

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF COMMERCE  
TOWNSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES QUARTERLY MEETING  
2009 Township Drive  
Commerce Township, MI 48390  
Tuesday, January 27, 2026, 7:00 p.m.**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Supervisor Gray called the Township Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**ROLL CALL:** Present: Larry Gray, Supervisor  
Melissa Creech, Clerk  
Molly Phillips, Treasurer  
Rick Sovel, Trustee  
George Weber, Trustee  
Robert Long, Trustee

Absent: Bob Berkheiser, Trustee

Also Present: Hans Rentrop, Township Attorney  
Max Griffin, MMAO Assessor  
Jim Dundas, Fire Chief  
Katelyn Massey, HR/Finance Director  
Natalie Hiney, HR/Finance Assistant  
Alyson Lobert, Library Director  
Mark Schoder, Maintenance Director  
Dave Campbell, Planning Director

## ITEM 1: Public Comments

Supervisor Gray opened Public Comments. Seeing none, Supervisor Gray closed Public Comments.

## **ITEM 2: Introduction: Ordinance 1.075 – Poverty Exemptions; and Poverty Exemption Application**

Assessor Max Griffin recommends that the Township Board adopt Ordinance number 1.075 which will change the poverty exemption application requirement for sequential bank statements from 6 of the most recent months to 12 of the most recent months. Many jobs are seasonal and requiring only 6 months often does not reflect the true financial circumstances of an applicant for a poverty exemption. The other change is requiring a credit report for all persons 18 years of age or older residing in the household.

Township Attorney Hans Rentrop confirmed the change from 6 months of bank statements to 12 months and also the requirement for every person residing in the household over the age of 18 to provide a credit report. This eliminates people who live

**ITEM 2: Introduction: Ordinance 1.075 – Poverty Exemptions; and Poverty Exemption Application (continued)**

in million dollar houses having one person in the household apply for a poverty exemption. The State Tax Commission issued guidelines regarding the asset level test. The State Tax Commission recommends that the house itself be excluded. The position the Township has traditionally taken is that the house is included. Most communities exclude it and have a low asset level test of around \$20,000 to \$30,000. Because Commerce Township includes the house the asset level test is \$300,000.

Trustee Weber asked if this makes the application process more arduous for residents.

Assessor Griffin said it gives the Board of Review a more complete picture of an applicant's finances. Assessor Griffin used the example of a resident who bought a \$450,000 house and paid off the mortgage 6 months after buying the house and also applied for a poverty exemption. The Board of Review does not want to grant poverty exemptions in those circumstances. Also, the poverty exemption application is limited by the self-reporting of the applicant and sometimes they do not list all their bank and financial accounts and a credit report will reveal those.

**MOTION** by Sovel, supported by Phillips, to approve the introduction of Ordinance 1.075 – Poverty Exemptions; and the Poverty Exemption Application.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**ITEM 3: HR Discussion**

**a. Handbook**

HR/Finance Director Katelyn Massey said the employee handbook was last updated in 2020 and the version in front of the Board of Trustees has been reviewed by the Township Attorney.

The Board discussed the no call/no show policy and the tardiness policy. The Board requested that the handbook specifically ban social media use and inappropriate website use. Director Massey said she did not update the no call/no show policy because it conforms to the AFSCME contract.

Trustee Weber said that going forward he would like the department heads to be involved in policy and/or handbook updates.

Supervisor Gray asked the Trustees to send their changes to Katelyn and give her the opportunity to take those changes to the department heads and get their input. She'll bring this back to the February 10, 2026 Township board meeting.

### **ITEM 3: HR Discussion (continued)**

Items taken out of order

#### **c. Accident/Incident Policy**

Director Massey said this new accident/incident policy will be distributed to all employees and is intended to promote clear reporting procedures for workplace safety and organizational accountability. This defines expectations for employees and supervisors. This covers reporting requirements for employees who, for example, fall in the hallway and it covers reporting requirements when someone who is not an employee falls in the hallway.

Supervisor Gray said this policy is approved.

#### **b. Job Descriptions**

Director Massey said most of the job descriptions dated back to 1999 or earlier. The only new ones were created by Alyson and previously reviewed by Natalie and Katelyn. Library Director Lobert included the new job descriptions in her budget and does not involve hiring any new employees. The only descriptions that were not updated were for the Fire Department and she would like to work with Chief Dundas to update those.

### **ITEM 4: Emergency Gates – Fire Department**

Supervisor Gray said that some developers have come in looking to put emergency gates in their developments. Emergency gates are a hassle to maintain, and the Board can see in the pictures provided, that the gates are often blocked by walls of snow and ice making it impossible for emergency vehicles to use. The Fire Marshal is required to consider possible worst case scenarios in the event of an emergency and the need to evacuate residents from an area either via road or emergency gate. He said that if there are less than 30 homes then the fire code allows one entrance. Further, the fire code says if there are more than 30 homes then 2 entrances are required or the use of an emergency gate when 2 entrances aren't possible. The use of emergency gates is up to the discretion of the fire official and the municipality. If a second entrance and an emergency gate are not used in developments over 30 houses then a fire suppression system must be included in each home, increasing the cost of that home. Supervisor Gray asked the Board of Trustees to consider the safety of our residents and our firefighters.

Trustee Sovel said these (referencing the gates in the photos) were approved by the Township through site plan approval and clearly these developments are not meeting the site plan conditions, so why is the Township not addressing these violations?

Fire Chief Dundas said that's a great question. One issue is the manpower it would take to check all the emergency gates routinely. Also, once the development is turned over to the homeowner's association, who do you ticket for these violations? If there are cars

**ITEM 4: Emergency Gates – Fire Department (continued)**

blocking it, then the Sheriff can issue tickets but that doesn't prevent the next person from parking there, and the next. Violations of the fire code are civil infractions. In the fire code it says the fire official is the person who determines the approval or denial of a security gate and it's the only part of the code with any subjectivity. This comes from all of us wanting to be on the same page, the Fire Department and the Planning Department, with what we tell contractors and to remove some of the subjectivity. The fire code requires two access points and the access points have a remoteness requirement. The code mandates measuring the diagonal distance of the usable property and 50% of that diagonal distance measurement is how remote the two entrances or access points must be from each other. The options for developers of a small parcel where the remoteness requirement for two entrances are not possible are to limit the number of dwellings to less than 30 which requires only one entrance and no fire suppression or they can have more than 30 dwellings with fire suppression and one entrance. Contractors often ask how they can get around it because including sprinkler systems increases the build costs and they invariably ask about adding a security/emergency gate. You can see in the pictures that for a few months of the year the gates are impassable. In better weather they are often impassable because people are used to them not being used and vehicles are parked in front of them. The only subjective part is the decision to allow or deny emergency gates and he thinks the Township should be consistent about it and not allow these things that we've seen are a problem.

Supervisor Gray said Planning Director Campbell is asking for something in black and white so he is not the middle guy between the Fire Marshal or Fire Chief and the contractor.

Trustee Sovel asked what other communities do and if this is common?

Fire Chief Dundas said yes, it is what other communities do.

Trustee Weber said some communities use a boulevard instead of 2 different access points.

Planning Director Campbell said the boulevard does not meet the remoteness requirement mandated by the fire code.

Trustee Weber said the safety of our residents is our highest priority but there always needs to be balance and he's concerned about the cost to residents. In addition to the initial cost of the sprinkler system, there are maintenance costs and yearly inspection costs. There are not that many emergency gates in the Township and there should be signs identifying them as emergency gates saying there's no parking or blocking of the gates. The master deed for these developments require the emergency gate to be accessible. It is not an unreasonable manpower ask because for the most part the issue

**ITEM 4: Emergency Gates – Fire Department (continued)**

is only a few months out of the year. We need to solve the issues for the gates that currently exist and going forward. How many parcels are left in the Township that are large enough that this would apply to? He's concerned about drafting this ordinance for maybe one or two parcels. It should be an enforcement issue more than a restriction issue.

Planning Director Campbell answered that this applies to multi-family developments which could be stacked and industrial developments where there are standards for secondary access.

Supervisor Gray asked the trustees who is going to enforce this?

Fire Chief Dundas said that he and the Fire Marshal can drive around and check out the gates but do they have to do it every day? Again, it's a manpower issue.

Trustee Sovel asked if Ordinance would enforce it or if it's a zoning violation?

Planning Director Campbell said he can see it both ways but it comes back to the manpower issue. If it's going to be the Fire Department's position and the Township's position that there will be no more emergency gates going forward then he would like that memorialized in an ordinance, a policy, or a resolution. Something in black and white so when a developer says show me where it says that I can't have an emergency gate, he can show the developer in black and white.

Trustee Long asked if a Letter of Understanding from the Fire Department to the Planning Department would be sufficient?

Planning Director Campbell said that having something in writing is better than not having something in writing but he would feel better if it came from the executive body, which is the Township Board.

Trustee Long asked Fire Chief Dundas if he is willing to give the Planning Department formal documentation regarding this issue?

Fire Chief Dundas said that he would be happy to do that.

Planning Director Campbell is concerned that a contractor would ask to appeal that decision to the Board of Trustees.

Trustee Weber said he would like an estimate of how many parcels this could potentially apply to.

#### **ITEM 4: Emergency Gates – Fire Department (continued)**

Supervisor Gray said the Board needs to do something before it becomes an emergency. It seems like the Board always wants to push things off because it's not an emergency right now.

Trustee Sovel suggested putting it on the February 10, 2026 Township Board meeting agenda.

Supervisor Gray agreed.

**MOTION** by Long, supported by Gray, to resolve to follow the Fire Department's recommendation in the matter of gated entrances.

Discussion:

Trustee Weber asked if Trustee Long is supporting the status quo?

Trustee Long said he is supporting the decision of the Fire Department at the discretion of the Fire Chief.

#### **MOTION CARRIED**

Weber voted no.

#### **ITEM 5: Ordinance Discussion**

Supervisor Gray asked Planning Director Campbell to speak about data centers.

Planning Director Campbell said part of the discussion is acknowledging what we don't know about data centers. Data Centers are a hot topic throughout the US and southeastern Michigan. We've all seen the news stories about Lyon Township, Saline Township, and Howell Township questioning data centers and their impact on the community. Data centers are a new land use that is not fully understood. They are typically sited on huge pieces of property and in Howell Township they were looking at a one-thousand-acre property. He doesn't know how many pieces of property there are in Commerce Township where someone could reasonably consider a data center. He thinks the Board should consider doing what a lot of communities are doing and placing a moratorium on consideration or acceptance of any applications for a data center to give the Township the opportunity to research them and their impacts and get a better understanding of what those impacts are and where it would be appropriate for a data center to be sited and, additionally, regulating their use and impacts. He's asking for a moratorium of 6 or 12 months.

Trustee Weber likes the idea of a 6-month moratorium.

### **ITEM 5: Ordinance Discussion (continued)**

Planning Director Campbell says this all leads to the Township amending the zoning ordinance to say where data centers are permitted under these criteria.

**MOTION** by Gray, supported by Creech, to put a moratorium on data centers for 60 days until the Township Board has a resolution in place, effective today.

Discussion:

Attorney Rentrop said the moratorium should be in the form of a resolution because it articulates what you are doing and why you are doing it. He has a draft of the resolution with him.

Clerk Creech asked if it could be added to the February 10, 2026 Township Board meeting agenda?

**MOTION** by Gray, supported by Creech, to put a moratorium on data centers for 6 months and direct the Township Attorney to draft a resolution.

Discussion:

Trustee Long suggested amending the motion for a 2-week moratorium until it's formally adopted by resolution at the February 10<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**MOTION** by Gray, supported by Creech, to put a moratorium on data centers for 2 weeks until the resolution is brought before the Board at the February 10, 2026 meeting.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

### **ITEM 6: Other Matters**

#### **Trustee Long-**

I've heard it mentioned a few times alluding to what other communities are doing. Commerce Township used to be the leader, not the follower. Be careful what you put in context for comparison because we're not going to follow.

The other thing is we need some help with aesthetics. I don't know if the contractors are deciding but we put up a prison fence behind a cemetery and have offensive industrial lights on the fire stations in residential areas. If Chief could find it in his budget next year to get some nice architectural lights that not only functions to light up the fire station but looks pretty too. We built a large privacy fence right down the middle of Byers Park that could have looked better. It's just a big bridge thing and now you can't even see the park so maybe there could be a couple of people that review and think about these things because things could look prettier.

### **ITEM 6: Other Matters (continued)**

#### **Trustee Sovel –**

We all received a letter from State Representative Noah Arbit about potential spending programs and we need to get back to him by February 6, 2026. Does anyone have any suggestions?

Supervisor Gray answered that he and Parks and Recreation Director Emily England talked about having the ballfield done at Bicentennial Park and a new bridge at the park

behind 7 Eleven on Commerce Road. Please forward your suggestions to me before February 6<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Supervisor Gray –**

He wants to tie the Heart of the Lakes Festival to the United States' 250 year semiquincentennial celebration.

#### **Trustee Weber-**

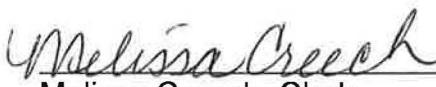
He finds it interesting that the state representative the board is least similar to in terms of ideology is the one who keeps coming to us and working with us versus our primary representative out of Milford who has never once come to a meeting in his 8 years here nor communicated with the Board and has never returned emails or phone calls. He finds that curious.

He also would like to add to Trustee Long's comments that Commerce Township should be leaders and not followers. One of the ways to make good decisions is benchmarking where others have failed. Benchmarking is different from following.

#### **Adjournment**

**MOTION** by Phillips, supported by Creech, to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 p.m.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**



Melissa Creech  
Melissa Creech, Clerk  
Charter Township of Commerce