

**ONOTA TOWNSHIP BOARD**  
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING  
February 5, 2024

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

Present: Terry Pihlainen, Supervisor  
Cheryl Lane, Treasurer  
Tina Watkeys, Clerk  
Brian Bresette, Trustee  
Jennifer Hough, Trustee

**II. AGENDA**

A. A motion was made to accept the agenda as presented.

Motion: Brian Bresette  
Support: Terry Pihlainen  
Motion carried.

**III. MINUTES**

A motion was made to accept the minutes as presented.

Motion: Brian Bresette  
Support: Cheryl Lane  
Motion carried.

**IV. Reports**

A. Financial Report

The treasurer presented the bills for payment.

A motion was made to pay the monthly bills as presented:

- » \$15,267.21 for the general fund, checks #5904-5936;
- » \$343.50 for the fire fund, checks #2186-2188; and
- » \$6,476.46 for the solid waste fund, check #1270
- » \$61,021.71 for the tax fund.

Motion: Brian Bresette  
Support: Tina Watkeys  
Motion carried

A motion was made to approve the monthly balance sheet and profit & loss statements for the general fund, fire fund, solid waste fund and tax fund as presented by the clerk.

Motion: Brian Bresette  
Support: Cheryl Lane  
Motion carried

Roll call vote  
Ayes: Cheryl Lane  
Brian Bresette  
Terry Pihlainen  
Jennifer Hough  
Tina Watkeys

Gen: 796,073.66
Fire: 421,808.74
SW: 161,074.08
Tax: 61,021.71

B. Assessor Report

None – did speak to the supervisor and he said has been staying busy.

C. Zoning Administrator Report

None

D. Fire Department Report

The fire chief reported that the department was not called to any incidents in January. She also noted that they were made aware after the fact that there was a structure fire on Au Train Trail, however our department never received a page or text to this incident. The department will follow up on the matter with Alger County Dispatch.

E. Planning Commission Report

Trustee Bresette reported that they went through Chapter 10 and discussed the open position on the Planning Commission. They discussed the interested parties and nominated Mark Fisher to fill the vacant position.

F. Supervisor Report

The supervisor reported on the following:

- \* Supervisor Pihlainen reported that he has been continuing his conversation with Jamadots. They are still in process of researching the proposition and are attempting to determine whether TDS has proprietary rights to Onota Township. His conversations with them are promising and he will stay on top of it and report any updates as they develop.
- \* Supervisor Pihlainen reported GFL (solid waste company) is changing the trucks to the type with grapple arms attached. These will pick up the waste containers and dump them into the trucks in an effort to reduce workman compensation claims. This could possibly cause an increase in the township's monthly solid waste bills. GFL is proposing a monthly cost of approximately \$15.50 per household paid by the township. GFL did not have current household information available and the township is awaiting their new proposal. GLF will supply the new bins as no others will work with their new trucks and therefore, they will not pick up anyone else's bins. Each family will be limited to 3 – 32gallon bags per week. He will update as more info is available.
- \* Supervisor Pihlainen also reported on the blighted buildings on M-28 will be scheduled for demolition. He is working on obtaining the title work on the Tioga which is required before demolition can happen on it. He is also looking into funding for the title work.

G. Other Reports

1. Matt Watkeys of Alger Conservation District announced the opening of the 2024 Tree Sale and provided flyers to scan for online use to view the sale catalog or you can visit their website **algercd.com**. He also provided dates and brief info on upcoming events which can also be found on their website.
2. Clerk's note: the clerk announced the policy for the retention period of the video recordings of all township meetings stating videos will only be retained for 30 days after the date of the meeting.

**V. CORRESPONDENCE**

- A. Email from ACRES - education seminar entitled: Green Bank Energy Financing (copy of flyer available for viewing)
- B. Email from Jarrod Biebel: DNR recreational grant opportunity for your consideration. Flyer for the virtual workshop available to view.

**VI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Opened: 7:17 pm

Received from: Joan Potter Summer added further information in regards to ACRES (Alger County Renewable Energy Solutions) education seminar on Green Bank Energy Financing. She also encouraged anyone interested in green energy to attend to learn about obtaining funding for their renewable energy projects.

Received: meeting attendee inquired as to whether or not there is/will be a recycling program with the increased fees from GFL (solid waste company). The answer was no due to excessive costs.

Another attendee stated there is a place on Baraga Avenue in Marquette that allows anyone to bring their recycling. This information was not verified by the board. The other attendee also requested elaboration on the increased solid waste bill from the supervisor. The supervisor went into further detail.

Received from: meeting attendee inquiring about the blighted structures and if abandoned vehicles would be also removed from said blighted structures. She also questioned where the vehicles would be moved to. The supervisor answered all surrounding debris, including vehicles, would be removed from approved blighted structure sights. Other properties in the township would not be cleaned up unless on the approved list from the Land Bank as identified by the State of Michigan.

Closed: 7:28 pm

**VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

- A. Kitchen Bid Opening – all bidders were instructed to submit their bids along with a copy of their contractor's license and insurance to the township no later than February 5<sup>th</sup>. Only one bid was received by Timber Ridge Construction in the amount of \$39,450.00. The ARPA funds received in the amount of \$36,000.00 are to be used for the project and remaining funds will be paid from the funds allocated by the township in 2023.

A motion was made to accept the bid for the kitchen remodel.

Motion: Brian Bresette  
Support: Tina Watkeys  
Motion carried.

Roll call vote:  
Nayes: Cheryl Lane  
Ayes: Brian Bresette  
Terry Pihlainen  
Jennifer Hough  
Tina Watkeys

- B. Open Planning Commission seat will be filled by the nominee Mark Fisher.
- C. Supervisor Pihlainen requested a discussion be initiated regarding the handicap ramp. He discussed a potential plan to build an enclosed handicap ramp. The board asked for additional proposals to review before deciding. This discussion was tabled until next regular meeting.

#### VIII. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Three sealed siding bids were received and opened by the board. The bids were received from Timber Ridge Construction, Borealis Builders LLC, and Upland Contractors. Trustee Bresette abstained from the vote due to personal conflict. After a discussion by the board, a motion was made to accept the bid from Timber Ridge Construction in the amount of \$27,050.00.

Motion: Terry Pihlainen  
Support: Tina Watkeys  
Motion carried.

Roll call vote:  
Nayes: Cheryl Lane  
Ayes: Terry Pihlainen  
Jennifer Hough  
Tina Watkeys

- B. Supervisor Pihlainen initiated a discussion concerning the current status and issues of the township Fire Department. The accuracy of the Fire Department's current report came up for discussion. (See Fire Department Report above). He stated that according to Alger County dispatch logs and the neighboring Fire Chief/Sherrif's Department employee, Onota Township Fire Department was dispatched but did not respond. He noted that other more distant fire departments were called and responded to the incident due to shortage of water. He further expressed the potential liabilities of the township due to negligence.

Supervisor Pihlainen also discussed a Title Three Grant of \$15,000.00 that was awarded to the township fire department in September, but has not been delivered or utilized due to lack of communication between the Fire Chief and the Alger County Sherrif's Department. The Sherrif' Department is holding the grant in escrow until the board is able to deposit appropriately.

Supervisor Pihlainen continued to cite several other areas of gross deficiency and the township must be properly protected. He made a motion for the board to request the Fire Chief's resignation immediately upon receipt of request letter and suspend the chief without pay until the resignation letter is received by the board. Trustee Bresette noted another negligent incident by the Fire Department. He then made a motion to request the Fire Chief's letter of resignation as Fire Chief but not suspend payment. The Fire Chief is to have until the next regular township meeting to submit the resignation letter.

Motion: Brian Bresette  
Support: Terry Pihlainen  
Motion carried.

- C. The Johnson Lane bridge discussion was continued. It was noted by Supervisor Pihlainen that the board needs more information in order to justify the construction costs that would be paid by the township with benefits to minimal properties. Both the Supervisor and Trustee Bresette expressed their desire to go forward with the project but more negotiating needs to be done before final decisions are made by the board.
- D. BS&A agreement was received and signed by Supervisor Pihlainen approving the set-up of township BS&A account.
- E. Poverty Exemption agreement was not provided at the meeting but was briefly explained by Supervisor Pihlainen. Please contact the Supervisor or Assessor for more information.
- F. Approval was requested by the Treasurer and Clerk to purchase 5 rolls stamps (100/roll). A motion was made to approve the purchase.

Motion: Brian Bresette  
Support: Terry Pihlainen  
Motion carried.

- G. The date and time were set for the Special Meeting for the Budget Planning. It is scheduled for Monday February 12<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm.
- H. The Clerk announced an issue with the Absentee Voter ballots for the Primary Election. The incorrect form per new election laws was sent by mistake by the former clerk which may result in presidential primary ballots not being sent. The Clerk stated she is working with the Bureau of Elections to find a solution allowing the ballots to be mailed. She provided an alternative solution to those who are able to go online can complete the correct form in time to still receive a

ballot for the presidential primary election. She will provide updates asap via posted notice at the township hall and on the township website.

#### **IX. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Open: 8:15 pm

Received from: Gloria Rinne inquired if township board members are required to live within the township. The Supervisor and Trustee Bresette answered yes.

Received from: Mark Zitnick voiced concerns regarding the Johnson Lane bridge project and potential board approval. The Supervisor and Trustee Bresette reiterated the need for more negotiations and consideration. He also stated the ADA ramp designs will be designed with ADA compliance as all contractors know the requirements and are required to construct accordingly.

Several members of the audience inquired and showed concern about the potential consequences and outcome of fire department that may result from the resignation of the current Fire Chief. The supervisor provided assurance that the fire department will continue to operate without any additional issues despite the chief's resignation.

Closed: 8:31 pm

#### **VI. BOARD CONCERNS**

Clerk Watkeys presented the sled dog race banner given by the UP Sled Dog Association as a token of appreciation for the township's assistance with the 2020 Sled Dog Race that ran through the township. The banner is signed by all mushers from the 2020 race and was hung on the wall of the township hall.

Supervisor Pihlainen announced the March Board of Review dates and times are to be held Wednesday March 13<sup>th</sup> from 3:00 pm – 9:00 pm and Thursday March 14<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm.

#### **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 8:36 pm.

Motion: Brian Bresette

Support: Cheryl Lane

Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tina Watkeys, Onota Township Clerk

Proposed: 02/12/2024

Approved: Approved