

ONOTA TOWNSHIP BOARD
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
MAY 4, 2020

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm (*Note: this meeting was held via teleconference due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as permitted by executive order.*)

Present: Terry Pihlainen, Supervisor
 Brian Bresette, Trustee
 Connie Lacko, Trustee
 Cheryl Lane, Treasurer
 Catherine Kimar, Clerk

Absent: none

II. AGENDA

A motion was made to accept the agenda as presented.

Motion: Brian Bresette
Support: Connie Lacko
Motion carried.

III. MINUTES

A motion was made to accept the minutes as presented.

Motion: Connie Lacko
Support: Cheryl Lane
Motion carried.

IV. REPORTS

A. Financial Reports

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

- » \$15,806.57 for the general fund, checks #4699-4724;
- » \$4,711.87 for the fire fund, checks #1970-75; and
- » \$5,412.66 for the solid waste fund, check #1196.

Motion: Brian Bresette
Support: Connie Lacko
Motion carried.

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

Motion: Brian Bresette
Support: Cheryl Lane
Motion carried.

Roll call vote

Ayes: Connie Lacko
Catherine Kimar
Brian Bresette
Cheryl Lane
Terry Pihlainen

Gen: 640,545.51
Fire: 260,886.96
SW: 145,262.32
Tax: 106.05

B. Assessor Report

The assessor reported minimal activity due to the pandemic and the stay home order. He received one land division permit.

C. Zoning Administrator Report

The clerk read the zoning report (*copy on file*). A decision on holding a teleconference for the Planning

Commission meeting will depend on if the governor extends the executive orders affecting public meetings. Brian Bresette noted that both the conditional use permit and any zoning variance would require public hearings.

D. Fire Department Report

Chief Kimar read the fire report (*copy on file*).

E. Planning Commission

There was no report, as the Planning Commission did not have a quorum for a meeting last month.

F. Supervisor Report

The supervisor reported on the following:

* Boat Launch

- Social distancing is being enforced by MI Department of Natural Resources (DNR) officers
- A new donation container needs to be installed
- What extent the township should be involved with garbage collection at this site
- An information kiosk is needed

The board discussed these issues. It was agreed the township should look into obtaining a trash receptacle for the site, with the maximum size being a 55-gallon drum (similar to the ones at roadside parks).

V. CORRESPONDENCE

No correspondence was received.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Opened: 7:17 pm

No public comment was received.

Closed: 7:17 pm

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

none

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Proposed ORV trail

Jarrold Biebel explained the details of the proposed off-road vehicle (ORV) trail. He said that residents from the central area of the township along M28 have no ORV access to the rails-to-trails system provided by the state. He approached the DNR to discuss this matter, and Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development (CUPPAD) in order to provide mapping for the potential trail pathway. He said it is also possible that the trail could receive grant funds if it was designated specially by the DNR. He was looking to receive feedback from the board and public on the preliminary documents that he had submitted so far.

The supervisor asked about the potential of a public hearing held by the DNR, as well as by the township regarding the use of county roads (there is a provision in the county ORV ordinance regarding this matter and the power of township boards). He added that all the potential trail areas north of M28 were Commercial Forest Reserve (owned by the company that had submitted a letter of support for this project).

John Highlen commented that there was a potential heavy impact of publicizing the trail versus making it an option for local residents to access the trail system, and that may affect support of the project. He offered to assist Jarrod in exploring the area near the end of Laughing Whitefish Point Road, as he was familiar with it.

Andrew Bek commented that there was potential for the trail to have a negative impact on the quality of life for residents along the proposed pathway. The board agreed that this item should be placed back on the agenda for further discussion next month.

B. Tax Rates

The clerk provided the board with details on the previous occasion that the property taxes were not fully collected to provide economic relief to the local landowners and taxpayers. The clerk agreed to discuss it with a former township clerk who had been in office at the time the taxes were partially collected and place the item back on the agenda for August or September (when the L-4029 would be submitted to the county).

C. Tyoga Campground

The supervisor stated that during the meeting with the DNR, they explored a means of opening this site on a trial basis for one year (without the construction of a permanent bathroom facility). To do so, the township would need to create a separate line item to compare the income (donations) vs. the expenses associated with the actual operation of the site. It would also involve a cost sharing agreement between the DNR and the township.

John Highlen explained the DNR proposal further. For the restroom, they would install a portable toilet for four campsites (which was a preferred method for giving the site a potential run for operation). The expected costs for a portable toilet (according to Brian) were approximately \$100/month for rental, emptying, etc. The four sites on the north loop would be opened – this would only require a picnic table and campfire ring per site. The Friends of Tyoga group would still be involved with fundraising, maintenance, and work while the township would serve as a means of fiscal support for the site.

A motion was made to enter into a cost-sharing agreement with the DNR for a one-year trial period for the Tyoga Campground with four sites.

Motion: Brian Bresette
Support: Cheryl Lane
Motion carried.

John Highlen agreed to contact the DNR on the township approval for this matter and report back to the township board.

D. Blight

The supervisor explained that he had been receiving many complaints, over the past several months, on the partially burned Tioga Tavern, junk cars on Sand River Rd, and a few other sites in the area. The complainants had been increasingly angry and threatening lawsuits against the township.

The supervisor asked the fire chief about burning down the remainder of the tavern structure and said that no one has funds for demolishing the building (*the owner, Alger County building inspector, etc*). The fire chief was extremely wary due to the questionable legality and liability of this action and how much this type of activity was discouraged by environmental authorities.

The supervisor said public concerns about the negative visual impact and danger posed by abandoned structures were valid, and that the township needed to look into potential avenues for addressing this (ordinance, condemnation, etc). He added that county-level agencies were unlikely to take any enforcement actions due to either lack of interest in the matter and/or financial limitations. Trustee Bresette said that one of the simpler, enforceable actions for the township to take would be mandating that property owners build a fence to hide abandoned and non-operational vehicles.

The board discussed the option of having the attorney send a letter to the owners of the properties

that are considered blighted due to the presence of abandoned vehicles or damaged structures. It was noted that any such letter needs to have an enforceable action that follows with township ordinances. The supervisor said he would ask the attorney to draft a letter for review at the next meeting.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT

Opened: 8:28 pm

Public comment was received from John Highlen on appreciation for the township trying to take action on blight.

Closed: 8:29 pm.

X. BOARD CONCERNS

Catherine – working on updating the cemetery records and mapping the unrecorded section – she will notify the board when this project is completed.

Terry – it is important for everyone to fill out census forms.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 pm.

Motion: Brian Bresette

Support: Connie Lacko

Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Onota Township Clerk

Proposed: 5/4/20

Approved: 6/1/20