

## Chassell Township Planning Commission

# MINUTES

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02 January 2025 / 7:00 PM / Chassell Fire Hall

## ATTENDEES

Brian Waters, Keith Meyers, Doug Hamar, Dan Palosaari, Rich Smith, Cindy Cowell, Steve Spahn, Supervisor, Lynn Gierke, also attending were four township residents guests

## AGENDA

### 1. Call to Order 7:01 pm

### 2. Pledge of Allegiance

**3. Approval of the Agenda** B. Waters motions, K Meyers seconds, all aye. Agenda approved

**4. Reading and Approval of November and December Minutes** B Waters moved to approve November 2024 minutes, S Spahn seconds, all aye. November 2024 minutes approved. D. Hamar moved to approve December 2024 minutes with amendments, B. Waters seconds, all aye. December 2024 minutes approved.

**5. Public Comments** No comments

**6. Road Commission Report and 5-year Road Plan Discussion** Move to old business.

**7. Capital Improvement Committee Report** No Report. Committee has a meeting scheduled in March 2025.

**8. Recreation Committee Report** K Meyers reports that conversations regarding the disc course are continuing. K Meyers reached out to Pete Torala regarding identifying a champion for the course who will spearhead maintaining the course. Plan to have the course up and running for the 2025 season.

Issues identified at the Centennial Park rink will be discussed later in the agenda.

The recreation committee will be focusing much of its work on the updated engineering plan at Centennial Park, the inclusion of the land swap real estate in the park plans and planning for the completion of the boardwalk and planning for the development of the marina.

**9. Recreation Facility Issues** No Updates

**10. Old Business**

**a. Chassell Mercantile Update** The Brownfield Plan was approved by the Houghton County Board in December. K Meyers and Jerry Wuoranmaa from WUPPDR spoke in support of the project. Jeff Ratcliffe from KEDA spoke regarding the availability of MEDC funding toward the project at the County Hearing. D. Palosaari reports that the stage of the project is just waiting for the MEDC funding to come through. K. Meyers shared that J Ratcliffe from KEDA recently expressed that the MEDC funding process is making progress and should be finalized soon.

**b. Snowmobile Trail Updates** A conversation was held with Barb McEwen from Baraga County Tourism and she indicated that they are waiting to get in bids to hire a contractor to go onto the trail with dozers to clear the trail. K Meyers and B Waters inquire if more trees have come down on the trail since their last walk through and after work had been done on the trail last year? D Palosaari indicated that he would go out and look at the trail. K Meyers gave a historical review of the snowmobile trail project for the benefit of the guests attending the meeting.

**c. Centennial Park Engineering Study** K Meyers reports that final details of the updated engineering study (es) are being worked on with Chris Holmes from UPEA. Included in the updated es will be the new land acquired in the land swap and the need to install a seawall along the shoreline where the marina is proposed to be built. K Meyers expressed that the updating of the es will be used to include as many details as possible to make it a viable document for future grant applications such as a waterways grant. Applications historically require complete plans prior to application, so the update will produce a viable document. Additionally, with the completed updated es, discussions with EGLE can begin regarding permitting.

**d. Holy Trinity Church** K Meyers reports that the contract has been signed with the firm selected from the demolition bidding process. K Meyers indicates that building demolition will begin when the weather permits the work. D Palosaari inquired about the contracted company name. K Meyers reports that he believes the name is Dirt Works. A discussion of the PC continued regarding the property being more attractive to potential developers after the collapsed building has been removed. It was added that the township has the adjoining property also-so that will add to the potential of future development.

**e. Sturgeon River Launch Improvements** K Meyers reported that the Township was not successful in being awarded a MI Recreation Passport Grant award in 2024. Meyers gave some background on the funding indicating that the scoring process assigns points to municipalities that do not have an existing park. Those are points that Chassell Township does not receive. Meyers indicates that a good proposal review discussion was received offering suggestions on how to strengthen the application for future competitions. Meyers shared that the proposal submitted was a strong application and can be used in other grant opportunities in the future.

**f. Kick Sled Track on Pike Bay** No updates. D Niemila shared that the local contact for kick sleds that he reached out to does not have any sleds or plans left any longer.

**g. Keweenaw Water Trail** K Meyers indicated that a meeting is schedule for Jan 20 on Zoom with representatives from Visit Keweenaw, the Keweenaw Land Trust and a couple of other folks regarding activating the Keweenaw Water Trail (KWT). K Meyers gave a historical review of the project for guests

present at the meeting. Historical comments included the fact that the KWT website has been dormant for a period of time. Meyers shared that the intent of the collaboration is to add the Sturgeon River and the Sturgeon River Sloughs to the water trail. Creators of the KWT are amenable to the addition of the river system. Meyers also added that being included on a water trail will strengthen future DNR grant opportunity applications.

**h. Baraga/Chassell Trail Project Collaboration** Adding to the information shared under 10.b. in the agenda: The PC will continue to reach out to the Baraga Tourism Bureau to move the trail project forward. Andy Murphy from MDOT is working on writing and posting a RFP to have the railroad tracks removed from the corridor. A Murphy will be in contact with the PC when the RFP is ready for posting. K Meyers shared that the DNR has invested in the trail project by improving and/or repairing the existing bridges on the corridor. K Meyers gave a historical review of the project for the guests in attendance at the meeting. Meyers described the project as being done in steps. Step one is the Baraga/Chassell collaboration to clear the trail and partner to complete the RFP and hire a contractor for rail removal. Step two will be managed by the DNR to use available funds to complete the trail. A meeting guest inquired if the Pike River railroad bridge is included in the project. K Meyers respond no, but that trail and bridge are actually included in another project that the PC is working on. The Township is working to gain ownership of the rail trail between US 41 and Halfmoon Beach Road and the Portage Township line. Meyers indicates that the money to maintain the trail is part of the Baraga State Park budget. Very little funds are available after the park operation is taken care of. The recent rehabilitation of the draining system near Lindala Road used all of the recent funding available. Planning is in process right now for the DNR to give the trail to Chassell Township. Once that takes place, the Township would address the needed decking on the Pike River Bridge. Supervisor Gierke shared that the DNR is ready to sign the agreement, but would like to attend a Township Board meeting to address the public and sign the agreement. Scheduling has been delayed due scheduling the DNR staff on the meeting date. The commission asked for the agreement to be expediated and signed at the January meeting.

A follow up discussion was held regarding identifying funding in collaboration with Baraga County to build water launches at Otter Lake and up river on the Sturgeon River.

**i. Veterans' Banners** No update

**j. Buckthorn Project** K Meyers reports that the MTU instructor plans to continue working on the project with her classes. The class had id'd some larger buckthorn plants that are more interior as opposed to trailside. The size of the plants will mandate some sawyers with saws to execute removal. The work will be completed prior to March. Identifying male and female plants is easy to do during the winter season.

**k. Hamar Creek Restoration Project** K Meyers reports that a meeting is scheduled on site for 1/9/25 at 11 am. K Meyers will meet Kris Nault from the DNR and Casey Huckins from MTU. D Hamar indicated that he can be available to also attend. K Meyers gave the meeting guests an historical update to the Hamar Creek Restoration Project. Once K Nault from the DNR approves the planned restoration activities, the Township will file for a permit from EGLE to complete the work.

**l. Cemetery Mapping** Supervisor Gierke reported that students completed \_\_\_\_\_ mapping last summer. D Hamar asked what has been done with the mapping reports. Gierke indicated that they are in possession of the Township. D Hamar asked if the mapping reports can be shared and Gierke agree. Hamar indicates that the maps will aid the landscaping work planning at the cemetery.

**m. Cemetery Trees** D Hamar reported that the initial tree removal project has morphed into a cemetery landscaping project. L Gierke shared that two trees have come down in early winter storm winds. Gierke indicated that Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly will have volunteers come in to saw up and remove the trees to use in their firewood program.

**n. Rail-Trail** Discussed in 10.h.

**o. Disc Golf Course** Discussed in Recreation Committee Report

**p. Mountain Bike/Pump Track Trail** No update. K Meyers indicates that he will reach out to the project organizers to request a proposed track trail budget for consideration against potential grant RFPs.

**q. X-Country Ski Trail Marinette Street Access** K Meyers reported that easements were attained from two necessary property owners to allow location of the 2024-25 trail system and inclusion of the Marinette St access point. These property owners have been insured. D Palosaari share that the property owners are LaRue and Lawrence. DPW staff has plowed parking at the Marinette St access area. The trail system is groomed and operational.

**r. Old Rink Warming Shack Upgrade** K Meyers reports that the upgrades are complete for this season and the grooming equipment will be moved into the shack on Friday. D Palosaari confirmed work by reporting that the doors have been installed and the roof will be replaced next spring. B Waters requested to go on record thanking D. Palosaari for all of the work that he did on the shack in order to repair and upgrade it to allow the grooming equipment to have a storage space.

**s. Boardwalk Project Update** K Meyers reported that the public has been interested in the project. A recent social media post with pictures and an update on the project received 1600 views and multiple shares. MJO reached out to the Recreation Committee to propose adding the fishing deck along the boardwalk into the project. Once the deck was assessed, MJO proposed a \$10,000 contract mod to bring the deck up to the specs of the new boardwalk. The Township Board reviewed, voted and approved the MJO proposal. D. Palosaari inquired if it would be considered to trim the top of the pilings to improve the visuals in the water near the boardwalk. A meeting guest asked if the old pilings in the water in the area of the boardwalk provide fish habitat. K Meyers share that he intentionally talked with regular sportspeople using the bay to fish and received strong affirmation that the pilings are important to providing fish habitat. The guest offered that they though MJO had an underwater saw. D Palosaari share that MJO is doing all of their work from shore and does not have barge on site during the project. K Meyers shared that inquiries about the pilings and fish habitat could be addressed with Kris Nault from the DNR next week during the Hamar Creek meeting. The Commission discussed addressing the pilings at the time of marina construction. The pilings will need to be addressed to allow marina access for boats coming in and out.

**t. 2025 5-Year Road Plan Approval** Move to old business

**u. Park Bathroom Remodeling Design** K Meyers reports that the EPA has approved the remodeling plan. Once the DNR approves the plans, the project will be bid out. K Meyers gave a historical report regarding the bathroom remodel project to the guests present at the meeting. A guest inquired about now needing heat in the building. The PC indicated that the building is heated now due to water pipes already in the building.

**v. X Country Ski Trail Signage** K Meyers gave an update on the 2025 trail system. Meyers described the trail expansions that have been made in 2024-25. In his report, he shared that S Spahn had a conversation with another landowner who is located near the trail system and the potential to add another loop to the existing trail. K Meyers point out that with all of the trail expansion, the Township will need to create new trail signage. The goal for new signage will be for the 24-26 season. This season caution tape has been put up to guide skiers as to direction of the trails. Anecdotally, Meyers and Spahn shared that they spoke to a skier from MN out on the trails while grooming. The skier gave positive comments on the condition of the trails and said they are better groomed than trails he has used back home.

## **11. New Business**

- . Fishing Finger Deck and Rail Improvements** K Meyers reviewed the Spark Grant and the McIntyre property land swap acquisition. Meyers talked about the UPEA Engineering Study and what the plans are for Centennial Park going into the future. The McIntyre land will be added to the existing detailed map of the entire park. Once detailed report complete, the DNR can be approached for a funding ask for the marina seawall. The detailed map includes a bathymetric map showing lake depths. This project is where the recreation committee will invest the bulk of its work. Once a plan has been created, it will be brought to the PC for review and approval and then presented to the Township Board for review and approval. K Meyers shared that public surveys indicate overwhelming interest in the addition of a marina to Centennial Park. Exploration of funding might include a public/private partnership. Meyers expressed that the marina project is a good complement to the Mercantile project. Supervisor Gierke shared that one additional document from the MTU Archives is required to complete title to the McIntyre property. Guest Matson expressed that the engineering report content is spot on for the marina project. A seawall will be needed to bridge the land to the water and the bathymetric content will guide any dredging that might be needed.
- a. Centennial Park Security Camera Upgrades** K Meyers reports that security cameras are used in Centennial Park to protect assets including new bathrooms and the pickle ball courts. Meyers reports some recent vandalism of the ice rink. There is some security footage available and will be shared with the sheriff department. Meyers reports that the Township now knows that higher grade cameras are needed to get clear footage. Additional cameras are also needed. The current camera's resolution is low. Supervisor Gierke reports that she has been working with Craig Austin to work with Baraga Telephone to acquire some additional cameras. K Meyers ask if there are motion activated cameras. The current cameras require watching hours of footage to find the footage that contains pertinent information. R Smith share that game cameras may work as needed. D Hamar inquired if there is signage indicating that the ice rink is under surveillance. K Meyers say that signage needs to be amped up. L Gierke indicated that there are approximately three cameras out of order. They are located on the pole that is slated to be taken down. There

are a total of 7-8 cameras. Adam, our contact at Baraga Telephone, is out of town and will work with the Township on new cameras upon his return.

- b. **Ice Rink Supervision Schedule** K Meyers report that the Recreation Committee proposes to create a volunteer group of adult ice rink supervisors. The current issue at the rink is hockey being played during open skate hours. The Township needs to ramp up its insistence of rule adherence. Meyers reports a recent incident of insubordination from an individual being asked to adhere to rink skate hours. Meyers also shared that youth using the rink for skating should not be responsible for policing hockey players. Meyers threw out how to handle an empty rink during open skate, should hockey be allowed in that instance? Meyers offered an additional issue of mixing junior and senior hockey players during the same ice time. Should a junior players only hockey period be posted? D Palosaari share that separate ice times should be identified between senior and junior players. K Meyers shared that he spoke with Deputy Hyrkas from the HCSD. Deputy Hyrkas are willing of offer support at the rink and even speak to frequent rule breakers. Supervisor Gierke passed out a draft of rink rules for the PC and guests to review. K Meyers indicate that a formal list of adult volunteers will be cultivated with contact information and a schedule of supervision. K Meyers also shared that the fraternity in Chassell is willing to flood the rink at the end of the night for the exchange of being allowed to practice broomball two nights a week. Meyers will follow up with the fraternity. C Cowell asked if the fraternity members are willing to take on supervision shifts also. Meyers indicated no. A meeting guest asked when the vandalism occurred at the rink. The cameras did not pick up an exact time stamp. Meyers shared that the damage was grafetti on the boards, broken windows, warming shack thermostat damage and holes in the boards caused by intentional slapshots. Supevisor Gierke commented that DPW observed that the warmer the temperature is in the warming shack, the greater the occurrences of vandalism are. A guest inquired if the warming shack is kept locked. Lynn Gierke responded not during skating season-only in the summer. Gierke also shared that two porta pottys have been installed at the rink this season. One is a handicap accessible unit. The current charge is 350/month for both units. The PC requested that L Gierke contact A1 to review the monthly charges and see if there is any way to change the service to lower the cost. For example, can pumping be done less often than currently. K Meyers brought the discussion back to adult volunteers. A guest suggested that the PC send a letter home with each Chassell student putting out a call for volunteers. K Meyers will check with the school administration about a letter. A guest shared that she witnessed a case of severe insubordination at the rink this season. She also responded to the idea of allowing hockey if no one is on ice during open skate. She made the point that families may drive by and not stop during open skate if they see hockey players on the ice. Meyers shared that he has spoken with other townships who have rinks. Supervision is handled many different ways. One township actually employs a rink supervisor in the winter. Most line up volunteers. D Palosaari suggest keeping a list of back up volunteers to support family supervision volunteers. If a volunteer needs assistance, they have a list of folks such as D Palosaari himself to call. B Waters asked the meeting guests if 8 pm is a reasonable time to end open skate. Guests said yes.
- c. **Ice Rink Rules and Hours** A robust conversation continued between the PC and guests about options that could be utilized to control rink use and behavior. A discussion about ways to lock the warming shack was held. D Niemila suggested use of a lock on a timer. Guest Matson suggested locking the shack when the weather is too warm to use the ice. A guest suggested adding the

line "police enforced" to the rules list. Meyers pointed out that the term is tricky because the police will enforce some rules such as no violence, but not others such as who is on the ice. B Waters returned to the suggestion of a school letter and affirmed that it was a good idea. D Matson asked who will keep the volunteer list so those interested know who to contact to sign up. L Gierke said that she will keep it in the Township Office. A final review of the rink rules was done. The draft was approved. D Niemila offer that an amendment can be made if broomball practice is added to the schedule.

## NEXT MEETING

February 6, 2025 7 pm Chassell Township Fire Hall

**Adjourn** B. Waters made a motion to adjourn. S. Spahn seconded. All aye. Motion approved. Adjournment at 8:57 pm.