

Ganges Township Planning Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes for December 15, 2025
Ganges Township Hall
119th Avenue and 64th Street
Fennville MI, Allegan County

I. Call to Order - Roll Call

Chair: Jackie **DeZwaan** called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Roll Call: Chair: Jackie **DeZwaan** - Present

Vice Chair: Dale **Pierson** - Present

Secretary: Phil **Badra** - Absent

Commissioner: Edward **Gregory** - Present

Commission Trustee: Dick **Hutchins** - Present

Zoning Administrator: Tasha **Smalley** - Present

Recording Secretary: Katie **Wolfe** - Present

McKenna Planner: Kevin **Garcia** - Present

II. Additions to the Agenda and adoption

DeZwaan amended the agenda to allow **Gregory** to report on data centers. **DeZwaan** made a motion to approve the amended agenda. **Pierson** seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Gregory reported that data centers are on the rise. They are huge, technical, consume a lot of energy and they only employ about 30 people. There are also concerns about homeowner ELECTRIC rates and business ELECTRIC rates going up. **Gregory** continued that Ganges Township should be aware. He also would like the PC to have an opportunity to review plans if an applicant applies for a data center within the township. **Gregory** gave **Hutchins** information to share with the Board.

Garcia replied that McKenna is creating a model ordinance to use and noted that it is good to be proactive. He also shared that the American Planning Association has published materials regarding zoning approaches for data centers. He explained that data

centers can be categorized by scale, from small, micro-level facilities to large-scale operations, and should be treated as a distinct land use with attention to noise mitigation. The publication also recommended protections against “ghost boxes,” noting concerns that if a data center is built and later closes, it could leave behind large, empty warehouse facilities.

III. General Public Comments

Chuck **Mannion** – 6611 Deer Trl. shared concerns about solar farms also.

Marsha **Maslanka** – 1811 66th St. thanked the PC for being proactive.

IV. Correspondence and Upcoming Seminars

Phelps to DeZwaan Re: Possibility of scheduling a special meeting

DeZwaan to Twp Board Re: Annual PC report

Pierson to PC Re: ZBA update in the Zoning Ordinance

Gregory to PC Re: Lakeshore Overlay District

Gregory to PC Re: House Bill 5304

Badra to PC Re: Lakeshore Overlay District

Badra to PC Re: Advisory Committees

McKenna to Badra, Fwd to **PC** Re: Zoning Ordinance update from McKenna

V. Public Hearing – None

VI. Approval of Prior Minutes

Motion made by **Gregory**, seconded by **Pierson** to approve the November 18, 2025, Regular Meeting minutes, with corrections. Motion passed.

VII. Old Business

1. Lake Michigan Shoreline Overlay District Discussion

Gregory shared that he would like language in the ordinance addressing maintenance of the landowner’s property from the bluff to the shoreline.

Smalley noted that building debris could be addressed under the Dangerous

Buildings Ordinance. The majority agreed not to include any additional language in the ordinance.

Garcia shared the updated draft of the Lake Michigan Overlay District, incorporating changes provided by **Badra**.

The PC reviewed the draft Overlay District and discussed its location. It was decided that the boundary would be set at 400 ft from the Ordinary High Water Mark or any parallel road, whichever is closer.

Pierson asked **Garcia** to share draft documents in Microsoft Word, in the future, so he can add notes.

Pierson noted that it is important to keep the sentence under Setbacks 3. “The bluff line setback distance shall be construed as running from the most landward bluff point toward the back (street side) setback line.”

Gregory questioned the definition of an elevated walkway. **Pierson** explained that the ordinance addresses elevated walkways between adjacent property owners and does not require setbacks. **Smalley** added that shared walkways would require an easement. **Gregory** questioned the inclusion of elevated walkways. **Garcia** responded that he would speak with McKenna’s Vice President, who drafted the changes based on his Michigan lakeshore planning experience, to clarify the intent of the section.

Pierson stated that **Garcia** removed the following sentence and requested that it be added back in the Shoreline Protection section. “For any permanent structure or portion of it, the bluff line setback distance shall be 130 feet and measured as above.”

Under the Excavation, Earth Moving, Land Contouring section, 2., remove the word “development”.

Under the Shoreline Protection section, 2.d. Add “and shall not extend lakeward more than 15 feet from the toe of the bluff.”

Under the Ordinary High Water Mark definition, remove the last part of the sentence that says, “which at the time of the adoption of this Ordinance was 580.5 feet.”

Edit the definition of Nonpermanent Shoreline Protection Structure to say, “A structure designed to safeguard shorelines from erosion and flooding that are intended for temporary use.”

It was confirmed that the PC intends to prohibit funiculars.

2. ZBA Ordinance Discussion

Pierson and **Smalley** agreed that Carol Josefowicz’s draft addressing ZBA Applications and Hearings could replace the current section 20.5.

Garcia suggested that certain items within the section be reordered to improve organization and clarity.

- Section 20.4 Variances
 - A. Applications and Hearings
 - B. Non-Use (Dimensional) Variances
 - C. Use Variances
 - D. Re-Submission

3. School Classification Discussion

Garcia suggested consolidating “commercial schools” and “studios” into one category called “studios”. He recommended allowing studios as a permitted use in the Glenn Hamlet Mixed Use District.

The PC agreed that the existing special land use criteria will suffice for the evaluation of private trade, commercial and industrial schools.

Pierson noted that he would like the following sentence removed from Agricultural Products Retail on page 18-39. “A six (6) foot, solid fence may be required by the Planning Commission if natural screening is not present.”

In regards to the Manufactured Housing Community District, **Garcia** noted the importance of maintaining a separate district to provide more regulatory leverage. The PC decided to keep the Manufactured Housing Community District.

VIII. New Business – None

IX. Administrative Updates

a. Township Board

Hutchins reported that the Township Board appointed Charles **Mannion** to the ZBA. He also reported on the Short-Term Rental Committee, noting that the committee has reviewed the intent and purpose statements and the definitions. The committee will next begin reviewing the regulations. He added that the attorney drafted a moratorium for short-term rentals.

b. Zoning Board of Appeals

Pierson noted that an application is in progress, but no meeting has been scheduled yet.

c. Zoning Administrator

Smalley had nothing to report.

X. Future Meeting Dates – Special Meeting on December 29th at 6:00 PM & January 27th

XI. General Public Comments

Lana **Murch** – 2384 Lakeshore Dr. shared concerns about what she described as arbitrary changes made to the Overlay District, including the distance measurement and the addition of riprap to the ordinance. She emphasized the importance of following best practices. **Murch** wondered if the PC could request the credentials of a McKenna representative with expertise or training in Lake Michigan shoreline protection.

Andy **Murch** – 2384 Lakeshore Dr. stated that the Overlay District measurement should apply regardless of the presence of a road and that properties within 400 feet should be subject to the same requirements. He also emphasized the need for supporting research and community input.

Kim **Mannion** – 6611 Deer Trl. in regards to cleanup of the bluff-to-beach area of a property, Mannion wondered if a township ordinance could require information to be included in a real estate closing packet.

XII. Adjournment

Gregory made a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Hutchins** seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Katelynn Wolfe, Ganges Township Recording Secretary