

**Ross Township Regular Board Meeting
Approved Minutes
ROSS TOWNSHIP
KALAMAZOO COUNTY, MICHIGAN
January 21, 2024**

Attendee Name	Title	Roll Call Status
Christina Hutchings	Supervisor	Present
Mary Stage	Clerk	Present
Amanda Wiersma	Treasurer	Present
Diana Langshaw	Trustee	Present
Michael Bekes	Trustee	Absent with cause
Lynn Harmon	Trustee	Present
Todd White	Trustee	Present
Rob Thall	Attorney	Present

There were several interested residents present.

Call to Order:

Supervisor Hutchings called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm with all rising for the Pledge Allegiance to the Flag.

Prior to the approval to the agenda, Supervisor Hutchings wanted to add:

Under the Consent Agenda the November 12, 2024 Townhall meeting minutes.

Approval of Agenda

Motion
Trustee Harmon moved to accept the agenda with changes, supported by Trustee Langshaw the motion passed.

Mover	Trustee Harmon
Second	Trustee Langshaw
Result	Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Approval of Consent Agenda

Motion
Trustee Harmon moved to accept the consent agenda with changes, supported by Treasurer Wiersma the motion passed.

Mover	Trustee Harmon
Second	Treasurer Wiersma
Result	Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Citizen Comment:

Supervisor Hutchings opened citizen comment at 6:02 pm.

Mark Rodgers – handed the Board a letter from Jakie Van De Walker to be officially put into the minutes, see attached. Mr. Rodgers is concerned about how Gull Lake Water & Sewer Authority (GLWSA) handled the installation of the sewer connections around Sherman Lake. He is also concerned about the large increase in the sewer bills over the last couple of years, he gave a chart to the Board, see attached.

Ron Slagell – CEO of LifeCare Ambulance wanted to introduce their new Vice-President of Operations, Brian Walls. Brian spoke briefly about his years and experience with LifeCare.

Christine Russell – Agrees with Mr. Rodgers concerning GLWSA. Her issue with GLWSA still has not be resolved and it has been two (2) years. GLWSA mistakenly installed the valves to her and her neighbor Susan McBane’s sewer line on the Whitcomb’s property, not part of the SAD project, making their properties unsellable. Ms. Russell provided a letter from a banking institution to the Board, see attached. Supervisor Hutchings will give letter to Legal Counsel to follow up with GLWSA, she also encouraged residents to attend the GLWSA Board meetings and let the other Commissioners know their issues with John Crumb and their mishandling of the Sherman Lake sewer installation.

Kerry Lynn Elieff – Spoke about her FOIA appeal to the Board calling the fee excessive. “FOIA is dealing with public banking, and since this in the public interest I am asking the fees be removed.”

Supervisor Hutchings closed citizen comment at 6:22 pm.

Various Committee/Service Organization Reports:

Supervisor Hutchings – the Road Commission, road repair cost analysis in the packet is not correct, the Road Commission will be issuing a new one, and we will review next month.

Supervisor Hutchings is pursuing a DNR grant to help with updating the Park’s bathrooms.

At the GLWSA Board meeting Supervisor Hutchings was asked to remove herself from the 2nd closed session, upon inquiry to GLWSA Attorney she stated to discuss the pros and cons of litigation action against Ross Township.

Diana Langshaw – Fire Board update: the Fire Department has joined into a grant with Barry and Hope Township for \$275,000.00 will know the outcome sometime in December. Evaluations of firefighters will be completed by the end of January. The budget was updated by Treasurer Wiersma. Handout with training schedule, budget, minutes, and other information, is attached.

The Augusta Village has approved the Fire Department 2025 – 2026 budget at their January meeting.

Police Department – Chief Brown explained there have been several accidents due to snowy weather, but other than the accidents everything is relatively quiet.

Old Business:

Sherman Lake Sewer Connection – Out of those pursued in Court 2 residents have connected, all but 2 have pulled permits. The ones that have not pulled permits motion to show cause, they will be assigned a court date and that will be between them and the Judge as to why they have not pulled permits and when they will have to do so.

LifeCare ambulance Contract – Attorney Thall is seeking with Fire Department input on this matter, before moving forward.

Intergovernmental Agreement – Attorney Thall is seeking more guidance from the Board on how the Board wants to proceed.

New Business:

Set Budget Workshops & Public Hearing Dates – Tuesday, February 11th at 6:00 pm, Tuesday, March 4th at 6:00 pm and Public Hearing Tuesday, March 18th at 5:30 pm. The Board will need budget information from the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Board of Review, prior to our February 11th meeting.

3 Board of Review Resolutions:

Property Tax Poverty, Letters of Protest, and Review Dates of Meetings.

Resolution
Clerk Stage resolved to accept the Updated State Required Poverty Level Income Standards For Property tax Poverty Exemption Guidelines for Tax Year 2025 as prepared by our Assessor, supported by Trustee Harmon, after a roll call vote, the motion passed.

Mover	Clerk Stage
Second	Trustee Harmon
Result	Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Resolution
Clerk Stage resolved to accept the to Provide for Alternate Starting Dates for march 2025 Board of Review as prepared by our Assessor, supported by Treasurer Wiersma, after a roll call vote, the motion passed.

Mover	Clerk Stage
Second	Treasurer Wiersma
Result	Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Resolution	
Clerk Stage resolved to accept the Provide for Acceptance of Letters of Protest from Taxpayer Residents for the March 2025 Board of Review as prepared by our Assessor, supported by Supervisor Hutchings, after a roll call vote, the motion passed.	

Mover	Clerk Stage
Second	Supervisor Hutchings
Result	Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Gull Lake Sewer & Water Authority – Supervisor Hutchings stated that she had been sending out the GLWSA Board packets to our Board for several months. She asked for comments from the Board.

Trustee Harmon – Explained that GLWSA is their own entity, with their own Board and Ross is just one (1) vote on that five (5) member Board, and if GLWSA Board approves the rate, I would ask Attorney Thall to explain what would happen if our Board does not approve the new rate.

Attorney Thall explained that we have 1 vote out of 5, if the GLWSA Board approves the rate increase it proceeds out to the other municipalities for their Boards approval. That amount that GLWSA say they need to generate that is our share that we must generate if we do not approve it, the Township would have to come up with the funds another way. Ross would be using monies generated through tax revenues, which means that residents that do not use the service would paying. It ties Ross Boards hands, if individuals are upset about the increase, they need to go to the GLWSA Board and object. This Board has chosen to put the burden on the resident using the system rather than the whole community.

Trustee Harmon stated Ross Board is been very critical of GLWSA operations and how things are handled there, we have written letters to GLWSA Board and to the other Township’s Boards that sit on GLWSA Board expressing our concerns, to no avail.

Clerk Stage stated that she went to the GLWSA Board meeting on Thursday, she expressed her concerns about multiple line items and how much they had increased. She then stated the Bear Priest, the new Richland Supervisor also showed concern and supported Christina when she expressed her concerns. Bear thought there was a way to trim the budget to keep the rate increase to the lowest amount. Because of this action there will be a budget workshop on January 30th, at 8:30 am at the GLWSA building.

Supervisor Hutchings also spoke about how the other members of the other Boards sitting on GLWSA do not get involved like the Ross Board members. If residents have objections to the rate increase, they need to go the GLWSA Board meeting and let their voices be heard.

FOIA Appeal Kerry Lynn Elieff – Clerk Stage read the scope of the FOIA. She then explained to the Board the process of how she came up with the estimate that was sent to Ms. Elieff.

Trustee White asked for clarification that the FOIA states that the estimate should be based on the salary of the lowest person capable of doing the task, is your Deputy capable of doing this task. Clerk Stage stated yes, and that she used her salary to figure the estimate.

Treasurer Wiersma also added that our storage handlers charge \$57.35/hour to pull boxes from the storage facility and that does not included delivery. Are these on top of the Deputy’s salary?

Attorney Thall stated yes and asked if those cost were included, Clerk Stage state they were not included. Thall continued waiver is at the discretion of the Boards, and these are the cost of providing the FOIA and more, the Township would have to eat those costs.

Trustee Harmon – We when talk about waiving fees or eating fees we are not a business that eats those fees; it is not us it is the residents who pay taxes that will be eating those fees. Rob is there any legal ground that we have to waive these fees. Is the appeal just on the fees, that is correct.

Motion	
Trustee Harmon moved to deny the appeal, supported by Trustee Langshaw the motion passed.	

Mover	Trustee Harmon
Second	Trustee Langshaw
Result	Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Second Citizen Comment:

Mark Rodgers – He would like the Board to the working in the citizen comment, he likes two-way conversation. So, the Trustee can engage with the residents. Supervisor Hutchings explained, when necessary, she will engage, and that Trustee would have to ask her to have two-way conversation.

Kerry Lynn Elieff – Handout letter from Bert Gale, a cease-and-desist letter that we stop operating our business out of our home. She expressed that she felt this was a targeted letter, without merit. Supervisor Hutchings explained that her husband contacted Doug Bogema our Fire Chief about having a 1000 gallon above ground gas tank to be installed on your property, and that is how this came to our attention.

Christine Russell – Spoke about the letter from Rob Thall to the GLWSA about concerning charges, she would like further explanation of the letter. She is upset about paying her sewer bill when her property is not sellable. Supervisor Hutchings expressed that she needs to go to the GLWSA meetings and explain how she feels.

Supervisor Hutchings closed second citizen comment at 7:03 pm.

Motion
Supervisor Hutchings moved that the Township Board convene in closed session under section 8(1)(h) of the Open Meetings Act, to consider material exempt from disclosure by state statute, section 13(1)(g) of the Freedom of Information Act, being the letter from our attorney dated January 21, 2025 for the reason that the letter is exempt from disclosure under State law at attorney-client privileged, supported by Trustee Langshaw after a roll call vote, the motion passed.

Mover	Supervisor Hutchings
Second	Trustee Langshaw
Result	Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Motion
Trustee Harmon moved that the Township Board returned to open sessions, supported by Trustee Langshaw the motion passed.

Mover	Trustee Harmon
Second	Trustee Langshaw
Result	Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Motion

Clerk Stage moved that the Board direct Attorney Thall to explore options on item 1 as discussed in close session, supported by Trustee Harmon the motion passed.

Mover Clerk Stage
Second Trustee Harmon
Result **Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent**

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Motion

Clerk Stage moved that the Board direct Attorney Thall to proceed with item 2 as discussed in close door session, supported by Supervisor Hutchings the motion passed.

Mover Clerk Stage
Second Supervisor Hutchings
Result **Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent**

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Motion

Clerk Stage moved that the Board to have exploration of option for Ambulance contract supported by Trustee Langshaw the motion passed.

Mover Clerk Stage
Second Trustee Langshaw
Result **Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent**

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Trustee Updates: No Updates

Motion
Clerk Stage moved to adjourn the meeting, supported by Trustee Langshaw the motion passed.

Mover	Clerk Stage
Second	Trustee Langshaw
Result	Resolution Adopted: 6 Ayes; 0 Nays; 0 Abstained; 1 Absent

Name	Vote	Name	Vote
Supervisor Hutchings	Aye	Trustee Bekes	Absent
Clerk Stage	Aye	Trustee Harmon	Aye
Treasurer Wiersma	Aye	Trustee Langshaw	Aye
		Trustee White	Aye

Supervisor Hutchings adjourned the meeting at 8:10 pm.