

**Princeton Township
Mille Lacs County, Minnesota**

Township Board Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, August 17, 2021

Minutes

The August 17 monthly meeting of the Princeton Township Board was called to order by Chairman Gene Stoeckel at 7:30 p.m. Supervisors attended the meeting in person at Township Hall. The meeting was open to in-person attendance, plus remote participation via GoToMeeting.

Supervisors present: Thomas Duden, Dan Hiller, Gene Stoeckel, Bill Whitcomb, John Wilhelm

Staff present: Clerk-Treasurer Doug Dahl, Deputy Clerk-Treasurer Andrea Gerrard, Ken Henchen

Public in-person attendees: Alicia Alferness, Jason Alferness, Shannon Brekke, Helen Canter, Joe Canter, Joe Gerold, Liz Gerold, Susan Gerold, Emily Hanson, Marcia Kendall, Cathy Lundeen, Tom Lundeen, Joel Minks, Hannah Otte, David Persing, Barry Ramage, Jr., Josh Schmit, Jan Stearns, Kathy Stoeckel, Tim Wilhelm, plus others whose signatures were not readable.

Online Attendees: Connor Cummisky, David Kepple, Ronald Lindberg, plus other unidentified callers.

All attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approve Meeting Agenda

Thomas Duden moved to approve the agenda. Seconded by John Wilhelm. Motion carried.

Approve Meeting Minutes

Mr. Duden moved to approve the July 20 minutes. Seconded by Bill Whitcomb. Motion carried.

Open Forum

A group of residents and non-residents attended the meeting to express their concerns about the Township's sign policy and actions taken by Township officials to enforce the policy. They expressed two primary concerns:

- 1) The sign policy in general, and the Township's removal of signs in accordance with the policy.
- 2) The specific action of removing signs placed along Township roadways by former Township Supervisor Greg Anderson.

In response, Chairman Eugene Stoeckel read the following statement from Township Attorney Jason Hill:

"Prior to 2020, there appears to have been an informal traffic sign replacement policy in the Town, but there does not appear to have been a formal written policy. In June 2020, with the

assistance of the Town's engineer, the Town adopted the Town's sign policy, which has been available on the Town's website since shortly after its adoption. The goals and purposes of the policy are set forth in the policy, including the safety of the Town's roads, uniformity, and consistency throughout the Town, ensuring compliance with State requirements, the establishment of a standardized replacement program, and the reduction of unnecessary costs to the Town's taxpayers.

The specific goal of switching from a MNDOT test for sign replacement, which includes a number of criteria established by MNDOT, to a scheduled replacement program was to ensure compliance with the State's retro-reflectivity requirements and to ensure replacement within the lifetime of signage per the manufacturer's specifications. The Town worked closely with the Town's engineer and MNDOT while preparing the policy, and those efforts continue to ensure the Town remains in compliance with updated standards and requirements. The adoption of the policy was prompted by the lack of an existing written policy. Maintenance costs was one of a number of factors taken into consideration when adopting the policy. Signs that were subsequently removed were removed in accordance with the policy.

With regard to Greg Anderson placing signs in Town rights-of-way or in view of Town rights-of-way, Minnesota Statutes, section 169.07 provides as follows:

(a) No person shall place, maintain, or display upon or in view of any highway any unauthorized sign, signal, marking, or device which purports to be or is an imitation of or resembles an official traffic-control device or railroad sign or signal, or which attempts to direct the movement of traffic, or which hides from view or interferes with the effectiveness of any official traffic-control device or any railroad sign or signal, and no person shall place or maintain, nor shall any public authority permit, upon any highway any traffic sign or signal bearing thereon any commercial advertising...

(b) Every such prohibited sign, signal, or marking is hereby declared to be a public nuisance, and the authority having jurisdiction over the highways is hereby empowered to remove the same, or cause it to be removed, without notice.

Greg Anderson placed a number of traffic-control signs on or in view of Town road rights-of-way, on two occasions, presumably in violation of Minnesota Statutes, section 169.07. Contrary to assertions made by Mr. Anderson, it is not believed that any of the signs were placed on Mr. Anderson's property. In accordance with the authority granted by the statute referenced above, the Town removed the wrongfully placed signs on both occasions. In order to ensure the safety of the traveling public, the Town and any other road authority in the State, including Mille Lacs County, must have the authority to remove wrongfully placed traffic-control devices that could create confusion and safety hazards. The placement of the signs by Mr. Anderson was referred to the County Sheriff, and the County Attorney has confirmed that they have declined prosecution with regard to the placement of the signs in June of 2021.

Additionally, Minnesota townships have limited authority to control speed limits on township roads. The Minnesota Department of Transportation largely controls the setting of speed limits. The basic speed rule, which applies to all roads, is that no person shall drive a vehicle at a speed greater than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions. Drivers are assumed to be aware of actual and potential hazards and their speed must be restricted to avoid a collision. The speed limit on township roads is generally 55 mph, but townships can establish 30 mph zones in urban districts, which are areas built up with structures at intervals of less than 100 feet, 35 mph zones in rural residential districts, which are areas with dwellings situated at intervals averaging 300 feet or less for a quarter mile or more, and 25 mph zones on residential

roadways, which are roads of less than one-half mile in total length. There are statutory requirements that must be met and followed in order to establish lower speed limits. Townships do not have authority to simply place lower speed limits signs on a township road. Townships can also request a speed study to be performed by MNDOT if the township believes that a speed is greater or lesser than is reasonable or safe under existing conditions. However, MNDOT establishes the speed limit upon completion of the study, and it cannot be changed without MNDOT's approval."

17th street and 107th Ave. are not in an urban district nor are they in a rural residential district, both roads are located in the agricultural zone and do NOT meet any of the criteria for speed reduction study mentioned above. Both roadways have a 55 MPH statutory speed limit.

Clerk-Treasurer Report

Cash control statement:

General Fund beginning balance for July:	\$24,103.56
Receipts	\$93,824.90
Disbursements	<u>\$25,489.15</u>
Ending balance	\$92,439.31
Road & Bridge Fund beginning balance for July:	\$220,014.32
Receipts:	\$ 95,649.37
Disbursements	<u>\$ 60,989.24</u>
Ending balance	\$254,674.45

Mr. Dahl noted that receipts included the first-half tax settlement from Mille Lacs County of \$179,036.39.

Distribution:

- General Fund: \$52,929.70
- Road & Bridge \$95,649.37
- Fire \$30,457.32

Mr. Duden moved to approve the July cash control statement. Seconded by Mr. Hiller. Motion carried.

Payroll:

July net payroll: \$4,080.35.

Mr. Hiller moved to approve the July payroll. Seconded by Mr. Whitcomb. Motion carried.

Claims for Approval:

Total claims through August 17, 2021: \$57,812.81.

Mr. Duden moved to approve the claims. Seconded by Mr. Hiller. Motion carried.

Mr. Dahl reported that the Township's Certificate of Deposit with Bremer Bank is due to mature on August 22. Current balance is \$108,767.32. Options are to renew the CD for another year at the present rate (0.45%), to seek another investment opportunity, or to transfer the balance to the Township's regular checking account. Mr. Dahl had spoken with Mark Oleen of Bremer

Bank who informed him that there are no other investment options paying better interest due to the circumstances in the global economy.

Mr. Duden moved to renew the Certificate of Deposit for one year. Seconded by Mr. Hiller. Motion carried.

Old Business

Mr. Hiller reported that the Township's equipment had sold for a total of \$99,098.40. Direct expenses were \$447.00 for advertising and \$200 for a contractor to retrieve a piece from Greg Anderson's property and deliver it to Hiller Auction. Hiller did not charge the Township for the auction itself. Total amount paid to Township: \$98,451.40.

Members have expressed their preference for transferring the proceeds from the sale to the Road & Bridge Fund. Mr. Stoeckel is investigating how that can be done. The question will be placed on next month's agenda.

New Business

- Review/approve the Kepple escrow refund: David Kepple had reviewed charges to his escrow and expressed his concern that some of the charges were against activities other than his preliminary plat. Mr. Dahl agreed to review charges with Zoning Administrator Scott Richards. Mr. Hiller moved to table action on the escrow refund. Seconded by Mr. Whitcomb. Motion carried.
- Review/approve the Long Siding Station special event application: The business re-submitted its application due to its name change from Long Siding Bar & Grill. Mr. Duden moved to approve the application and refund the \$50 application fee. Seconded by Mr. Hiller. Motion carried.
- Review quotes for County Ditch 2 culvert work: The Township received quotes from Dahlheimer Trucking & Excavating for \$10,000, and from Darryl Waletzko LLC for \$27,790. Mr. Hiller moved to accept the quote from Dahlheimer Trucking. Seconded by Mr. Whitcomb. Motion carried.
- Request quotes for snow removal: Mr. Duden moved to place notices requesting quotes for snow removal in the Union-Times newspaper to run for four weeks with a deadline of October 1. Seconded by Mr. Hiller. Motion carried.
- Ditch mowing quotes: The Township received a quote from Daryl Waletzko for \$85/hour for the first cut and \$105/hour for the second, deeper cut. Also received a quote from Tom Lundeen for \$62/mile x 41 miles = \$2,542.00 total. Mr. Duden moved to accept the quote from Tom Lundeen. Seconded by Mr. Whitcomb. Motion carried.
- Mr. Hiller moved to table the sign policy review and direct Mr. Wilhelm to research the question and bring a report to the next Board meeting. Seconded by Mr. Whitcomb. Motion carried.
- Mr. Whitcomb moved to table consideration of new sign quotes. Seconded by Mr. Hiller. Motion carried.

Supervisor Reports

- Mr. Duden reported that Baxter Road was missed in the first mowing. Will get extra attention on the next cut. Also, he will be meeting with representatives of the city and school district about a proposed referendum for the school district to address what the district is planning, and how it will affect taxes.
- Mr Stoeckel reported that he had attended a meeting with the city and townships regarding use of American Rescue Plan Act funds available for installing broadband. There was no City Planning Commission meeting.
- Mr. Hiller reported that there was no fire board meeting. Also, the Township Planning Commission did not have any business to forward to the Town Board.
- Mr. Whitcomb reported that the Brickton Road work has been completed; met with Bogus Brook and Wyanette Township representatives to review shard-road agreements; cul de sac at the north end of 95th Ave. needed grading—done.

Adjourn

Mr. Hiller moved to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Whitcomb. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Doug Dahl
Clerk/Treasurer