

PENINSULA TOWNSHIP

13235 Center Road, Traverse City
MI 49686

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**Township Board Special Meeting
December 13, 2023, 9:00 a.m.
Township Hall
Minutes**

1. **Call to Order** by Wunsch at 9:00 a.m.

2. **Pledge**

3. **Roll Call**

Present: Shanafelt, Rudolph, Wunsch, Achorn, Sanger, Sanders

Absent: Chown

4. **Citizen Comments:** none

5. **Approve Agenda**

Sanders moved to approve the agenda as presented with second by Rudolph.

Approved by consensus

6. **Conflict of Interest:** none

7. **Consent Agenda:** none

Business:

1. Work session to plan priorities for 2024

Shanafelt: by the end of the session, I hope to have a priority list of things we would like to accomplish in the next year. Associated with that, we need to determine what is needed to get those things done, some clarity on who is going to take responsibility in driving it, and when it will be accomplished. It's tactical. We have neither the funding nor personnel resources to do a real strategic plan in the sense that we'd be able to execute on such a plan. We are in a position to sort out the myriad things we have to do and prioritize those. All of you have a list of things in your mind that you want to get done. Put them on the post-it notes. Consolidate those and clarify them. Then prioritize. We can determine the things we want to get done now all the way down to things that would be nice to have. The reason for putting things in bins is that sometimes it's impossible to prioritize in a rank order list. Also, the activities will be done by different groups.

Post-it notes put on board and organized by Shanafelt.

Shanafelt: here are the different categories:

Staffing and additional planning

Improving government processes; assessment for possible charter

Move planning and zoning to appointments

Parks manager

Boat launch

Pelizzari trail fund and plan

Enforcement for zoning, violations bureau
Complete master plan
Ordinance rewrite
Shoreline ordinance
Wind and solar
Roads
Housing density
Transitioning budget to supervisor's office
Prepare plan for township office facilities
Communications program for information to public
Update technology
Water and sewer rates
Fire department station 1 rebuild
AED for town hall
Review security
WOMP litigation

Shanafelt: the fire station is a real question, but I don't know how we solve it.

Wunsch: we need to decide if the board wants to weigh in heavily or let the chief handle it. Currently the chief is getting drawings made. If we want him to take the lead on the project, that's okay. Ultimately, we'll have to answer for the fire millage going up. Generally, we're pretty hands off with the fire department but between the union contract and the new station, there could be significant occultations in the fire millage.

Sanger: the issue in my mind is the area for the new station. We need roughly five acres. We need to keep that part of our planning. Where is it going to be? That has to be tackled sooner than the plans.

Rudolph: the chief has been taking the lead on looking for property.

Sanger: I want to help the chief by elevating it up to our level.

Rudolph: might be useful for all of us to think about what the township is responsible for? The things I've concluded we're responsible are the fire department, the police, the parks, sewers, assessment, and collecting taxes. Collecting taxes in Michigan, compared to other states, takes place at the township level. [Most of] the taxes we collect actually [go to the] county and state. Those are the main ones, other than land use planing and enforcement ordinances.

Sanders: and elections.

Rudolph: that is a big one. Because of the legislation passed last year, that has ramped up. Our clerk is trying to [manage] that election process with all the changes.

Shanafelt: and the cemeteries. What is consensus on our top priorities?

Wunsch: we're on a multi-year cycle. Some of these are foregone conclusions. While additional staff would be great, we can't address that. Given that our current staff handles statutory requirements, there's no give on eliminating existing workload.

Shanafelt: do we have consensus that the master plan and zoning are top of the list?

Wunsch: I would put the master plan at the top. The overall zoning rewrite is probably a 2025 priority.

Sanger: the difficulty we are going to face is that the duties Rudy [Rudolph] listed are mostly statutory. Others have been taken on, such as cemetery, fire, and police. They are not required for a township. We need to achieve a balance between statutory and what the voters want. It's part of our challenge with limited resources. It would be great to have all these optional items, but do we do that at the expense of our statutory responsibilities?

Wunsch: I would argue we are currently doing more at the expense of our statutory duties. If we look at where we're not performing where we need to be, we're understaffed in assessing, the treasurer's office, short on a zoning administrator. Continuing to spend 10-15 percent of our annual budget on parks. But if our residents really don't want us to spend the money, we have to spend on the statutory requirements.

Sanger: that's where the communication comes in. Many of the statutory duties we perform are hidden and the public doesn't understand the workload involved.

Shanafelt: regardless, fire is optional but we already took it on. We need to hire a zoning administrator. We need to offer a competitive salary for that, but we have a budget that doesn't really allow for it. In my mind, master plan is one. Then start working on the next one because it's due in five years. Those go hand in hand. Approve it, then form a committee to start working on the next one. Parallel to that is hiring a zoning administrator.

Sanger: in some ways it's out of our control because of the shortage in the labor force.

Shanafelt: are we offering a competitive salary?

Sanders: I just asked Jenn [Cram]. We have three applicants.

Cram: the salary was not advertised so these [new] applicants don't know. When we advertised to hire Nicholas [Wikar], the salary was not competitive. We went beyond our comfort range to get him to commit to the position; unfortunately he didn't work out. We now have an idea of where we need to be with that. As part of requesting the additional budget to get him, I looked at the salary ranges for others in the region and his salary was ultimately competitive. It's a matter of finding someone with the right interests. As you know, I'm taking a lot of heat as the zoning administrator. You have to have the right person who understands the responsibility. Maybe resources are needed to help find that person.

Shanafelt: we have not engaged a recruiter?

Cram: no, just posted online.

Sanders: it's passive, but the people who are looking, that's where they look. We also have three people in the local area who have already applied.

Shanafelt: so in this moment, we're in the process of getting it done. Leave it on the priority list, but we don't have to change anything to achieve that.

Wunsch: from a staffing standpoint, that one is a little different. We have a role, a salary. But if you look at parks and the additional support staff that have been requested for the treasurer, clerk, assessor...I will be taking on the budget this year. Looking at it from a high level, I don't see where [the money will come from]. We could pay out of reserves, be financially reckless, but we wouldn't be paying those salaries out of current revenues, which is a really reckless thing to do.

Cram: with regard to the master plan, I have the experience and desire to get that across

the finish line but will need some consulting help.

Shanafelt: I'm calling this a "wish list" because we actually can't fund it, even though we need it.

Achorn: point of reference: the treasurer's office is really the only one that has the details for all the revenue. That part of all the budgets; it's not just one budget. The treasurer's office is the only one with enough information and the wherewithal to find the information.

Shanafelt: from a strictly can-we-make-the-gears-turn point of view, we need to focus on making sure we are staffed correctly; otherwise the rest of us can't operate.

Achorn: I think the way it's staffed now is sufficient. In the future, it may not be.

Shanafelt: cautionary thing to keep our eye on.

Achorn: I've been the one pulling the budget together. Between Brad [previous treasurer] and I, it went into the computer. For the last six years, I've been trying to teach others to do parts of it.

Sanders: I keep asking if the assessor needs assistance. Legally she needs someone who has that assessment credential in that office. Since she's the one out there figuring out who owes what, and that money is collected and goes to the treasurer's office, that needs to be office staff, even if it's part time. It has to be a credentialed person.

Wunsch: she's brought up multiple times the need for additional staffing in that office. I hate to be the sour note here, but we are dealing with a tough labor market. What I've seen in my lifetime here, our resident base has higher and higher expectations and lower and lower willingness to do this volunteer thing. Have to make a choice as a community to make some changes or the changes will be made for us. The do-nothing approach is going to lead to a lot of dysfunction.

Sanger: no one wants an increase in taxes. There's a big misunderstanding in terms of what percent collected actually goes to the township.

Shanafelt: right. No one wants to pay taxes. It's really a philosophical question: what kind of community do you want?

Sanger: take assessing for example. We could contract with another township to conduct our assessing. Even if that is more economical, the subtle issues of the accessibility of someone here, the knowledge of the township, would suffer.

Shanafelt: it's not always about money; it's about how we use the money. Going back to the notes, if we do nothing more than get the master plan done and focus on zoning issues, are we good for next year or is there something else we should be working on?

Sanders: the question is, can we get the master plan done in the first quarter? That opens up three more quarters to potentially get other items in there.

Shanafelt: well, different people are involved in doing those different things.

Achorn: there's only one person available to be working on all those.

Shanafelt: Randy [Hall's] plan is to have a more engaged and active planning commission engaged in getting things done. We talked about hiring contractors to help with some of the other efforts. I agree it's ultimately one person coordinating how this works. [We need to] allocate some dollars to make that absolute time less.

Sanger: regarding the master plan, we worked with a committee three years ago. Do we

have to go back to ground zero?

Shanafelt: passing the master plan and starting work on the next one are one and the same. We have to do both.

Sanger: there is a timetable. I believe it can be completed in the first quarter if we take what we have as a basis.

Cram: we're not starting over. We have a draft that is close to being done. If I weren't covering two positions, the master plan would already be across the finish line. Now we are playing catch up, and I already have someone helping me part time contractually. We've started to work on getting the master plan ready to present in January so that everyone is refreshed with where we're at. The primary thing is the future land use component.

Sanders: I've got it.

Shanafelt: I've got you down as having it. This is Randy's number one item as well. What we have up here is park stuff, enforcement issues, charter vs. general township.

Sanders: it's a timing thing. If it's going to go out for a vote –

Shanafelt: it's super difficult to get it on the ballot in 2024.

Sanders: special election?

Shanafelt: we'll figure it out. We have roads and housing density. Facility plan; that's a lot of money. That would come after we have some analysis of how we need to be structured. That will directly lead into the facilities planning. Communications plan. Upgrade technology. Water sewer rates, which we have to do. Date we need to get that done by?

Achorn: In January, we could request public work comes in to explain what they expect from us.

Wunsch: we need to figure out how we're going to communicate any rate increases this year. We had a huge increase last year. It comes back to the township collecting taxes for other agencies. Should be smaller this time around, but we need to help people understand we don't really have a choice in what those rates are.

Achorn: we do not have power over what is being billed to us. When they do a facility update, our portion is billed to us. We have no input.

Shanafelt: a communication plan is part of this.

Wunsch: as the supervisor, I sit on the DPW board. Mostly what I do is approve expenses that have already occurred.

Shanafelt: communication I think is a bin one priority.

Rudolph: same thing happens with the road commission and the educational districts that we have to finance. We don't have control over that.

Sanger: but we get the blame so we need to be able to explain why.

Shanafelt: regarding the township agenda, the first one is sewer, the second is the union negotiation. I don't know if there's anything else here.

Wunsch: the boat launch is already approved?

Achorn: we approved the contract. Now we're waiting for the public to come in and say, "Yes, we really do want to fund it."

Shanafelt: do we have a date for the boat launch?

Achorn: ARPA has to be committed by the end of 2024 and spent by 2026.

Wunsch: we've identified three park priorities for the ARPA funding, and because we haven't received a lot of philanthropic funding for the boat launch to date, it looks like it will eat up all our ARPA funding plus some general reserve funds to do that project.

Achorn: we really do need help from the public on Pelizzari and the boat launch.

Sanders: back to our communication plan.

Shanafelt: for the boat launch, December 2024 timing?

Wunsch: yeah.

Shanafelt: what's left is the Pelizzari Natural Area fund and plan, township org chart, planning and zoning move to appointments, enforcement, charter vs. general law, housing density, roads, upgrade tech for township, additional funding options, tax levy, new tenant for [cell] tower.

Achorn: that's immediate.

Wunsch: make it an agenda item.

Achorn: we need to find someone who will lead the project to find a new tenant.

Shanafelt: that's an operational thing we have to do. Put that on the January agenda. AED. Review security procedure.

Sanders: security procedure can go under the organizational chart for the township.

Shanafelt: last two are settle WOMP and unresolved litigation.

Rudolph: we need a "have to do" list as well.

Shanafelt: yes. Do what we can with that. Our aim has always been to resolve these things as quickly as possible.

Sanders: we moved last night to hopefully make a significant step in the WOMP lawsuit.

Shanafelt: I agree. But we won't just settle by accepting what they want.

Wunsch: hopefully there will be willingness to come to the table, but it doesn't change our approach in mediation up to this point.

Shanafelt: focus on litigation and resolution. That also relates to the zoning ordinance rewrite. Bring clarity on what we can and can't do, which leads also to enforcement.

Sanger: make the timetable mid year?

Sanders: they're continued agenda items.

Sanger: township agenda items are ongoing items we have to do.

Shanafelt: regarding housing density, consider the state and the recently passed bill.

Achorn: it's rezoning and what we could do to put guardrails on what the state bill is.

Cram: put that in the category of zoning. We need to update our land provision ordinance to be in compliance with this. Also looking at zoning ordinance amendments for planned unit developments (PUD) because there could be incentives we could address if that bill passes.

Achorn: same thing with the wind and solar bill that passed.

Cram: correct. I've already started talking to Sarah about that.

Shanafelt: for the zoning, we happen to have a committee that is specifically enabled to deal with zoning. Suggest we allow the planning commission to take the lead on setting priorities and planning and execution.

Cram: regarding the shoreline regulation committee, people have come forward; we have a good group. Would the board be comfortable with the planning commission taking the

lead on appointing or selecting the people that are on these different subcommittees to work with staff on the zoning ordinance amendments?

Shanafelt: it's a goal of that committee. Let's make sure we do that.

Cram: another big zoning update, a police power ordinance, is our stormwater ordinance. I've been hearing a lot about that being out of date. It's on the planning radar.

Shanafelt: that goes back to enforcement –

Cram: a violations bureau.

Sanger: the more general issue is the township's plan for enforcement. I'm working on a plan. Once we have it, how do we implement it? One option is to go to a violations bureau. There are a number of options. The issue we find today is that we have ordinances, but we don't have a plan for enforcing them except for relying on the trust of the public.

Shanafelt: I view enforcement as integral to planning and zoning.

Sanger: the planning commission has statutory responsibility for the zoning ordinance. Our township has about eight other ordinances that need work. Where do we assign the responsibility within the governmental office to do the police power ordinances?

Shanafelt: take the lead and tell me when you'll have a proposal.

Sanger: early second quarter.

Cram: you have my support on that as needed.

Sanger: between staff and planning commission.

Sanders: regarding roads, it's Grand Traverse County. Having somebody from the board be the intermediary is probably a good step. Tomorrow night they have a meeting. I'll be there. I was going to jump in and be that person anyways.

Cram: along with roads, we need to stay in touch with the TCI technical committee. That's the regional transportation planning committee that has formed because of the metropolitan area. On behalf of the township, I've been attending both the technical committee meetings and the policy committee meetings. Will continue to keep the board updated. Isaiah [Wunsch] goes to the policy meetings as much as possible as well. The policy committee and technical committee each meet six times a year and alternate every other month.

Shanafelt: is the charter township discussion an ongoing agenda item? Apprise the board as we move along?

Sanger: I think it should be. Keep on the radar any form of government that will enable us to fulfill the statutory duties and wants of our residents.

Shanafelt: it's ongoing; I'll be the person on that.

Wunsch: is it something we think should go on the ballot [next] year?

Sanders: I don't know if we have enough time to do it.

Rudolph: communicate what you're trying to do to the public so they can make a choice.

Wunsch: it's up to the public to research themselves. We can't advocate for or against. I'm not planning on seeking reelection for the supervisor role. Having served in this role for about a year and a half, I think it will be reckless for the township to try to continue on the path it's on. It's going to be a choice to either put charter on the ballot in 2024 or put special millages on the ballot. We need to communicate to the residents that we have lost the willingness to do a bunch of volunteer work for free. We've lost the willingness to

donate to these kinds of parks projects. Like it or not, we are moving toward a more suburban, urbanized community where people are expected to pay to play, although they're telling us they don't want to pay more taxes. For a two-year term, we're probably in good shape, but given inflation –

Shanafelt: I disagree. At least the initial work we did [regarding township operations] suggests that we are currently understaffed and underfunded to meet demands and obligations.

Wunsch: we can keep running people and an organization at an unsustainable burn rate, and it will lead to consequences. We can fund these things or we can decide not to fund them. At some point, we need to have the courage to put it out to the residents to try to figure out what they want.

Sanders: the benefit of putting it on the 2024 ballot is we'll know right away. The talk has been out there for a while, so we'll know yes or no. If it's yes, then we move forward.

Wunsch: if people do not want to pay for services, the board shouldn't torture itself trying to figure out how to provide something they don't want to pay for. If they don't want to pay for parks, let's not worry about parks.

Shanafelt: do we want to aim for charter on this upcoming ballot? In support of that, try to get a third-party assessment for educational purposes?

Sanders: the board votes on whether we want to get it on the ballot. The sooner we do that, the sooner we can decide if we're gonna move forward at all. Let's get it on January's agenda to vote on whether we want to get that on the 2024 ballot.

Achorn: I heard other choices at the St. Joseph meeting. What about those choices? Re-set the Headlee, set a parks budget?

Rudolph: set a parks assessment.

Shanafelt: govern by referendum, which is impossible.

Achorn: they have to have choices.

Shanafelt: putting charter township on the ballot sort of precludes putting a parks millage on the ballot.

Cram: to understand what the community is willing to pay for, could it be structured that it's the charter township, yes or no, but then also, are you willing to pay for a parks millage? Then you would know where the interest is.

Sanders: don't want to just keep having the conversation over and over. In January, let's have an agenda item where we say for 2024, we're gonna get something on the ballot.

Shanafelt: yes. Let's consider the choices of multiple different types of millages to accomplish what a charter township would do.

Sanders: what is the deadline to get whatever on the ballot?

Sangers: I like the way we're going. We know we have a problem. The public has now heard about the problem. I think it's a serious mistake to just push it down the road. We need to determine if we can come up with some solutions in terms of the timetable. Yes, the vote can be held anytime. If it's a special vote, then we have to pay for it rather than piggyback on back of another. My main concern is, we've been elected to get the job done. We need to give the problem some daylight and tackle it.

Achorn: we've run out of money.

Sanger: not just that, we have staff putting in ungodly hours, not taking vacations. As an employer, this is not good that we can't treat our people the way we should. As a supplier of services, we cannot deliver the services the public is demanding from us. We can't just go and spend the money and go into debt. Need the public to help this board make a decision in terms of direction.

Shanafelt: several of these items are closely related. Some of these things we think are important are ongoing township agenda items that we will update as they progress. There's a wish list: staffing and fire station. Are we going to continue letting the chief lead that or does the board want to engage in that discussion? We essentially have five things that can all be primary priorities because they happen with different people over time. Master plan: Maura [Sanders] has that with Jenn [Cram] and Randy [Hall]. All of the zoning issues will be handed off to the planning commission, which is their role. Let them prioritize and address them, noting that the shoreline regulations are primary. Communications is a priority. Everything else has pieces already going for it. The communications plan does not. Need to think about how we want to approach that and who's going to take the lead on that. Enforcement, Dave [Sanger] will take the lead on and have something to us by the end of the second quarter. The question of charter township versus other forms of financing; we will have a discussion in our January board meeting to put that together. I put my name down to do that. Fire station. Do we want to talk about that?

Sanders: I think that should be an agenda item with the chief. Allow his input and hear what the public says.

Shanafelt: sometime in the first quarter?

Wunsch: should we make it an agenda item or put together a committee? Chief has an idea of what he wants; does the board want to have some oversight?

Shanafelt: does anyone from the board want to volunteer to be a sub-committee to work with the chief on something to bring back to the board?

Rudolph: I would work with him.

Sanger: I'll help too.

Shanafelt: regarding a timeline, let's have that back sometime by second quarter. The only open one is communications. We don't have a PR department. What are the channels we use to communicate with? Need more to communicate what we talked about today. How do we do that?

Sanders: having Becky [Chown] here for that would be helpful. We talked about what we can use our website for, but also getting a couple members of the community like Jane at the Gazette and anyone else who has said they would volunteer some time.

Shanafelt: can I put you and Becky as taking the lead on that?

Wunsch: one of the questions is the frequency.

Sanders: that's the question; how do we want this to look?

Wunsch: add it as a standing item at our board meetings. If we want to push something out more frequently than we're doing, let's spend five minutes on board consensus on what we need to communicate at the end of every meeting. It'll be a statement from the board instead of a statement from a single member who's weighing in with their thoughts.

Sanger: identifying that single point of contact between the public and the township for the dissemination of information. It has to be timely.

Wunsch: [Sanders], Becky, and I?

Sanders: some of these fall under reorganization of township structure.

Shanafelt: sure. What I'm looking for is how we implement this. Implementation is different.

Wunsch: add it as a meeting agenda [item].

Five-minute recess

Shanafelt: to summarize, I wrote down our hot button items. There's a lot of overlap. Some of them were subcategories of bigger questions. I started out thinking we would have many separate items that would require prioritization. We ended with a wish list and five categories of things that are high priority that we think we can accomplish over the coming year. We identified that a number of the hot button items are things we are already working on. We've codified them, indicating dates by which they'll be done. Often in the prioritization process, we prioritize but don't take responsibility. We did a pretty good job having people step up and say, "I will do this." The one thing I still think stands out as a thing to finish is the master plan. We have a first quarter date on that. Maura is going to be the lead. As we're finishing that, what is our next step to get our next updated master plan, which is due in a few years? Zoning is a big issue. We have many items on there for the planning commission. Enforcement is an issue Dave has been working on. By the end of the second quarter, he will have recommendations. Communications is important for a variety of reasons. We need to find mechanisms by which we can communicate better to the public. The last thing is the question of charter township versus something else. We will talk about that at the January board meeting. We are going to put this up to a vote and grab the bull by the horns and figure out what to do.

8. Citizen Comments:

Fred Woodruff, 4824 Forest Ave: this was fascinating. I serve on the study committee for charter township. I urge you to think about a complicating factor in what you all are going to be doing going forward because you're all up for reelection. If there's going to be a ballot issue related to township organization and funding, it's an integral part of what whoever runs is going to be running for. I'm perplexed by the attitude that, as a sitting public official, you can't express your position in an official capacity. But I wonder as you run for office if you have a position on that, whether you can communicate that. I understand that there's an act dealing with public officials when it comes to municipal finance, but you're not going to propose a bond issue or a millage. I don't know if charter township is covered by that act or not. I suggest you look into that and find out what you're able to do because I sense that you're frustrated by the fact that you have opinions, and you're going to have to vote on some things but you're not able to say how you feel about them. I think the public and the folks who you're asking to vote one way or the other would greatly appreciate understanding where each one of you stands, which comes under the issue of communication. Thank you.

Lisa Trombley, 7961 East Shore Road: I think this was a great process. I participated in this many times during my career, and I think you guys did a good job. I appreciate focusing on

what you have to do versus what you want to do or what citizens might want you to do. That's really going to be one of the bars you have to work towards. There are always a lot of things we want to do, but [it's good to] stay focused on what you actually are accountable to doing and doing that in the most efficient and effective manner. Following last night's meeting, I think the study group is good for [looking into] charter township. But until you've fully assessed your reorganization, your policies and procedures, how efficiently and effectively you can get that done, your master plan is going to drive that. Your master plan contains those things you must do as well as the things you might want to do. Having all of that in place is critical before you can make a recommendation about charter township. There are alternatives to charter township and [you need to make] sure all of that information is put forward to the voters. I'm an active resident, I'm around. A lot of folks are not, so they just hear snippets. [You need to] make sure they are informed before they make a decision on something as important as this. We do have a mix of residents. We have an incredible amount of talent in this township, retired folks who have expertise and experience in a lot of different ways. I think many are willing to come forward and participate where they feel their voices are going to be heard and they feel a bit of appreciation. They want to contribute. Second, with respect to taxes, people are willing to pay for something when they perceive they are getting value. When they're not confident they're getting value out of their government, that's when people are reluctant to pay the taxes. We do have money here and some people maybe have more money than time; other people have more time than money. We've got a lot of different perspectives and interest areas across our population. It's tricky to find what is going to play to the majority. When we've got limited time and resources, we've got to play to that majority. I would say very well done. I appreciated being able to listen in; I think it was a good thing. You've got a great plan going forward. Thank you very much.

9. Board Comments:

Shanafelt: thank you, guys.

Cram: thank you for letting me listen and participate.

10. Adjournment

Sanger moved to adjourn with a second by Rudolph. Motion approved by consensus

Adjourned at 11:55 a.m.