

**Chassell Township Planning Commission**  
**Minutes**  
**December 7, 2023**

**Attendance:** Brian Waters, Doug Hamar, Dan Palosaari, Steve Spahn, TJ Palosaari, and Rich Smith. Absent: Dale Peterson and Daniel Niemela. Guest: Representative Greg Markkanen

Brian called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and the pledge of allegiance was given.

**Agenda:** Doug asked to add veterans banners to the agenda. Brian moved that it be added. Doug provided the second. There was unanimous approval.

**Minutes:** Keith noted that Lynn had communicated a correction on the amount paid for the 2023 road work to \$181,500. Doug moved approval of the minutes with that change. Brian provided the second. The motion was approved unanimously.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Guest Speaker:** Doug introduced Representative Greg Markkanen who he had invited to brief the commission on current issues. Rep. Markkanen noted that he has the biggest geographic district in the state. He noted the recent shift in the party balance in the house to 54-54, but that instead of sharing power the Democrats adjourned while they were still in the majority. Rep. Markkanen discussed the bill recently passed and signed by the Governor about siting for wind and solar projects that takes away power from local units of government and gives it to the Public Service Commission. Rep. Markkanen noted that this is troublesome to the Republican caucus. He also noted that the representative in the 109<sup>th</sup> district voted with green energy and did not support the natural gas burners in her district. He noted that CCI and Tilden were not supported as well. He noted that some fifty amendments to this bill were rejected by the Democrats. The implication of this change would be that Adams and Stanton Townships would have no local control over proposed wind projects in their townships. He also noted that septic and aggregate are potentially the next targets. He did note that zoning on wind and solar may provide some leverage. Rep. Markkanen also indicated that it is likely that UPPCO will go for a rate increase of 3 to 4% for its customers. He noted that states around us do not have a limit on the percentage increase that may be sought. There was then a discussion about using former mine shafts to generate electricity by pumping up water and then running it through turbines. Rep. Markkanen noted that utilities oppose this concept and that UPPCO refused to work with MTU on the research. He noted that Dairyland in northern Wisconsin will have such a site with a Swedish firm. He encouraged us to check out a November 8<sup>th</sup> speech on green energy by Senator McBroom. The commission discussed looking at our zoning regarding wind, solar, and aggregate. The Zoning Committee will meet to review this ahead of our next meeting. The commission thanked Representative Markkanen for taking the time out of his schedule to meet with them.

**Road Commission Report and 5-Year Road Plan Discussion:** Brian reported that he had presented the plan we recommended to the Township Board at its November meeting. The plan was approved and forwarded to the Houghton County Road Commission.

**Capital Improvement Committee Report:** The DPW staff wants to do a work session to discuss. This will be scheduled.

**Park and Recreation Committee:** Keith reviewed the process that had been followed to develop the MDNR 5-Year Recreation Plan starting with the survey that allowed the public to provide input and then the Recreation Committee's review of the results to identify the priorities that would be included in the plan. Keith prepared a 57-page draft plan which was posted on both the Chassell.net website as well as on the Chassell Township Facebook page. The committee held two public hearings with the most recent on December 4<sup>th</sup> (which met the MDNR's 30-day notice requirement). With no recommended changes, the plan is ready for the commission to recommend to the Township Board for final approval and for the board to pass a resolution communicating its support for the plan to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Brian acknowledged and thanked Keith for the considerable work he had put into the plan and moved that the commission approve the final draft of the MDNR 5-Year Recreation Plan, recommending its approval by the Township Board and recommending passage of a resolution by the Township Board. Doug provided a second to the motion. The commission approved the motion unanimously.

**Recreation Facility Issues:** The bent over interpretive heading to the launch was discussed as was the missing beach rules sign. Doug noted that he has the Houghton rules that we could use as a guide. Lynn Gierke who was also present at the meeting noted that Industrial Graphics has installed the new park sign.

#### **Old Business:**

- a. **Chassell Mercantile Update:** Dan noted that he is still working on the project.
- b. **Snowmobile Trail Update:** Brian discussed snowmobile trail #15. Barb McEwen had noted to Brian that the easement is 50' from the side of the tracks which is adequate. Assistance is needed with the cutting of the blowdowns along the Snake River and then southward. It was noted that Matthew Spencer is the new owner of the last piece of property the trail crosses coming into town. Brian will talk with Chuck.
- c. **Centennial Park Engineering Study:** We will invite Chris to brief us on this at our next meeting.
- d. **Future DNR Grant for Launch Site Amenities:** Keith is pulling things together what we will need to address ahead of filing a proposal by April 1<sup>st</sup>. With river trails as the top priority for residents coming out of the recreation survey, seeking MDNR grant funding to help support the further development of the launch site makes a great deal of sense.
- e. **Bridges Out-of-Poverty:** Keith was out of town most of November, so he was not able to coordinate with Kevin Store at the Copper Shores Community Health Foundation.
- f. **Old Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and adjoining property RFP:** Another project has diverted the Raasio firm away from this project. Keith will continue to seek updates from Jeff Ratcliffe at KEDA.

- g. Portage Paddle Sports:** Brian will be setting up a meeting with Branden
- h. Water Trails Program Handbook Draft:** Keith is continuing to work on proposal and will be incorporating our developing partnership with the Baraga County Convention & Visitors Bureau as they seek to develop launch sites upstream on the Sturgeon River.
- i. Bark Park and Historic Trail Signage:** We have the concepts in place and the Chassell Historical Organization has received a commitment from the John & Melissa Besse Foundation to provide the funding for the panels at the park entrance noting the historic trail and the bark park as well as signs for where park visitors need to turn right to go to the historic trail and the bark park.
- j. DNR SPARK Grant Schedule:** Keith attended the kick-off meeting online on November 9th. After a lot of back-and-forth with the MDNR on the Prime Professional role, Keith prepared an RFP which the township ran in the paper and Keith also contacted local and regional firms to make them aware of the opportunity. Keith and Brian met onsite with Traverse Engineering to review the project, but they declined the opportunity. One proposal was received from UPEA. The proposal was opened at the meeting and was within the amount that had been budgeted in our SPARK Grant proposal. The planning commission will seek approval to award the Prime Professional role to UPEA at next week's Township Board meeting.
- k. Baraga/Chassell Trail Project Collaboration/Trail Inspection:** No response yet from Andy Powers at MDOT in response to Jeff Ratcliffe's email about our joint interest with Baraga County to pull the rail from the abandoned corridor to develop this rail grade into a multi-use trail.

#### **New Business:**

- a. 5-Year Recreation Plan Discussion and Approval:** Addressed during discussion under old business.
- b. Centennial Park Rules Sign Update:** Addressed under Recreation Facility Issues.
- c. Long & Short-Term Rental Registration Form:** This is a requirement under our updated zoning ordinance so there is a responsible person identified locally in the event an issue comes up with rentals. The Zoning Committee will look at this ahead of our next meeting.
- d. Veterans Banners:** Doug mentioned the idea of putting up veterans banners like some of the other local communities. There is funding available to support this. We will take a closer look at this opportunity.

Brian moved that we adjourn. Rich provided the second. The motion was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.