

Meeting of the Sparta Township Board

Sparta Township Hall – 160 E Division St – Sparta MI 49345

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July 10, 2025 – 7pm

Present: Supervisor Dale Bergman, Clerk Marcy Savage, Treasurer Ashley Johnson, Trustees Jason Bradford, Bill Goodfellow, Barb Johnson, and Rob Steffens.

Also present: Historical Society Chairman Doug Pinckney, Library Director Merri Jo Tuinstra, Village Manager Jim Lower, Kent County Commissioner and DDA Director Liz Morse, Kent County Drain Commissioner Ken Yonkers, Sparta Fire Department Chief Dan Olney, and Recording secretary Katy Shelton.

Absent: None.

1. **Call to order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm.
2. **Pledge of Allegiance:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. **Additions or corrections to the agenda:** None. Motion to approve the agenda by Goodfellow with a second by Steffens. Motion passed unanimously.
4. **Public comment for agenda items:**
Larry Carter, 68 Rogers Ct, Sparta, asked that in all discussions regarding the township/village relationship, that speakers remain civil and keep the residents' best interests in mind.
5. **Approval of the minutes and treasurer's report:**
 - a. **Approval of the minutes of June 12, 2025:** Motion by Goodfellow with a second by B Johnson to approve. Motion passed unanimously.
 - b. **Approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of June 30, 2025:** Motion by Goodfellow with a second by Bradford to approve. Motion passed unanimously.

- c. **Treasurer's Report:** Motion by Goodfellow with a second by B Johnson to approve. Motion passed unanimously.
- d. **Building Department monthly report:** this is informational only.

6. Business items:

- a. **Approval of bills:** Motion by Steffens with a second by A Johnson to approve. Motion passed unanimously.
- b. **Assessment Administration Service Agreement:** The board discussed the job performance that current Township Assessor Cliff Turner has done in the twenty years he has been in this position. Several board members highly praised him. Motion by Goodfellow with a second by B Johnson to extend his contract for two years. Motion passed unanimously.
- c. **Historical Commission Research Facility Trade for Civic Center or Village Office:** The board discussed which would be a better fit for the Historical Commission: the Civic Center or the Bank Building where the Village offices are currently located. Doug Pinckney, Chairman of the Historical Commission, presented a letter from the Historical Commission outlining why they felt that the Civic Center was a much better choice. Village Manager Lower stated his views. He also told the Board that if the Commission didn't relocate to the bank building, that that building would be sold. The Board also discussed possible future uses for the Bank Building if the Commission didn't relocate there. Board members were polled on which building they felt was a better fit for the Commission. Bradford: Civic Center. Savage: Civic Center. Goodfellow: Civic Center. A Johnson: Civic Center. B Johnson: Civic Center. Steffens: Civic Center. Bergman: Civic Center. Motion by Goodfellow with a second by Savage to approve the trade of the Historical Commission Research Facility and the Civic Center. Motion passed unanimously.
- d. **POW/MIA Recognition Day Resolution:** Motion by Savage with a second by B Johnson to approve a resolution declaring September 19, 2025 as Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Day. Motion passed unanimously.

- e. **Planning Commission Recommendation: Dwellings and Accessory Building Regulations:** Board members were presented with a memorandum from Township Planner Kevin Yeomans. In it, he discussed the proposed changes to these regulations. It was noted that the Planning Commission held a public hearing on this issue on June 10, 2025, and that the Planning Commission approved these changes. Motion by Savage with a second by Bradford to approve Ordinance 25-3 to amend the dwellings and accessory buildings requirements. Motion passed unanimously.
- f. **Planning Commission Reappointments:** Motion by Steffens with a second by Bradford to reappoint Terry Hartman to the Planning Commission. Motion passed unanimously. Motion by B Johnson with a second by Savage to reappoint Linda Anderson to the Planning Commission. Motion passed unanimously. Motion by Steffens with a second by Goodfellow to reappoint Tim Driscoll to the Planning Commission. Motion passed unanimously.
- g. **Nash Creek Intercounty Drain Payment:** Ken Younkens, Kent County Drain Commissioner, was present for this discussion and later addressed the Board. Board members discussed what the best way was to pay for this very high and very unexpected cost. It was mentioned that many residents are appealing their assessments, and that the final numbers for both the Village and the Township could change. There will be a meeting on July 25th at the Drain Commission from 8am-4:30pm for people to discuss their concerns with the Drain Commission. Motion by A Johnson with a second by Savage to approve a lump sum payment not to exceed \$600,000. Board members were polled: Yays: Steffens, B Johnson, A Johnson, Bergman, Goodfellow, Bradford, and Savage. Nays: None. Several board members stated that they were approving this because it was necessary – not that they support the way that the Drain Commission has handled this whole process. Motion passed unanimously.

- h. **Fire Board Recommendation: Fire Authority:** Village Manager Jim Lower was present to discuss this issue. He said that this is a structural change and that there would be no change in membership. (There will still be three township members and three village members.) A Fire Authority is an intergovernmental entity that services as an organization where multiple agencies (township, village) can provide fire protection services. It provides several benefits with virtually no drawbacks. Fire Department Chief Dan Olney was present to discuss his views. He said that his department agrees that this Fire Authority is a good idea. Motion by Goodfellow with a second by Bradford to approve. Motion passed unanimously.
- i. **Change of Attorney:** The Township has been discussing changing attorneys from current attorney Cliff Bloom of Bloom Sluggett to Michael Homier of Foster Swift. There is a potential conflict of interest in that Mr Bloom's business partner serves as the attorney for the Village. Treasurer Johnson discussed this change and what it would entail. Motion by Savage with a second by A Johnson to let Cliff Bloom finish up whatever projects he's involved in for the Township but to appoint Michael Homier as the Township's attorney. Roll call vote: Steffens: no. B Johnson: no. A Johnson: yes. Bergman: no. Goodfellow: yes. Bradford: yes. Savage: yes. Motion passed 4:3.
- j. **Earned Sick Time:** Clerk Savage discussed this. The Board decided to table this issue in order to get more clarification on what exactly is covered.
- k. **Fire Department Allocation:** Fire Chief Olney was present to discuss the fire department's extensive expansion and renovation project. The total cost of that is \$2,100,000, with a \$1,000,000 federal grant expected from the US Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency. He reminded the Board members that the Township has allocated \$200,000 towards this project and asked them not to rescind these funds. He also said that the fire department might lose their grant if the Township doesn't

financially support the project. Board members then discussed whether the Township should go ahead with this allocation – whether it was fiscally responsible due to all of the other expenses that they currently have. The unanimous consensus of the Board was to table this issue until next month's meeting.

- l. Resolution: Rescinding the Prior Township Support of the Nash Creek Intercounty Drain Project:** Ken Yonkers, Kent County Drain Commissioner, was present to discuss this. He stated that the resolution was not factual. He took issue with several of the statements in the resolution. He stated that the Nash Creek Drain was in bad shape. The Board members then extensively discussed this resolution. Motion by Goodfellow with a second by Savage to approve this resolution. Roll call vote: Steffens: no. A Johnson: no. Goodfellow: yes. Savage: yes. B Johnson: yes. Bergman: yes. Bradford: no. Motion passed 4:3.
- m. Repairs and Replacement Parts to our Recording System:** Motion to repair the system in an amount not to exceed \$3000 made by Goodfellow with a second by Bradford. Motion passed 6:1. Trustee B Johnson dissented.
- 7. Other informational:** Kent County Commissioner and DDA Director Morse was present to discuss the Sparta Social District. She said that the district exists 24/7 – it's not just during certain events. She wants to expand the boundary a bit by the library. Library Director Tuinstra said that was fine as long as someone empties the trash cans. The consensus of the Board was to approve this expansion.
- 8. Public Comment:** Historical Commission Chairman Pinckney commented on the Nash Creek Drain project. Library Director Tuinstra asked who would empty the trash cans outside of the library if the social district expands there. She was told that the Village would do this.
- 9. Adjournment:** Motion to adjourn at 8:43 pm by Bradford with a second by Savage. Motion passed unanimously. Submitted by Katy Shelton, recording secretary. Reviewed by Marcy Savage, Clerk

