WHITEWATER TOWNSHIP BOARD and
WHITEWATER TOWNSHIP PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PRAC)

Whitewater Township Hall, 5177 Vinton Road, Williamsburg, MI 49690
231-267-5141 Phone

SPECIAL MEETING
AMENDED APPROVED MINUTES
Thursday, June 5, 2025

CALL TO ORDER:
Township Supervisor Slopsema called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.
The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

ROLL CALL (for Township): Supervisor Slopsema called Roll.

Township Board:

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

Absent: Clerk Wendy Hoeksema (excused)

1 **Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC):** Secretary Voice called Roll:

Present:
Chair Melissa Melton
Vice Chair Brandon Hubbell
Secretary Amber Voice
Member Gary Buczkowski
Township Board Treasurer Jill Koester

A quorum was established.

Absent: None.

ALSO PRESENT: Recording Secretary Kay Held

SET/ADJUST/APPROVE AGENDA:

Board Action:
Ms. Melton made a motion to approve the Agenda as presented. Ms. Koester seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

Mr. Arends noted this Joint Special Meeting is being held by the Township; therefore, only Township Board Members are eligible to participate in Board Actions. Subsequently, a second motion for Agenda approval was made and voted on by Township Board Members.

Board Action:
Ms. Slopsema made a motion to approve the Agenda as presented. Ms. Koester seconded the motion.

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

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

CORRESPONDENCE:
In her absence, Supervisor Slopsema read aloud a memo from Clerk Hoeksema offering input moving forward. She stated the 2021 Recreation Plan was impressive and will be a foundation from which to work regarding the updated five-year Plan. She suggested the following considerations:

- Rather than investing heavily in surveys or consultants, implement short demographic-based surveys and conversations.
- Focus on recreation programs that will garner resident involvement.
- Partner with nearby communities on a joint plan that might share costs and ideas while increasing participation.
- Plan for maintenance needs on assets already in the Township; i.e., trails, restrooms and parks equipment.
- Prioritize community impact in terms of benefits and number of people served.
- Promote facilities and programs to increase community awareness as many residents were unaware of existing assets based on the last survey. This will also more positively impact the budget.

BOARD DIRECTION TO COMMITTEE ON FUTURE GOVERNANCE, OPERATIONS AND DELIVERABLES:

Campground/Park Business Function Decisions:
Supervisor Slopsema provided an update on campground operations. With the exit of the former Parks Manager, duties have been divided among staff. Mr. Tom Bartnicki was promoted to Lead Ranger, a wage increase was approved for Lead Ranger Tripp Wagner and Ranger Vickie Emerson is taking on more administrative functions.

Mr. Arends stated there are numerous relatively inexpensive projects being worked on at the park; i.e., painting the ranger station, planting flowers, replacing the split rail fencing, improving parking bumpers and focusing on Hi Pray Park. A schedule for restroom maintenance in place.

A purchase order was executed for beach sand, and the Park is speaking with the DNR regarding shoreline erosion. A P.O. is expected to be issued for striping the parking lot and implementing directional arrows for traffic flow.

General Ordinance No. 48: Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee:
The PRAC General Ordinance No. 48 was created in 2012 with no changes other than membership makeup. There was discussion regarding the process through which to update the Ordinance and PRAC By-laws.

PRAC Chair Melton commented PRAC was formed as an Advisory Committee to provide ideas to the Township Board. It was previously directed by a former Clerk, who was also the Parks Administrator. There was a communication disconnect between the Board and PRAC once the prior Clerk was no longer the Park Administrator, the Park Manager role was not solidified and there was no Board Liaison for a long period.

PRAC 5-year Recreation Plan Update:
PRAC Chair Melton delivered a presentation on PRAC's history. PRAC has not directly pursued DNR grants; those have been conducted by engineering firms within a project. PRAC has not been directed to pursue grant opportunities; however, they are open to it. The application process will require a different scale of time.

The last Recreation Plan was distributed in 2020; the Committee is considering appropriate updates. Consultancy input is not viable due to budget constraints. She does not believe the existing Parks & Rec Master Plan needs to be re-written, but rather updated to address changes in the community since 2020.

PRAC has a Special Meeting scheduled next week, June, 10.

Ms. Melton's packet included a revised survey, proposed budget, Capital Improvement list and schedule of tasks to complete prior to the DNR's Recreation Plan submission deadline of 2/1/26.

Survey:
The survey asks respondents to rank preferences which will be tracked and analyzed. A memo in the meeting packet from Ms. Melton outlined survey content, methods for survey distribution (website, coupon mailer with tax bill, online Survey Monkey, physical copy at cleanup day and hard copies at the Township Hall) and results reporting. It will also include a QR code for tracking. Grand Traverse County GIS will be utilized to update community mapping.

Mr. Mielnik stated the DNR changed its Parks & Recreation Plan guidelines in 2021 and suggested PRAC check that for any changes. Ms. Melton has reviewed the changes. The information can be found on the DNR's My Grant page.

The completion deadline is in January; this timeline includes a 30-day Public Hearing requirement, circulation to the public and county/regional planning agencies and Township approval by Resolution. The approved Plan must be submitted to the DNR prior to grant applications such as Passport, Land & Water Conservation and Trust Fund Dollars. The Board encouraged PRAC to apply for every grant opportunity available. The DNR grant application deadline is April 1 each year.

There was discussion about several line items in the budget as well as the Capital Improvement project list.

3

Ms. Melton encouraged the Board to provide PRAC with any suggested changes or additions to her material prior to its meeting next Tuesday.

Park Area Reviews:
PRAC Chair Melton provided a slideshow of the Parks and Nature Trails and a written outline describing the Lossie Road Nature Trail, Battle Creek Natural Area and Hi Pray Park. The slideshow highlighted current conditions and areas in need of improvement.

Lossie Road Nature Trail:
This is a 1.77 mile walking trail through a road easement that was relinquished from the County to the Township. Unfortunately, vehicles have created erosion, and higher water levels in swampy areas have affected the west end portion of the trail.

ARPA grant funding was secured; however, reallocated to the fire truck purchase. Engineering has been performed, an RFP is ready for distribution and it is a shovel-ready project.

A neighboring property owner has requested the ability to access their back property on the east end of the trail; the previous Board did not support or ratify a decision. Maintenance is needed; i.e., mowing, tree removal and repair of the damaged Skegemog Point sign.

PRAC would like to promote wildlife, forestry and wetland education opportunities on the Trail. They have witnessed much wildlife and two bald eagles; the Trail may be a nesting ground for them.

They have also evaluated the connection between Lossie Road Nature Trail and Battle Creek Natural Trail.

Mr. Arends believes many residents are unaware of the natural recreation trails and suggested the Township Board join PRAC on a walking tour of the properties.

In response to Mr. Mielnik's inquiry about engineering, Ms. Melton stated preliminary engineering drawings have been completed. No soil borings have been conducted. Upon approval, an RFP will be distributed for engineering and construction portions of the project. Thus far, $6,240 has been spent on engineering fees.

Low spots need to be filled in and the walking bridge replaced. Wetland mitigation will need to be reviewed, and an EGLE permit is required.

It is anticipated the engineering and construction costs will be $173k. Three years ago the preliminary engineering estimate was $5k and an additional $25-45k for the full engineering estimated for ~~to manage~~ the project.

Battle Creek Natural Area:
This is a 255-acre parcel off Skegemog Point Road, acquired through the Land Conservancy and the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. The management plan for this property is included in the Recreation Plan. It includes frontage on Elk Lake with the Battle Creek running through the property. The walking trail does not connect in a loop style. A switchback is another connectivity idea.

PRAC's goals are to make it a more sustainable walking trail, create a loop and add a connector to Lossie Trail. There is also the potential to create a connector to reach the beach; this was destroyed in a 2015 storm. Ms. Melton showed a map of the property. An easement would be needed from one private property and a retaining wall is necessary.

There was group discussion about pursuing a DNR grant for trail building.

4

Ms. Slopsema suggested collecting trail user data.

Whitewater Park / Campground:
The Whitewater Township Park and campground consists of 55 sites, a boat launch, beach, pavilion, volleyball court, and walking trail. It is currently limited in electrical capacity; however, the Township is in the process of receiving RFPs for electrical upgrades.

Recently PRAC revised the trail system mapping, upgraded the boat launch and relocated an outdated playground area. (PRAC didn't have involvement in the boat launch project.) PRAC received approval and Tribal Grant funds for adding toddler equipment to the playground. Additional projects under consideration include upgrading/moving the beach area and new pavilion, a ranger station and a toilet for the boat launch area. In the past, the Township Board or Park Administrator managed projects without PRAC's involvement, impacting collaboration.

Mr. Arends stated the new Township budget has merged two funds into one named "Park and Recreation Fund." The Township is encouraging the Park Manager to be more involved in PRAC to reduce the disconnect felt by PRAC.

Mr. Mielnik referred to the Capital Improvement project list taken from the 5-year Plan and sees much potential. He would like to see the long-term vision and believes a Master Plan for the Park is necessary. Mr. Buczkowski stated the survey may shed more light on concrete information. Mr. Mielnik stated the DNR has offered Whitewater Township a tour of Wilderness State Park where there was a successful buildout.

Supervisor Slopsema stated prioritization of projects is important and should include explicit benefits to the community. Program planning and events were discussed; Ms. Melton stated a Coordinator and additional support are needed for the execution of events as PRAC is currently comprised of four volunteers. PRAC

would like to hold events at the Park facilities as campers expect and enjoy this. Surveying campers through Roverpass and looking at other like properties was suggested.

Members of the Board and PRAC agreed there was collaborative discussion this evening:

- Close the disconnect between Township Board and Parks
- More resources are needed beyond the small PRAC
- Focus on long-term planning
- Seek funding opportunities
- A Master Plan for the Park is important to the Rec Plan, grant applications and planning
- Collaborate to implement programs among the Parks and community
- Start by planning small activities for campers at the Campground

Hi Pray Park:
At Hi Pray, 250 Little League players, their families and community enjoy activities. This Park consists of two baseball diamonds, a batting cage, playground, pavilion, basketball court and tennis/pickleball courts. The dilapidated bleachers are being upgraded to new metal bleachers; three are assembled with a fourth to be put together and perimeter fencing. Volunteers also cleaned up the front flowerbed, dugout and weed/brush along the fence. Baseball field maintenance is ongoing.

Immediate needs include resurfacing the cracked tennis and basketball courts, removal of overgrown brush in the fence line that is damaging the fencing and removal of an old, unused shed. The fourth bleacher will be placed in this spot. The Conservation District could be a resource for clearing the heavy brush behind the fences as they may have received funding to assist local governments.

PRAC has evaluated additional project ideas such as a paved walking trail, playground area for younger children, dog park and water park.

5

The groups brainstormed about short- and long-term project improvement ideas that could have impact in the Township beyond the Parks and capital returns on investment.

Supervisor Slopsema stated the Tribe agreed to apply their $14k grant originally intended for Toddler Play Equipment and instead went to ~~the playset on~~ the bleacher purchase.

Ms. Melton asked if the Board would reconsider material to place under the bleachers for reduced maintenance. Supervisor Slopsema suggested she research costs for various materials.

Six-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) (reference):
Aspects of the CIP were discussed throughout the course of the meeting, and PRAC submitted a list of Capital Improvement projects with cost projections. A five-year Recreation Plan is required in a Capital Improvement Plan.

Board Expectations of PRAC:
Ms. Melton commented that as a result of this meeting she feels there has been clear messaging, direction and improved communication. It is also helpful to know there is a process in place.

PRAC will need Board approval for pursuing grants. The Township has a Board Member on PRAC intentionally who provides a monthly report. Both groups agree this is helpful. Ms. Koester suggested having a member of the Campground involved as well. Lead Ranger Tom Bartnicki will attend PRAC meetings; however, he will not be a PRAC alternate.

PRAC currently has four members; there is an open seat and two vacant alternate positions.

Ms. Melton stated there is no grant writer on PRAC, it is a time-intensive process and former Boards have had funds available for time invested in grant writing. Mr. Arends responded the Township budget has funds for professional services. Grant writing compensation would need Board approval.

BOARD AND PRAC COMMENTS/DISCUSSION: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

ADJOURNMENT:

Board Action:
Mr. Mielnik made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Arends seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 9:38 p.m.

Submitted by: Kay Z. Held, Recording Secretary