

Charter Township of Portage  
Regular Board of Trustees Meeting

September 14, 2020

The Charter Township of Portage held a Regular Board of Trustees Meeting on Monday, September 14, 2020 via Zoom meeting.

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Bruce Petersen at 11:00 AM

**In attendance** were Supervisor Bruce Petersen, Clerk Amy Skewes, Treasurer Betsy Smith and Trustees Peggy Anderson, Bill Bingham, Bill Fink, and John Ollila as stated by roll call

**Additions or Changes to the Meeting Agenda:**

Kevin Harju, FEMA road construction, Recreational Marihuana ordinance, P.O. policy,

A motion was made by Ollila, seconded by Fink to approve the meeting agenda. Motion carried by a voice vote.

**Approval of the Bd. of Trustees Previous Minutes:** A motion was made by Ollila and seconded by Anderson to approve the August 10, 2020 meeting minutes. Motion carried by a voice vote.

**Approval of the Bills:** A motion was made by Anderson and seconded by Bingham to approve the bills as audited. Motion carried by a roll call vote. Aye: Anderson, Bingham, Fink, Ollila, Petersen, Skewes, Smith. Nay: none

**Review Clerk's Report:**

Office Closure on election day – Motion made by Anderson, seconded by Fink to close the office on election day for regular business only. The clerk's office will remain open. Motion carried by a voice vote. All in favor.

Ballot Drop box – To be put at the Otter Lake Fire Hall.

**Review Treasurer's Report:**

Collecting and disbursing taxes

**Review Zoning Administrators' Report (John/Bill) for (July 2020):**

Zoning Report August 2020

DP Construction Greenway Drive Storage Bldg (approved)

Jason Ruotsala Paradise Rd New Garage (approved)

Bob Gregg Hwy 41 Roof over existing deck (approved)

Robert Fay Hwy 41 New Garage (approved)

George Staley Hwy 41 New Garage (pending)

William Sleeman Superior Rd New Home (approved)

Leland Knuttila Tapiola Addition (approved)

Joe Bergan Tapiola New Pole Barn (approved)

Don Bigelo Tapiola Addition to home (approved)

*Communications*

Calls from Maple Street on letters regarding junk

Home owners to respond back in writing. Board will review.

calls regarding rental of homes

Reviewing options on possible B-3 district

Information to Bruce regarding alley way in Dakota Heights

Bill & John

**Review Fire Departments:**

**OLFD:** Fires, 0 EMS. 4

Surveying has been completed on property

**HTFD:** No report

**Review Assessor's Report:** Attached

**Trustees Reports/Updates:** Anderson asked if there has been a notice in the newspaper for the removal of floral arrangements at the cemetery.

**Public Comments:**

Dave Johnson wanted an update on the sewer project, wants to know if it's going to begin this year.

Chris Holmes from UPEA updated him on the delays and the project should begin next year.

Jackie Chandler from Hurontown wanted an update regarding the speed of traffic by her home. Bruce is looking into radar speed signs.

Mike Bach asked if the agenda is posted on the website

**Correspondence:** Correspondence: EGLE – Const. Without a Permit Update, EGLE – New Testing for PFAS, EGLE – Brian Irizarry – Wetlands Permit Comment Period, CCSA – 2020 Soccer Season Cancelled – Field Grading/Reseeding, Pilgrim River Steakhouse – Property Tax Due Date, True-To-Vote FOIA Request Cancelled

Copper Ridge Road – Sewer Charges Responses – Homeowners do not want to pay the added bills. Fink commented that they must pay, Ollila agreed. Skewes asked if Bruce called anyone to see if this was legal, Bruce said he spoke to MTA and it is legal. Smith commented that she spoke to a homeowner and several of the homeowners on the road are not going to pay, they have contacted a lawyer and were advised not to pay.

**Old Business:**

- A. Green Acres Rd. Sewer & Infiltration R. D. –Chris Holmes spoke with some homeowners about easements, also waiting to hear from Pat Greeley regarding a right-a-way certificate.  
Dave Johnson asked Bingham if he is for or against businesses getting hooked up to the public sewer system. Bingham said he is not against anyone getting hooked up.

- B. Car and Junk Enforcement in Dodgeville/Hurontown starting with Maple St. – Bingham said one home has some improvements
- C. Lift Stations Flat Roof Repair – UPEA Designs/Cost – Cost will be approximately \$5900 per building
- D. Recreational Marihuana – Fink will be revising the draft ordinance; we need to schedule a public meeting.
- E. Houghton County Rec. Authority – Sign Articles of Incorporation – Discussion ensued Fink asked what rights are we giving up to the Authority. Ollila suggested Bruce call the attorney to ask about Fink's legal questions and get a meeting set up with people involved in the Authority.
- F. Joint Clarification of Item #21 with the waste Water Treatment Contract. Fink and Petersen had a meeting with the City, there will be a new contract drawn up to review and sign.
- G. Superior and Boundary Road. Cost sharing. Kevin Harju updated the board on the process on how road funding works.
- H. Twp. COVID-19 – Response Plan – Future office Re-opening. Forms need to be available for employees.
- I. Stormwater Ordinance – Board Acceptance. Ollila made a motion to accept the Stormwater ordinance as submitted by the Planning Commission, seconded by Anderson. Motion was carried by a roll call vote. Aye: Anderson, Bingham, Fink, Ollila, Petersen, Skewes, Smith. Nay: None

#### 14. New Business:

- A. 46529 maple Street House condemnation – Building inspector sent condemnation letter.
- B. DPW – Enterprise Funds/Cemetery Materials Inventory Tracking Sheet.
- C. Rate Increase for PW/PS - \$34.50 Base fee from \$33.75 for Rural Development  
A motion was made by Bingham to increase the base fee from \$33.75 to \$35.00 for Portage water customers effective 10/1/2020, seconded by Ollila. Motion was carried by a roll call vote  
Aye: Anderson, Bingham, Fink, Ollila, Petersen, Skewes, Smith. Nay: None
- D. Soccer field water usage – Will have an irrigation system. They have been watering the field, Bruce said it's not much cost and will be charged to Portage water customers. The board wants to know the actual cost of the water used and to what account the cost will be billed. Ollila said *the township can not use public funds to benefit a public enterprise.*
- E. Dakota Heights Sewer Billing – 4 months they were charged only the base fee due to an error in the system. Skewes made a motion to waive any late fees for up to 5 months for these customers affected, seconded by Smith. Motion carried by a roll call vote. Aye: Anderson, Bingham, Fink, Ollila, Petersen, Skewes, Smith. Nay: None
- F. Office Mail sorting, opening and dating -EGLE fine – None by Sept. the 8<sup>th</sup>. Bruce explained that an EGLE fine notice came in the mail, which he was alerted to and after contacting EGLE he found out that it was not a fine at all. Because of this misrepresentation of his mail he does not want Vanessa opening his mail any longer. She is to just stamp the date received and put it into his box, he is encouraging other office officials to do the same if they wish.
- G. Personnel Manual 2020 – Updates – Adopt. Ollila has some updates he wants to get to Bruce. Smith, Skewes and our Township Auditor have notified Petersen that the Elected officials job descriptions or their deputies should not be in the personnel manual as they are elected

officials. Petersen disagrees and says it's just a guide as to the job description of these positions. We will review the manual before the next meeting and adopt

- H. Increase Cemetery Charges – Schedule Cemetery Meeting
- I. Petersen notified the board of a \$1000.00 grant available to residents from the Michigan Dept. of Health and Human Services which will help pay for water/sewer bills for someone who is receiving public assistance. A motion was made by Ollila, seconded by Bingham for Bruce to compile a list and send over to the Dept of Health and Human Services to see who might qualify for this grant.

**15. Meetings:**

- A. August 20, 2020 – Cemetery Comm. Meeting.
- B. August 20, 2020 – Personnel Comm. Meeting.
- C. August 25, 2020 PAAR Plan Insurance On-site Review – Risk Management.
- D. August 20, 2020 – City of Houghton – Eric - #21.
- E. August 19, 2020 – Core & Main Water Billing Software Review.

**16. Other Business:**

A Budget meeting is scheduled on 9/28/2020 at 11 A.M. via Zoom to review the 2020 Budget, the cemetery and the Portage Water/Sewer rates.

Our next regular meeting will be held on October 12, 2020 at 11:00 A.M. Via Zoom

**17. Public Comment: None**

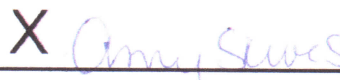
**18. Adjourn:** A motion was made by Petersen and seconded by Fink to adjourn at 12:50 PM. All in favor, motion carried by voice vote.

**Public Attendance:**

Kevin Harju – Houghton County Road Commission  
Jackie Chandler  
Chris Holmes - UPEA  
Mike Bach  
Roy Britz  
Ted Soldan - OLFD  
Dave Johnson

X 

Bruce Petersen  
Supervisor

X 

Amy Skewes  
Clerk



## Assessor's Report, September 2020

In July we had our Audit of Minimum Assessing Requirement (**AMAR**) Review [the AMAR is conducted once every 5 years]. Supervisor Bruce Petersen met with me and the State representative to go over our Assessment Roll, Board of Review decisions, and other ancillary State Assessing Requirements. *(As a note, the Township's last review was in 2015 at which time the State found serious deficiencies in the Township's Assessment Roll).*

We just received the AMAR review letter (copy attached) from the State, and were given a *perfect score* for the Township Assessment Roll; this reflects work done not only by us as your Assessors, but also the Board of Review and the Township Board (for having the necessary assessment related resolutions in place).

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The granting of / qualification for the **Principal Residence Exemption** seems to be an area of confusion among residents, banks and 'closing agents'.

Principal Residence Exemption – provides an exemption from the school operating tax (approximately 18 mills) to a property owner who occupies their home as their primary residence.

The Principal Residence Exemption (PRE) Affidavit (MI form 2368) must be completed to qualify for the exemption. The exemption cannot be granted if it is not fully completed, if incorrect information is filled in on the form, if the property owner has a PRE at another Michigan home or a similar exemption in another state.

For a summer (July) levy of the School Operating Tax; the statutory deadline to file is June 1<sup>st</sup>, after June 1<sup>st</sup> of any given year if the Principal Residence Exemption was not in place for a home, it cannot be placed on the roll for that year without Board of Review action. For a winter (December) levy of the School Operating Tax; the statutory deadline to file is November 1<sup>st</sup>, after November 1<sup>st</sup> of any given year if the Principal Residence Exemption was not in place for a home, it cannot be placed on the roll for that year without Board of Review action. For the Houghton/Portage School System the Township levies ½ of the school operating millage in the summer, and ½ in the Winter. For the Baraga School System the Township levies all of the school operating millage in the winter.

Each year, the July Board of Review meets on the Tuesday following the third Monday in *July*, and the December Board of Review meets on the Tuesday following the second Monday in *December*.

Often a large percentage of the actions taken by the July and December Boards of Review are to handle the granting of late Principal Residence Exemption requests. Given the angst that not having an 'expected' PRE on a tax bill causes- 18 mills of

the approximately 48 mills levied, the following is to help understand the review process when a PRE Affidavit is received.

If all of the questions on the PRE are correctly answered, the form is received by the deadline, the form has an original signature, and the applicant qualifies, the PRE is granted and noted in the Assessment Roll.

If there is an error or problem with the information on the PRE form when it is received, we will first call the applicant. If there is no phone number provided, as is unfortunately usually the case, we send a letter to the applicant with the details of the error/problem and await return of the form. Most homeowners call when they receive our letter, we review their form, and they return the form within a couple of weeks.

Failure to correct the form and return it results in the exemption *not* being granted to the property owner, and subsequently the receipt of a higher than expected tax bill. At this point, the property owner calls, the requirements are discussed, and a plan of action is laid out.

Only the July or December Boards of Review can grant the exemption once the statutory deadline to apply has passed. We work with the property owner to submit the information needed, minimally:

- a correctly completed Principal Residence Exemption Affidavit which is submitted to the Assessor who provides a copy of the approved form to the Board of Review
- a letter to the Board of Review (July or December) asking the Board of Review to grant their PRE retroactively.

A PRE Rescind form must be filed if a homeowner no longer occupies their home as their primary residence. It is the homeowner's responsibility to notify the Assessor (me) if they move from their home.

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**State PRE Audit.** This month we received our annual request from the State to upload the information from our assessment database relative to Principal Residence Exemptions (PREs). The State's Agent will be reviewing the PREs within the Township, and may send letters of inquiry to property owners. It is imperative that if a property owner receives a letter from the State's Agent that they respond immediately to the State's Agent as directed in the letter. Failure to respond will result in the State denying the homeowner's Principal Exemption, and billing the homeowner penalties and interest, for up to 4 years.