

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

REGULAR MEETING
Approved MINUTES
Thursday, May 8, 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:

Recording Secretary Kay Held

SET/ADJUST/APPROVE AGENDA:

-Move Fire Chief Morgan's Report to follow Declaration of Conflict of Interest.
-Add to New Business: IT Support Hours Contract

Board Action:

Ms. Slopsema 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.

FIRE CHIEF REPORT:

Chief Morgan's report is in the meeting packet. He additionally reported:
The On-call Program was enacted on 4/1/25. Calls for service went from 9 April, 2024, to 35 in April, 2025. The Department saw an improved response time for arriving on-scene. National statistics prove a two-minute reduction in response time significantly improves the chances of survival in cases involving CPR. Several employees will be completing their probationary period soon. Of note there were two or three calls out of jurisdiction, one of which was a 12-hour incident and a wildfire incident. The fire hall building will be painted and a new Township Fire Department sign will be installed.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

James Gallagher, Baggs Rd; opposes short term rentals under 30 days; wants stronger enforcements of ordinances.

Denise Heidisch, (no address given) supports STRs, believes homeowners should control their property, criticizes overregulation and wants to rent her place for 30 days or less.

Dennis Dean, Carns Rd, stated long term rentals on his property have been problematic but STR's have little impact. He is now questioning whether he has the right to rent his own property, believes property owner should decide this.

Barb Dean, Carns Rd, she has found no regulations against short term rentals, and she volunteers to serve on any future committee looking into this. Farmers in general are concerned about land loss and would support AIS and furthering diesel technicians; she is disappointed in PC for not acting.

Melinda Gallagher, Baggs Rd; opposes STRs due to negative neighborhood impacts and absentee owners, believes they inflate housing prices.

Steven Holl, Island View Dr; Was surprised to find a home on lake near him being used as STR, previous Board members told him there is no way to control it. His neighbor sold to someone to didn't divulge they planned to list on Air BnB, concerned about unlisted ones.

Laurene Garchow-Packer, Island View Dr; opposes STRs because of the behavior issues, misuses of lake, parking and traffic on private roads, and noise that nonresident homeowners cannot really address. She is concerned about changing the feeling of their private lake.

Vern Gauthier, Deal Rd; wants to be able to short term rent to horse show attendees if he chooses to. He has enforceable rules regarding quiet time/parties like a responsible homeowner should.

Heidi Vollmuth, Winnie Lane; notes zoning inconsistencies, encouraged public to locate and read Ordinances, emphasized the need for clear, enforced rules and transparency in ordinances.

Kim Mangus, Brown Bear Lane; criticizes confusing and inaccessible ordinances, wants better regulation and notes STRs weren't considered illegal historically. She opposes the civil infraction ordinance as she believes it infringes on constitutional rights.

Jessica Mangus, Brown Bear Lane; criticized the timing of calling a non-emergent special meeting on a religious holiday like Good Friday and called the civil infraction ordinance unfair with fines too high for average person to fight it.

Sue Mielnik, Wheeler Oaks Drive; stated she has extensive experience in real estate and her opinion is her own not her husbands (who serves on the Board) Says STRs are not legal because they are not specifically allowed. She explained permissive zoning ordinances. She believes past township officials gave the public the wrong idea by saying STRs were okay. She says we currently have no good way to enforce. She was upset how the recent special meeting was handled and wants more honesty and communication from member(s) of the Board.

Vicki Beam, Baggs Rd; States she sees both pros and cons of STRs as she prefers Air Bnb's/VRBO's herself while traveling. She advocates for cooperation between residents and the Board and wants an ordinance that reflects public input. Encouraged constructive solutions and transparency. She complained the public should be able to comment through Zoom.

Mike Jacobson, Skegemog Point Road; Supports STR's but also supports Zoning and regulations which may help with ones on lakes, which have operated for decades. He opposes the civil infraction ordinance and feels it will be an unfair, way to discriminate.

PUBLIC HEARING: None.

REPORTS / PRESENTATIONS / ANNOUNCEMENTS / COMMENTS:

Code Enforcement – Mr. Gary Clark (former Code Enforcement Officer):

Mr. Clark possesses a 46-year career in law enforcement, retiring as a Detective Lieutenant. He also spent 10 years as a Code Enforcement Officer. He is currently with Homeland Security.

He noted BS&A has a good application for code enforcement. In his experience, compliance was the issue, not fines. Being proactive versus reactive is important, and he discussed enforcement procedures and court action. He noted Short-term Rentals are difficult to police. Mr. Clark distributed a sample door hanger he used previously with information for the Township.

186 Networks Broadband: Information in packet.

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

Planning Commission Report – Mr. Randy Mielnik:

No written report available yet; Planning Commission meeting was last evening. He stated it was a long meeting with numerous Public Comments regarding Short-term Rentals. There were two Public Hearings for rezoning requests with Grand Traverse Plastics and AIS Construction.

Grand Traverse Plastics proposed rezoning of two parcels on the west side of Moore Road for a planned expansion with the construction of a 45k sq. ft. warehouse. The request was approved by the Planning Commission and will come before the Township Board. If rezoned, site plans will be reviewed.

AIS Construction proposed the rezoning of property to the south of their existing facility, which is zoned industrial. The land to the south is zoned both agriculture and residential. There was a great deal of Public Comment. No action was taken on this Amendment request. The Planning Commission will take time to review information and issues presented. They encouraged AIS to reach out to neighbors who had concerns. This subject will be on the Planning Commission Agenda at the June 4th meeting.

There was discussion regarding the scheduled Joint Planning Commission/Township Board meeting of May 29, 2025. There was also preliminary conversation regarding the structure of the Resident Outreach Sub-committee (ROS). The proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment regarding Short-term Rentals (STRs) was postponed due to the late hour of the meeting past 11:00 p.m.

The Geffels Webster planning consultant will be producing an assessment of the Zoning Ordinance and may present at the June 4 PC meeting.

Zoning Report – ZA Deb Graber:

Zoning Administrator Graber's monthly report is in the meeting packet. She was prepared to provide additional information via Zoom; however, there were technical difficulties with the system.

Per her report, 15 Permits were issued and one Land Division was approved. She also noted several Code Enforcement items. There will be no ZBA meeting on May 22, as there are no new appeals.

Parks and Recreation Report – Mr. Mike Dwyer:

Mr. Dwyer's report is in the meeting packet. He additionally stated:

The park is ready and opens tomorrow, 5/9/25, with 100% occupancy. New Lead Ranger Tom Bartnicki and the rest of the crew are doing very well. Septic, porta johns and electrical have all been prepared. Ice and wood deliveries are scheduled.

Both water samples returned good; however, the Health Department requested the well system be re-chlorinated and provide two additional reports. There is no contamination noted; however, the Health Department checklist requires this. The system will be shut down for 24 hours and the well chlorinated next Tuesday, May 15. Campers will be notified. This process will be required every season.

An electrician is modifying the showers, and it will be completed before Memorial Weekend. The boat launch tags are being printed. The sale of the portable restroom trailer is not final, but is expected shortly.

PRAC Report – Ms. Jill Koester:

Ms. Koester’s report was in the meeting packet. She additionally reported: New bleachers arrived Wednesday; Mr. Brandon Hubbell received and will store them until installation. They hope to coordinate the installation at Hi Pray Park with the community clean-up date of May 31. Mr. Mike Jacobson will be paid to take the old bleachers away on May 31 as new ones are assembled.

She met with the Fitness Campaign group and will meet with them again next week with PRAC. She will present information to the Township Board for consideration.

CONSENT CALENDAR – Receive and File:

Pull from Consent Calendar:

-Whitewater Township Board Minutes of 4/7/25 (Regular Meeting) and 4/18/25 (Special Meeting).

Mr. Arends asked for clarification of the structure of the Consent Calendar as compared to the Reports section of the Agenda as there seems to be some duplication. The Supervisor will work on this.

Fire Report: In meeting packet.

Planning Commission Report: Verbal report given.

Zoning Report: In meeting packet.

Parks Report: In meeting packet.

Supervisor Report: In meeting packet.

Clerk Report: No report.

Treasurer Report: In meeting packet.

Trustee Reports: In meeting packet.

MMR Reports: None. (arrived after packet was distributed)

Sheriff’s Report: None. (arrived after packet was distributed)

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: No report.

Correspondence:

-Grand Traverse County Survey

-Short-term Rental: Ferguson, Kingma, Holl, Chesebro, Schulte, Blight, Rhoraff, Bruso, Bruce, Stalzer

Minutes for Approval:

<https://www.whitewatertownshipmi.gov/township-board--subcommittee-meeting-minutes.html>

4/7/25 (Regular), 4/18/25 (Special). Pulled from Consent Calendar. Amended below.

Bills for Approval: Ms. Hoeksema – In meeting packet.

Budget Amendments: None.

Revenue and Expenditure Report: 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:

Township Board Minutes - Amendments:

4/7/25 Regular Meeting Minutes (Recording Secretary Held):

4/18/25 Special Meeting Minutes (Clerk Hoeksema):

Amendments, changes and corrections were discussed. An Approved Amended copy of each set of Minutes will be posted to the Township website.

The Board also discussed with Recording Secretary Held preferred methods for notating Amendments in the content of the meeting Minutes and how they are indicated in the amended copy.

Regarding the 4/18/25 Special Meeting, there was discussion on suggested edits regarding Treasurer Koester's declared Conflict of Interest on Short-term Rentals, Public Comments made and the rule of law whether she is recused from the quorum and entire meeting, or only the subject related to the conflict of interest. They also clarified that Ms. Koester did not participate in the Board discussion on the matter in question. Clerk Hoeksema researched the three-step recusal process and Conflict of Interest reporting requirement. Mr. Arends suggested seeking the Township Attorney's opinion on this matter.

Board Action:

Ms. Slopsema made a motion to approve the Minutes as amended from the 4/7/25 Regular Meeting and 4/18/25 Special Meeting. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.

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

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Civil Infraction General Ordinance – Review, Next Steps:

Supervisor Slopsema included a proposed Civil Infractions General Ordinance in the meeting packet. A Code Enforcement Policy and Procedure document was also included from 10/2012. A sample Ordinance from Acme Township was provided as a comparative resource.

There was extensive Board discussion regarding specific practices for enforcement and the process to adopt a Civil Infractions General Ordinance. This would entail a Public Hearing for citizen input. It was noted that Zoning Administrator Graber is seeing improved compliance through her enforcement efforts and communicating with residents.

They reviewed the content and made edits of the proposed document as prepared by the Township Attorney Chris Patterson. Board Members had varied opinions between the proposed copy and a more simplified sample. Clerk Hoeksema cautioned against discounting the attorney's input. There was additional discussion and consensus for two Board Trustees to research and draft a Civil Infractions General Ordinance for Board consideration. Clerk Hoeksema and Mr. Mielnik volunteered to do so based on their expertise and familiarity with the content. Ms. Koester volunteered to seek out additional resources for them to examine.

Board Action:

Mr. Arends made a motion to continue the meeting beyond the three-hour mark; however, to make the second Public Comment section the next order of business to accommodate members of the public, given the late hour. Ms. Koester seconded the motion.

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

Note: The Board took a five-minute recess at 9:30 p.m. The meeting resumed at 9:36 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Barb Dean, Carns Rd; discussed her efforts restoring historic homes for STRs and emphasized the need for clear, proactive rules. She supported inspections, compliance, STR oversight and volunteered to help on the STR committee.

Vicki Beam, Baggs Rd; encouraged the Board to consider hiring a new attorney and supported taking time to carefully review ordinances, not to just adopt a draft. She appreciated the Board's willingness to pursue a civil infraction ordinance.

Kim Mangus, Brown Bear Lane; favored the Acme Township Civil Infraction Ordinance over the one proposed by Whitewater's attorney. She opposed the current ordinance and stressed it should be simpler and clear in understanding.

Jessica Mangus, Brown Bear Lane; warned the Board to consider how ordinances could be misused. She recommended taking as much time as needed for thoughtful, long-term decisions.

Mike Jacobson, Skegemog Point Rd; urged the Board to explore using a different attorney based on his past issues with legal advice. He didn't support a civil infraction ordinance but said a clear, simpler version would be preferable. He praised ZA Graber's enforcement efforts. Advised Board to keep in mind decisions today affect transitions to future Boards.

Whitewater Township Park Electrical Upgrade C2AE – Verbal Update: Mr. Arends

Requests for sealed bids will be sent out in the next few days. There will also be an advertisement in the local newspaper. The public sealed bid opening procedure will be on Monday, June 16th, at 10:00 a.m. at the Township Hall with the Supervisor and Clerk.

Joint Township Board / Planning Commission Meeting of 5/29/25 – Agenda Input:

Supervisor Slopsema asked the Board for input for the upcoming Joint Municipal Meeting. The following items were discussed:

- Short-term Rental process the PC discussed
- Resident Outreach Sub-committee (ROS) structure and process
- Private Road Ordinance
- Capital Improvement Plan
- Giffels Webster presentation on Zoning Ordinance Assessment (Mr. Mielnik is concerned whether an appropriate block of time will be available at the Joint Meeting given all of the other Agenda items)
- Discussion with PRAC and suggesting they might be a better advisory to the PC as they are responsible for the six-year Capital Improvement Plan.

Mr. Mielnik stated the PC has not started discussing the Capital Improvement Plan. An ROS worked well with the Master Plan project; however, it is not an answer to everything. There are some resources in development regarding private roads, and Gourdie Fraser is an asset regarding engineering.

Mr. Mielnik believes we need long-term vision and planning for Hi Pray Park and the campground. He is familiar with a firm that did a Master Plan for Wilderness State Park. They have offered a tour to the Whitewater Township Board to demonstrate its implementation.

Board Members discussed prioritization of topics. Planning Commission Chair Keith DeYoung and Township Supervisor Linda Slopsema will create the Agenda for the Joint Meeting.

Joint Township Board / PRAC Meeting Scheduling & Agenda Input 5/15 or 5/27, or Alternate:

The Board discussed dates for the Joint Township/PRAC meeting. They are:
Thursday, 5/22/25, at 7:00 p.m. or Thursday, 6/5/25, at 7:00 p.m.

Ms. Koester will contact PRAC Members regarding proposed dates and advise the Township Board.

Newsletter Update – Mr. Arends, Mr. Mielnik:

Mr. Mielnik stated the content is nearly ready. Mr. Arends needs to finalize the distribution list.

Tax Fund Balance – Ms. Koester:

Ms. Koester provided follow-up communication regarding required maintenance of the Tax Fund Account.

Board Action:

Ms. Slopsema made a motion to issue a check of \$7,119.09 from the General Fund to the Tax Revolving Loan Fund in order to correct the deficiency from prior years and to increase the fund balance by \$2,500 from what was established in 2014, providing more overdraft protection. Mr. Arends seconded the motion.

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

IT SUPPORT HOURS CONTRACT:

Ms. Slopsema reported the Township has approximately five hours remaining on its initial 100-hour pre-paid block of IT support from Social Explorations. A 100-hour block is offered at a discounted rate of \$110/hour from \$125/hour. It was stated that the township averaged approximately 20 hours of support per month over the past five months.

Board Action

Mr. Arends made a motion to issue a P.O. to Social Explorations for 100 support hours at \$110/hour. Ms. Koester seconded the motion.

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

NEW BUSINESS:

Salary Survey / Recommendations – Mr. Arends:

Mr. Arends reported Grand Traverse County conducted a wage study for 2023-24 and shared the data with municipalities. It includes a comparative analysis and the disparity is wide for statutory positions. Clerk Hoeksema noted they just completed another study. The Michigan Municipal League just published a study as well. Whitewater Township's elected positions are paid approximately 50% of the comparable Townships in the County.

Mr. Arends recognizes that regardless of community size, the Township positions have the same statutory responsibilities, and many jurisdictions have more staff. He would like to do a more comprehensive study on wages, benefits and responsibilities. There was discussion that Whitewater Township also has a fire department, campground and cemetery.

Supervisor Slopsema expressed concern about the significant work load of the Clerk and the hours she is needing to work to maintain the Clerk's office. She believes her salary rate is unfair and wrong. Some employees are being paid more for fewer hours worked. Park Ranger starting wages are higher than the Clerk's. Additionally, the role of the Clerk is also fulfilling the role of receptionist as she is public facing and has many demands, despite setting limited hours. Numerous Townships are increasing Clerk wages as well as hiring FOIA Coordinators. The Board noted the prior Clerk also worked more hours than scheduled.

Supervisor Slopsema requested an expedited method to implement a wage adjustment for the Clerk. The Township is not allowed to give retroactive pay to a government official. This change would be an increase for the position, not specifically the individual in the role.

Acme Township is the most comparable Township to Whitewater in Grand Traverse County; that Clerk position is being paid \$55,097; Clerk Hoeksema's wage is \$30,645, resulting in a \$30,117 wage disparity. Board Members discussed options for an increase. There was Board consensus that a wage increase needs to be made as soon as possible, followed by a comprehensive study.

Board Action:

Ms. Slopsema made a motion to adopt Resolution #25-08 Salary for Clerk – Whitewater Township, Grand Traverse County: Whereas, the Township board deems that an adjustment in the base salary of the office of clerk is warranted for these statutory duties. Now, therefore, be it resolved that as of May 8, 2025, the yearly base salary of the Township Clerk shall be \$46,600. Mr. Arends seconded the motion.

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

Fire Department Grant Proposal: Firefighter Safety:

Chief Morgan submitted a request for approval to apply to the Tribal 2% Grant for \$11,500 to purchase an NFPA certified thermal imaging camera, and a Max Fire Box phase 1 live training prop and support to host a live-burn thermal imaging training course through Insight Fire Training.

Board Action:

Ms. Slopsema made a motion to approve the Grant Application submission by Chief Morgan to apply to the 2% Grant through the Grand Traverse Band for thermal imaging equipment and associated training as requested. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.

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

Township Surplus Disposal (List provided at meeting):

The list is not complete. This subject will be postponed to the next Regular Meeting.

Pension Plan: Authorized Signer – Clerk Hoeksema:

Approved Signers need to be updated on the retirement/pension plan from Acrisure/John Hancock.

Mr. Arends made a motion to name Clerk Wendy Hoeksema to have full discretionary authority for the Whitewater Township pension account #12139 for purposes of establishing signing authority with John Hancock. Ms. Koester seconded the motion.

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

TABLED ITEMS: None.

BOARD COMMENTS / DISCUSSION:

Clerk Hoeksema reported there was a near-fire concern in the Township Hall this week with an electrical wiring issue related to the ceiling fan that was overheating. Supervisor Slopsema and Chief Morgan were called to the building at the time and reacted swiftly. A licensed master electrician was contacted and on-site within the hour to evaluate the wiring and resolve the immediate problem. Controllers, electrical boxes in the ceiling and the fan(s) need to be replaced. Improper restriction was also found in the breaker box. There is minimal heating and cooling in the Hall; they are important for air flow.

A fireproof container box is necessary to preserve and protect permanent records in the Township Hall. There are concerns that some of the filing cabinets are not fireproof.

There was Board consensus for the Supervisor to approve the cost for emergency electrical service.

Members of public present spoke up and asked the Board to reconsider placement of the ceiling fans under the light fixtures as it creates a strobe effect which can cause visual issues for people.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Special Meeting: Joint Township Board and Planning Commission Meeting, Thursday, 5/29/25, 6:30 p.m.

Special Meeting: Joint Township Board and Parks and Recreation Meeting, To Be Determined.

Proposed dates are: Thursday, 5/22/25, at 7:00 p.m. or Thursday, 6/5/25, at 7:00 p.m.

Regular Meeting: Township Board Regular Meeting, Thursday, 6/12/25, 6:30 p.m.

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 11:26 p.m.

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