisor Slopsema and Trustee Arends met with GTC Road Commission members recently due to road conditions and speed concerns. The process for a speed study, due to recent new legislation, starts with the Township, goes to the Road Commission and then the State Police. Mr. Arends asked that any speed study requests be discussed by the Board first.

There was Board consensus to submit a letter for a speed study on Skegemog Point Road, and Clerk Hoeksema will follow-up on the initial submission for Vinton/Church Streets and any Township expense.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Cherry Capital Connect (Fiber Internet), Letter of Understanding – Mr. Tim Arends
A memo from Mr. Arends was in the meeting packet regarding the status of ARPA funds and the commitment of deliverables for Cherry Capital Connect's fiber internet project. The Letter of Understanding also satisfies ARPA reporting requirements.

Board Action:
Ms. Koester made a motion that the Supervisor be authorized to sign the Letter of Understanding between the Township and Cherry Capital Communications regarding ARPA funds allocated to the company for internet connectivity to residents and businesses of Whitewater Township who are either unserved or underserved by current providers. Ms. Slopsema seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

Note: A five-minute break was taken at 8:25 p.m. The meeting resumed at 8:30 p.m.

Civil Infraction General Ordinance – Ms. Wendy Hoeksema / Mr. Randy Mielnik:
The meeting packet included a memo from Mr. Mielnik and Clerk Hoeksema as well as a proposed Civil Infractions Ordinance. Mr. Mielnik provided an overview of this material including the MTA's recommendation of converting enforcement and penalty provisions in the Township's Zoning and Nuisance Ordinances from criminal misdemeanors to municipal civil infractions. The Board reviewed the draft Ordinance.
Several Civil Infraction Ordinances from similar communities were drawn from as examples. A Public Hearing was suggested for resident input. Mr. Mielnik also recommends all General Ordinances be available. The Clerk has located electronic copies and will post those on the website.

Board Action:
Mr. Arends made a motion to schedule a Public Hearing at the next Regular Meeting on July 10, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. to obtain public comment on the draft Civil Infractions Ordinance, with appropriate public notice. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.
ROLL CALL VOTE: Koester-N, Arends-Y, Mielnik-Y, Hoeksema-Y, Slopsema-Y. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS:

Zoning Map Amendments – Mr. Randy Mielnik:

Zoning Amendment Case #2025-01 (Grand Traverse Plastics Rezoning): Zoning Amendment #88
Mr. Mielnik reported a memo from Planning Commission Chair DeYoung and Vice Chair Stratton is in the meeting packet along with the rezoning request application from Grand Traverse Plastics.

Mr. Mielnik stated the Planning Commission held a Public Hearing on May 7, 2025. He explained the intention for the request is to build a new 40,000 sq. ft. warehouse. They would also be adding 12 employees. The property is currently zoned Commercial; Grand Traverse Plastics is asking for a rezoning to Industrial.

Input from the public included concerns about light, noise and traffic on Moore Road. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the proposed rezoning request to the Township, and it aligns with the Master Plan.

Supervisor Slopsema invited Mr. Kevin Reffitt to the podium, representing the applicant. Discussion regarding business and planned development ensued, with questions answered.

Board Action:
Mr. Arends made a motion to approve Zoning District Amendment Case #2025-01, which rezones Parcels 28-13-005-003-00 and 28-13-005-006-00 to N-1 on the Official Zoning Map of Whitewater Township. Ms. Slopsema seconded the motion.

Mr. Arends withdrew his motion. Ms. Slopsema withdrew her second to the motion.

Mr. Mielnik noted the Ordinance Amendment number should be #88.

Board Action:
Mr. Mielnik made a motion to approve Zoning Amendment #88 where the Official Zoning Map of Whitewater Township shall be amended to rezone Parcel ID #13-005-003-00 from the A-1 Agricultural and C-1 Commercial Zoning districts to the N-1 Industrial Zoning District and to rezone Parcel ID #13-005-006-00 from the C-1 Commercial Zoning District to N-1 Industrial Zoning District. Mr. Arends seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE: Hoeksema-Y, Koester-Y, Mielnik-Y, Arends-Y, Slopsema-Y. Motion carried.

Zoning Amendment Case #2025-02 (Behrenwald Realty / AIS Rezoning): Zoning Amendment #89
The Board agreed to discuss aspects of the case, even though it was a late addition to the packet. Mr. Mielnik stated the Planning Commission held a Public Hearing on May 7, 2025. He projected images on the projector screen. AIS is requesting to rezone part of their property from residential and agriculture (R-2 and A-1) to industrial (N-1) to allow for a new training facility and storage building. The PC suggested a compromise to reduce impact on nearby homes.

A representative from AIS, Kurt Johnson, explained that the expanded use would still stay within the existing industrial area with no new road access, nor noise expected. He submitted supporting documents and site plans. It was discussed that if AIS ever left the property, it could revert back, but the Planning Commission could not advise this nor enforce this directly.
Supervisor Slopsema recommended Township legal counsel to talk with AIS's attorney for clarity.
The Board agreed more work was needed in order to reach a consensus and to explore the conditional rezoning.

Board Action:

Mr. Arends made a motion to refer the Zoning Amendment Case #2025-02 (Behrenwald Realty / AIS Rezoning) matter back to the Planning Commission to address the possibility of conditional rezoning of the property. Ms. Slopsema seconded the motion.

VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

Board Action:
Mr. Arends made motion to extend the meeting beyond the three-hour mark. Ms. Slopsema seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried

Michigan Rural Readiness Grant Application:
Mr. Mielnik reported on information from the Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity regarding a Rural Readiness Grant Guideline to fund rural capacity building, development readiness, partnerships in planning and collaboration. A Letter of Intent is due June 30, 2025. If accepted, a full Application is due August 11, 2025, and grants will be awarded in November, 2025. The grant offers up to $50k with a 20% match. Suggested uses for grant monies were to include planning for the industrial area, old village of Williamsburg and old M-72. There are also zoning issues that need to be addressed.

Board Action:
Ms. Slopsema made a motion to prepare a Letter of Intent for the Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity Grant Application. Ms. Hoeksema seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried

Road Improvements –Ms. Linda Slopsema
Supervisor Slopsema met with Dan Watkins from the GT County Road Commission regarding the poor condition of Cook and Skegemog Point Roads. The Road Commission proposed:
-Cook Road (2 miles) wedge and chip seal at $366k
-Skegemog Point Rd (3 miles) $910k with 2 miles being a full reconstruction
Total combined repair cost of $1.276 million.
The County is willing to give more as this is needed and fund $638k. The Township has a Road Fund with a balance of $400k. $238k could be from a Special Assessment District (SAD) on approximately 130 parcels on Skegemog Point Rd. The SAD could be bonded over 10 years and the road life extended up to 25 years with this alternative.
Mr. Watkins will be available for further input and questions at the next Board meeting, and his team will be considering design details such as drainage and trees with engineers in the meantime.

The Board recognized members of the public:

Mr. John King: Requested consideration of Elmer's trucks on roads and non-resident usage.

Mr. Mike Jacobson: Wanted clarification of dollar amounts and if using parcel frontage for calculation, especially those with multiple parcels.

Mr. Randy Hector: States he has a civil engineering degree, lives on the road and he agrees the drainage must be corrected. His concern is the 15+ people with no frontage on road that live behind him and use the road to access their properties.

There was Board consensus for the Supervisor to distribute information to property owners regarding this topic. She will forward to Board Members for review prior to distribution.

Township Governance Excellence – Mr. Randy Mielnik:
Mr. Mielnik included the MTA's sample Principles of Township Governance Excellence policy in the meeting packet.

Mr. Mielnik stated his concerns about the Special Meeting that was held on Good Friday, April 18, 2025. Many residents attended and criticized what they thought was imminent Board Action on Short-term Rentals. The purpose of the Special Meeting was to move a proposed Civil Infraction Ordinance to a Public Hearing.

He since learned that Treasurer Koester sent out an email prior to the meeting warning residents the Board was going to act on STRs that morning and encouraged them to attend. Her message delivered incorrect, misleading and insulting information via multiple platforms. He took personal offense to these actions and is choosing to confront this situation in an open, public setting so there is no mistake about his views. There was no sneaky plot to run Short-term Rentals through an approval.

The formation of a Resident Outreach Sub-committee provides an opportunity for an objective and complete investigation in Short-term Rentals. Actions going forward must rise to a higher level, and he will not tolerate another Board Member making unfounded suggestions about his intentions. He never had any individual conversations about STRs prior to April 18. The Board as a whole has been hurt by this. He urged residents who receive similar communications in the future to reach out to the Board. Contact information is on the website. He will call out any similar situation in the future as he learns about them.

He requested the Board consider adopting a formal Principles of Township Governance pledge, which he read aloud.

Ms. Koester responded with her perspective. She was out of town and learned of the Friday morning Special Meeting Wednesday night. She was not informed what it was about but rather the Board understood she couldn't be there and they would fill her in later. The next day she saw the Agenda on the website. She saw the information on the Civil Infraction Ordinance but also what looked to be a prepared document ready to be voted on at the meeting regarding STRs. Other people interpreted the same. She contacted three couples who operate STRs and encouraged them to attend.

At the meeting she recused herself from discussion and delivered a Public Comment. She stated she did not accuse Mr. Mielnik of anything. STRs do not affect her personally, and she does not rent short-term. However, she supports Short-term Rentals including restrictions.

Clerk Hoeksema requested a public and personal apology for slander and libel stating Ms. Hoeksema made multiple complaints against her neighbor. She felt her family was put in danger.

Supervisor Slopsema called a Point of Order for interrupting and debating Ms. Hoeksema. Ms. Slopsema stated she has seen posts affecting her and ones saying that Ms. Koester is embarrassed to be part of this team. She knew Ms. Koester was traveling and made herself available for discussion. False information started by the Treasurer, was spread by friends who have STRs, and many residents are still suspicious. Ms. Koester's text created a great deal of misinformation.

Supervisor Slopsema has learned the Township does not have a Code of Ethics and believes this is necessary in an attempt to avoid these situations.

Ms. Koester stated she made personal apologies to Ms. Slopsema, Mr. Arends and Mr. and Mrs. Mielnik.

Mr. Arends saw the Governance Policy in the meeting packet, but was blindsided by it being handled in such a public way. He is on this Board to get away from the actions of the previous Board.

Mr. Mielnik stated letting if this go unanswered, people would continue to believe information that is not true.
Supervisor Slopsema noted the Township also needs to adopt a clear Conflict of Interest Policy. The County has a Code of Conduct and Ethics for Elected Officials. She queried the Board if they were interested in pursuing this. Board Members believe it is important to have a Code of Ethics; Mr. Arends

suggested not finalizing a policy tonight but revisiting the document at another time after people have calmed down.

FOIA Coordinator – Document Update:
Supervisor Slopsema included proposed revised FOIA Procedures and Guidelines in the meeting packet. The prior Board had shifted FOIA duties to the Supervisor; however, it was always the Clerk's function prior to that. She and Clerk Hoeksema verified at a training program the FOIA Coordinator is typically the Clerk. The FOIA Coordinator is not a statutory duty by state law; the Township must designate someone.

Board Action:
Ms. Slopsema made a motion to update the Whitewater Township Policy and Procedure Manual APPENDIX I "Township FOIA Procedures and Guidelines" document to identify the Clerk as the FOIA Coordinator. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

Computer Training Dates for Security and One Drive – Ms. Slopsema:
IT Tech for Whitewater Township, Mr. Noah Creamer of Social Explorations offers one-hour training sessions for important security measures. The Board discussed the possibility of coordinating training with Planning Commission Members, and employees. Supervisor Slopsema will reach out to all and coordinate a time with Social Explorations.

TABLED ITEMS: None.

BOARD COMMENTS / DISCUSSION: None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Township Regular Board Meeting: Thursday, 7/10/25, 6:30 p.m.

Electrical Upgrade Bids: Sealed bids for the Whitewater Township Park electrical upgrade project will take place on Monday, June 16, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Ms. Connie Hymore: Urged the Board to rebuild public trust after recent miscommunications, stating she even received the text from Treasurer Koester and wanted to remind her people take public official's word for the truth.

Ms. Kim Mangus: Applauded public engagement and urged the Board to work with AIS. Called for a fair assessment on road project parcels, not to send anyone into bankruptcy.

Mr. Mike Jacobson: Voiced concern about Civil Infractions Ordinance and offered to help with Battle Creek culvert issue.

ADJOURNMENT:

Board Action:
Ms. Slopsema made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Hoeksema seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 p.m.

Submitted by: Kay Z. Held, Recording Secretary
Wendy Hoeksema, Clerk