

**ALMENA TOWNSHIP BOARD**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**(Preliminary draft)**  
**February 12, 2014**

The Almena Township Board met at the Township Hall. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Supervisor Van Tassel.

Roll call: Mark Roman, Jim Manning, Bill Van Tassel, Jerry Lentz, Sheri Manning, and Sandra Rickli. Deedra Rhoa was absent.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:**

There were 2 additions made to the agenda, the first, under Unfinished Business, item number 2 - Building Department update; the second was to add under New Business, item number 6 - Assessor/BOR request; **MOTION: Motion** by Jerry Lentz to approve the agenda as amended, **second** by Sandra Rickli. **Motion passed.**

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL – January 8, 2014:**

There were 2 corrections made as follows: Sheri made a correction to Treasurer's report on page one, the 4<sup>th</sup> line down has the words, tax deferment, should read tax exemption, with the words, "all will be deferred for the summer tax to be deleted (struck), also on page 3, item number 2, Appointment of a new Trustee, the first line: the word letter, should be letters.

**MOTION: MOTION: Motion** by Jerry Lentz to approve the meeting minutes of January 8, 2014 as amended, **second** by Sheri Manning. **Motion passed.**

**PRESENTATION/APPROVAL OF BILLS:**

Sandra Rickli presented the monthly disbursements for the period of January 9, 2014 through February 12, 2014.

**MOTION: Motion** by Sandra Rickli to approve bills in the amount of \$37,423.27, **second** by Mark Roman. **Motion passed.**

**REPORTS:**

**Road Commission:** Al Svilpe, representative to the Van Buren County Road Commission, in attendance, presented information.

**Sheriff's Dept.:** Deputy Wilton presented his report for the last 2 months; there were 24 incidents in Almena in the month of January.

**Commissioner:** Dick Godfrey in attendance to present news from the County Commissioners, which was distributed. Commissioners voted to oppose Senate Bill 636 which would eliminate local landline telephone service by 2017. Commissioners awarded the bid for single entry construction at the Courthouse to Beckering Construction of Grand Rapids. The bid totaled \$694,390.

**LIMITED PUBLIC COMMENT:**

**Debbie Hurst,** Finch St. had some questions.

**REPORTS:**

**Treasurer:** Sheri Manning gave an update on Championship Construction; delinquent personal property tax is in process. This has been turned over to Viper for seizure; he has 90 days to pay the taxes from the seizure order, which will come due in March, if not paid by then, they will seize property, which will then go up for auction; we should know something by April. Governor Snyder has proposed his 2014-15 fiscal year budget which includes an overall increase of 2% with a 3% increase in constitutional revenue sharing, which is the revenue sharing check the township receives every other month from the state. Based on last years' numbers it will be an increase of around \$10,000 if approved. He has also approved an additional 254 million for transportation, but there is nothing included for local ~~for~~ township roads, it is all for state roads and bridges. Appropriations have been made for funding; payment in lieu of taxes, which is new. Almena Township participates with MI PA 495, which indicates that if more than 50% of a structure is damaged, the township can receive 25% or \$8295 of that amount of that insurance money to pull into escrow until the homeowner is able to rebuild or clean it up; which means it would then be paid back to the property owner, or the township would use that money in escrow to clean up the site. The Treasurer recommends that we should request the money be forwarded to us to hold in a separate escrow account at the bank. This would be a separate account that would need to be set up at the bank. The affidavit will need to be signed and returned to the Insurance Company if approved.

**MOTION:** **Motion** by Mark Roman that the township set up an escrow account in which to place these funds, which we have recently received and any future payments for fire damaged structures in Almena Township, **second** by Jerry Lentz. **Motion approved.**

The Treasurer also shared that billing has been sent to Heritage Glen for Street Lighting, the first copies had been misplaced, they now have new copies.

Three (3) new computer work stations have been quoted by Jim Horton. There were a few questions as to what is included; once that has been determined, it was the consensus of the board to order them to be paid for in this current fiscal year.

**ZBA:** Kristen Garceau, Chair, in attendance to detail her conversation with our Township Attorney, David Lewis, in regards to the Santora appeals case. There was concern expressed by Kristen that Attorney Lewis was unfamiliar with the role of the ZBA in regards to ZBA variance decisions and the Court of Appeals process, including conversation after the decision has been made. Bill Van Tassel and Sandra Rickli will meet with, or conduct a conference call, with Attorney Lewis.

**Supervisor:** Bill Van Tassel reported on the following: He has recently looked into items that needed some attention. Bill contacted Consumers Energy in regards to a possible new street light for the entrance of Woodfield Subdivision on CR 652. He learned that the reason no light had been put in was that only the last 2 houses on that street had electrical service provided by Midwest Energy. Consumers Energy would have already installed a light in that location if this was their location. Bill has contacted Midwest Energy; they will be contacting us soon with costs and details. Michigan Emergency Management Act Pandemic Preparedness: Bill and Jim Martemucci will be looking into what is required and what is needed to bring this township hall up to standards so that it can be used as a relief center in case of disaster or even as a warming center in case of power outages, during a severe winter weather event. This would involve partnerships with state and local police, fire entities, and the Red Cross. Mr. Martemucci is a retired State Police commander and an Almena Township resident; he is a great asset to the

township. This will take some time to research, findings will be shared as they are discovered; hopefully in the summer.

At the request of the commercial committee, and with the help of Bill Henderson, Zoning Administrator, a more user-friendly site plan review application has been developed and provided to the Planning Commission for their review. The PC will review and potentially give feedback to the commercial committee on how to develop this so that it will be the best fit for the township. In regards to recycling, Bill met with Chris Phillips from Best Way Disposal about potential sharing of the transfer station with Antwerp Township. Bill inquired into the possibility of providing curb side pickup in the higher density S-SE portion of the township. They are looking into this area for consideration.

Fire Report: Bill Van Tassel reported that firefighting has become quite a challenge this winter; they have had to be extra vigilant to protect both man and machine from the elements. The MIOSHA right to know letters from businesses are being sent back in, which is good. The purchase of a tablet to access that information for the new unit 1201 is underway. The scheduled house burn went well; it was great educational experience with cold weather training and man down training. Gobles, Lawton, Mattawan and Decatur were on-site to take advantage of this training opportunity. Chief DeGroff wanted to start discussions about very preliminary planning for a new fire station, as the current building is getting old and with the size of modern fire trucks, they are quickly outgrowing the current building. With this being a potential 5 year time table; this is a very preliminary discussion. At the February Fire Board meeting, Bill Van Tassel was voted in as new fireboard chairman.

Planning Commission: Mark Roman reported on the public hearing held on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, the PC must look at the proposed language again based on the boards' request that the language is too focused on PUD's only and does not include the subdivisions as well. Chris Korey will be working on new language *of the ordinance change* to incorporate that desired result. The PC annual report was approved by the Planning Commission.

Parks and Recreation: Supervisor Bill Van Tassel recently attended the NAWCA meeting at the Plainwell DNR office. The purpose of this meeting was to identify potential projects that could be bundled together by the Ducks Unlimited grant writer, Dane Cramer, in an effort to create matching monies for a NAWCA grant.

Clerk: South West Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) is inviting Almena Township staff, and elected and appointed officials to the Lake Michigan Water Trail Event on Wednesday, February 26, 2014 at Michigan Works, Benton Harbor, Anchor Room A&B from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm. Elections: We will know by February 25<sup>th</sup> if there will be a May election. Many excellent resumes have been received for the deputy clerk position; the interview process is currently under way.

### NEW BUSINESS:

#### 1. Senior Services:

##### Senior Services Contract Services Resolution:

Noreen Miller, activity coordinator for Senior Services was in attendance to present the contract services resolution and the renewal millage resolution for Senior Services.

This a renewal contract for Almena Township and Senior Services of Van Buren County, as the exclusive agency to provide services for older citizens pursuant to PA 39 of 1976 and to receive reimbursements from the revenue raised for the Senior Services Millage for the duration of the millage.

**MOTION:** **Motion** by Jerry Lentz to approve the Senior Services Contract Resolution with Almena Township, **second** by Mark Roman; Roll call vote: Sheri Manning-yes,

Mark Roman-yes, Jim Manning-yes, Jerry Lentz-yes, Sandra Rickli-yes, Bill Van Tassel-yes. **Motion passed.**

Senior Services Renewal Millage Resolution:

This resolution is to approve the ballot proposition for the placement on the ballot in the primary election to be held on August 5, 2014.

**MOTION: Motion** by Jerry Lentz to approve the ballot proposition for Senior Services to be placed on the ballot in the primary election to be held on August 5, 2014, **second** by Sheri Manning. Roll call vote: Jerry Lentz-yes, Jim Manning-yes, Sheri Manning-yes, Sandra Rickli-yes, Mark Roman-yes, Bill Van Tassel-yes. **Motion passed.**

2. Siegfried Crandall proposal:

This is a proposal to again contract services with Siegfried Crandall for our annual financial audit.

**MOTION: Motion** by Mark Roman to contract services for our 2014 annual audit with Siegfried Crandall, **second** by Sandra Rickli. **Motion passed.**

3. Resolution Establishing Poverty Exemption Guidelines:

Resolution establishing poverty exemption guidelines for 2014.

**MOTION: Motion** by Sheri Manning to adopt the Resolution Establishing Poverty Exemption Guidelines for 2014, **second** by Jerry Lentz. Roll call vote: Sandra Rickli-yes, Jerry Lentz-yes, Sheri Manning-yes, Mark Roman-yes, Jim Manning-yes, Bill Van Tassel-yes. **Motion passed.**

4. Payroll Account:

The Treasurer explained that payroll is pulled from the General Account each month. It is recommended that a second account should be established for payroll only, upon which the total for payroll each month, including withholdings, would be given to the Treasurer at which time she would make the transfer. It was the consensus of the board to establish this payroll account.

5. Metro Act Right of Way Permit Extension:

**MOTION: Motion** by Jerry Lentz to approve the Metro Act Right of Way Permit Extension, which will expire on April 30, 2014, **second** by Mark Roman. **Motion approved.**

6. Assessor BOR Request:

It was brought to the attention of the board that a determination must be made as to the Assessors' attendance /whereabouts during the board of review hearings. We have heard feedback from 2 BOR members requesting that the Assessor be on ~~sight~~ *site*, available for questions, and/or information in order for the BOR of review to make educated, timely decisions. The Supervisor will be attending a Michigan Township Association (MTA) BOR workshop on February 18<sup>th</sup>. The board will place this topic on the special meeting agenda for Budget work scheduled for February 20<sup>th</sup> so that the board can make an educated decision.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

1. Road Projects:

Supervisor Bill Van Tassel announced that this will be an on-going subject.

Bill presented the standard yearly projects, which are maintenance items that would come directly from our budget; 1) Driveway culverts; 2) Boom mowing; 3) Miscellaneous ditching; and 4) Dust Control. Also, the Road Committee has a list of targeted projects, of which we could use County money given to Almena Township for local road projects, which as of 12/4/13 amounted to \$225,467.84. Those targeted projects are: 1) Gravel purchase for maintenance of gravel roads; 2) Survey of 30<sup>th</sup> St., with an understanding of how long the survey is good for, 3) Replacement of the culvert on 27<sup>th</sup> St. located South of 48<sup>th</sup> Ave., Hayden Creek. It is the consensus of the board to get estimates only on these targeted projects.

It is the consensus of the road committee that all other road projects will have to wait until spring, as there is no way to evaluate roads at this time until the thaw is in process, or complete.

2. Building Department Update:

Sheri gave an update on the BS&A Building Department software install. A representative from BS&A will on site at the township on Wednesday, February 19<sup>th</sup> to install the software on both Sheri and Jan's computers, and also to get an understanding of the type of volume so that he can set up the system in order to utilize it to its full potential. Sheri and Jan will receive in-house training at township on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup>.

Upon Sheri and Sandi meeting with Texas Township to renegotiate the contract, it was discovered that building department fees will be reduced to 60% due to Almena's purchase of the BS&A program, but that both Mechanical and Electrical would remain at 80%, of which there was surprise and concern amongst the board. The board would like to do some research to see what other options are available for Mechanical and Electrical permits and inspections before making a decision. Sheri will research this and it will be discussed again at the March board meeting.

**OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Debbie Hurst, Finch St. shared that she lives in Trestle Creek and she is very much in favor of recycling. She currently has recycling curb side service through Ever Kept, which also offers yard waste; it is even available weekly if requested.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**MOTION: Motion** by Jerry Lentz to adjourn the meeting, **second** by Sandra Rickli. **Motion passed.** The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

ALMENA TOWNSHIP

cc: Township Board (7)  
Planning Commission (8)  
ZBA (5)  
Attorney David Lewis