

**Ganges Township Planning Commission**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes for September 23, 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** - Present

Commissioner: Edward **Gregory** - Present

Commission Trustee: Dick **Hutchins** - Present

Zoning Administrator: Tasha **Smalley** - Present

Recording Secretary: Katie **Wolfe** - Present

**II. Additions to the Agenda and adoption**

**DeZwaan** made a motion to amend the agenda, adding Public Comment Discussion under New Business. **Gregory** seconded the motion. Motion passed.

**Gregory** made a motion to approve the agenda with additions. **Hutchins** seconded the motion. Motion passed.

**III. General Public Comments**

**Sue Mackey** recommended that the PC should consider offering meetings on Zoom so more residents can participate.

Gregg **Greiner** - 1748 Blue Star Hwy wondered about the township adding a small millage on taxes to set up a legal defense fund.

Andy **Murch** - 2384 Lakeshore Dr. noted that Ganges Township should not go the route that Saugatuck Township did in regards to the overlay district because the length and depth of the lots in our township is ARE different.

Kim **Mannion** - 6611 Deer Trail commented that she would like the township to discuss short term rentals, especially rental fees, taxes and fines for things that are not being handled properly.

**Diana Decker** - 1705 Lake Michigan Dr. noted that in the state of Michigan if you hire someone else to manage your property, they must have a broker license.

**DeZwaan** noted that short-term rentals are not in the Planning Commission's purview. It is an enforcement issue that has to be done by the Township Board.

#### **IV. Correspondence and Upcoming Seminars**

**Phelps** to **DeZwaan** re: record retention. Fwd to **Badra** with reply from **MTA**

**Dezwann** to **PC** re: record retention

**Badra** to **PC** letter sent to Saugatuck Meadows Campground APPLICANT

2 **Phelps** to **PC** re: Varnum's FOIA request

**Pierson** to **PC** re: Varnum's FOIA request

#### **V. Public Hearing – None**

#### **VI. Approval of Prior Minutes**

Motion made by **Gregory**, seconded by **Badra** to approve the August 27, 2025, Regular Meeting minutes, with corrections. Motion passed.

#### **VII. Old Business**

##### **1. Lake MI Overlay District Discussion**

**Badra** noted that he sent the Overlay discussion notes to Representative Andrews and his response was "EGLE can't do anything above the ordinary high water mark". EGLE does not do anything with the bluff except say what setbacks may be necessary for the septic system AND BUILDINGS. They do not regulate dredging.

**Gregory** noted that PC members turned in extensive ideas and recommendations, however everyone has their own ideas and they need to be analyzed to come up with a draft of the overlay district. He continued that the PC also needs to

determine what pieces will be required versus recommended. **Gregory** continued that he needs direction so the PC can create something in a timely manner. He would like to see public review and participation.

**Badra** noted the PC should define what is going to be the overlay district; then the PC can decide what can be regulated within that distance. Badra suggested starting at the ORDINARY high water mark (580.5 feet ABOVE SEA LEVEL) and going inland 500 feet.

**Pierson** commented that some of the properties should not fall into the overlay district because they are not in the high-risk erosion area. **DeZwaan** noted that if the PC is going through the process of creating the district, the whole bluff should be protected.

**Pierson** stated opposition to the ORDINARY high-water mark point (580.5 feet ABOVE SEA LEVEL), noting the fluctuating water level. **Badra** replied that 580.5 ft is the measurement that EGLE uses. Everything below that point is theirs.

**Gregory** noted that putting a limit on linear feet of depth is inaccurate because all of the lots are different. **Smalley** suggested saying 500 ft or to Lakeshore Drive. Then you are encompassing those that are longer but if you are across the street, you are not ~~on the lake~~ IN THE OVERLAY DISTRICT. If there is a longer parcel, then the same amount of land is being protected.

During the discussion, it was noted that there are many private drives between the lake and Lakeshore Drive. **Smalley** replied that the overlay could say only lots on Lake Michigan.

**Badra** commented that his idea of 500 ft was just a thought. The measurement can be less but should not be any more.

**Gregory** noted the difficulty of creating an ordinance when it is unclear what EGLE is regulating. **Pierson** noted that the township cannot overrule EGLE; however if the new ordinance is submitted to them and approved, then it becomes the new standard which is enforceable by our zoning administration.

**Badra** noted that the township attorneys and the planner should be involved to help write and format the ordinance properly.

**Hutchins** clarified that the district will be from 124th Ave to 112th Ave, which is the entire township bluff. The depth will need to be something that's consistent, not by lot but by distance from the ORDINARY high water mark.

**DeZwaan** stated that the PC is going to need the assistance of a planner. She confirmed that the overlay district will apply to all parcels fronting Lake Michigan in the entire township (from 124th Ave to 112th Ave). The PC all agreed on the district. **DeZwaan** noted that it would be helpful to have a planner to help with the remaining details of the ordinance.

**DeZwaan** asked the Township Board Representative, **Hutchins**, to contact the Township Supervisor to see if the Planning Commission can amend their budget to include the planner and legal counsel.

**Smalley** suggested that the PC creates an outline of the ordinance intent, including what the district is and what is going to be regulated. A special meeting was scheduled for Sept. 30 to hear the PC's detailed opinions of the district. It was determined that the PC would review Pierson's draft ordinance line by line to determine what the intent and purpose of the ordinance will be. Then the planner will attend the meeting and write up the new ordinance.

## **VIII. New Business**

### **1. Discussion about Public Comments**

**DeZwaan** stated that she has allowed individuals to speak more than once on one subject during general public comments. This is incorrect and will not be permitted moving forward. **DeZwaan** then started discussion about the ability for individuals to join meetings electronically.

**Badra** stated that the Freedom of Information Act says active military and people with disabilities can comment or get involved in a public meeting electronically, however, it does not say that anyone else can. Also, Zoom is not a requirement in the Open Meeting Act or anywhere else.

Following discussion, it was agreed by consensus to add the policy: [Necessary and reasonable aids for disabled persons will be made available with sufficient

notice to the clerk] to the Public Comment Guidelines. The PC also decided to have the Guidelines added to the website.

## **2. Campground Moratorium Discussion**

**DeZwaan** noted that the current moratorium is in effect until June 10th. In order to adopt ~~a new moratorium~~ AN UPDATED CAMPGROUND ORDINANCE, **DeZwaan** recommended that it should be completed by March so the PC can make a recommendation to the Township Board with reasonable timing.

**Badra** shared an excerpt from the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act Section 125.3207. He highlighted a section that says [a zoning ordinance shall not prohibit the establishment of a land use in the presence of a demonstrated need for that land use within that local unit of government or the surrounding area]. He continued that there are 18 campgrounds within 23 miles, and four campgrounds ALREADY in the township. **Badra** said because of this, the PC should not allow any more campgrounds in the entire township of Ganges because there is not a need and the township does not have the infrastructure for it.

**Pierson** disagreed because of the overflow of campers at Campit, stating that there is a need for more campsites.

**DeZwaan** noted when you look at the Master Plan, the township is supposed to encourage tourism and recreation, and camping does just that. She added that the PC can look at the special land use requirements for campgrounds and impose restrictions that make it more harmonious with the community.

**Gregory** stated that the news reported on RV parks becoming popular due to rising housing costs. He continued that Ganges Township is a rural unincorporated area with minimal residential and commercial resources.

**Pierson** commented that a well managed campground would be a great addition to the area for local businesses. Adding that the rural character of Ganges Township attracts many tourists. **Pierson** shared a list of conditions that he would like to see if a campground were to be permitted in the township. He stated that if all the conditions were met and there is enforcement, then there should be no problem with another campground.

After discussions regarding the districts that campgrounds would be permitted in, it was determined that **Badra** will contact the supervisor, John **Hebert**, to ask permission to contact the attorney. **Badra** plans to ask the attorney if new campgrounds can be eliminated from Ganges Township and if not, where they should be permitted. He will also share the PC's thoughts on why they should be permitted and why they should be eliminated.

## **IX. Administrative Updates**

### **a. Township Board**

**Hutchins** reported that the Township Board will be working with a new legal counsel and the township has entered a new contract for an enforcement officer who will be enforcing the blight and the junk car ordinances. Lastly, the Township Board plans to start looking more seriously into a short-term rental ordinance.

### **b. Zoning Board of Appeals**

**Pierson** reported that the ZBA had a meeting on September 2nd. The applicants at 1339 Fabun Road petitioned for a front setback variance to construct an addition. The ZBA approved the variance with the following condition: to move the planned entry steps to the east side of the home.

### **c. Zoning Administrator**

**Smalley** had nothing to report.

**DeZwaan** noted that she received the quarterly report from Ciesla. She feels it is almost time for the inspection for his reclamation. To date, he hasn't done any.

**Smalley** responded that his file states when he is done, he has to reclaim it.

## **X. Future Meeting Dates - September 30th, October 28th & November 25th**

## **XI. General Public Comments**

**Greiner** suggested having recommendations within the Lake MI Overlay District instead of requirements. He continued when it comes to the moratorium, there is a big difference between a need and a want.

Andy **Murch** stated that if the district includes 500 ft, that should be the case no matter what side of the road the home is located on. He also shared an article with the PC that discusses the damage that armored revetments have caused.

Lana **Murch** - 2384 Lakeshore Dr. noted the importance of a special meeting to set the parameters before meeting with the planner. She urged the PC to keep the focus on the bluff.

**Mackey** reiterated that she would like to see Zoom become available as an option, if not, she hopes the PC will continue to provide access to the meetings and allow public comment.

**Decker** shared that there is an open house at the City of Saugatuck and recommended that the PC attend one of their meetings.

Marsha **Maslanka** - 1811 66th St. shared that she would like to see no more campgrounds in the township. She questioned why tent sites were excluded in the moratorium. Lastly, she reiterated the fact that the traffic study submitted for the campground did not include holidays and weekends, which does not reflect the traffic in the area.

Aaron **Kronmeyer** - 6556 118th Ave. noted that it is not fair to say a campground that violates ordinances creates a need for more campgrounds.

Bob **DeZwaan** - 2259 68th St. shared the importance of protecting the Lake Michigan Shoreline. He suggested checking in with the South Michigan Shore Conservatory for insight.

**Mannion** wondered if new campgrounds could be on hold until further notice to send a message that Ganges Township has enough campgrounds for now; then the township could re-evaluate in a few years.

**Decker** asked for clarification on the new enforcement officer and residents shared concerns about complaints not being addressed. **Smalley** shared that concerns with Campit are being addressed. Andy **Murch** noted that community members need to continue complaining if there are violations.

**XII. Adjournment**

**Gregory** made a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Badra** seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Katelynn Wolfe, Ganges Township Recording Secretary