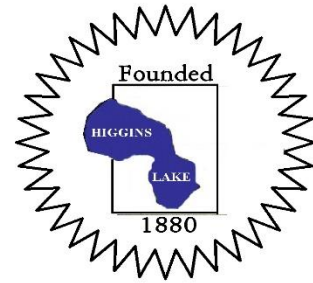


Dec 5, 2024

Gerrish township Board
2997 North Cut Road
Roscommon, MI 48653



Fellow Board Members,

We are starting a new local legislative term with some fresh faces and new challenges – I am happy to be a part of it all.

One of the biggest challenges will be the Lake itself. Higgins is obviously the most significant natural resource of our community.

Gerrish is a beautiful place to live and raise a family, The year-round community is small, but every year grows and by many seasonal residents and many more vacationers. Higgins Lake is the reason they chose to buy/build, work, rent, or vacation here – to enjoy the beauty of lands surrounding the lake. Without it, there would be little else attracting people to the area. Visitors bring people of all ages that shop, buy groceries, work, and play.

It is also home to the folks that provide those services, as well as secure full-time employment here at our schools, construction, government facilities, and recreational businesses. Without the lake, many, if not most, of these people would be at other attractive locations “up-north.” Gone would be the “part-timers” as well as the jobs that support the “full timers.” Student populations would shrink, teachers move on, County government move to a more central location, DNR consolidate to more populated areas. Without the beauty and cleanliness of Higgins, property owners would relocate to other areas. When they leave, property values would plummet and resources dry up. The outstanding services enjoyed by Gerrish residents would be in jeopardy and potentially shrink – causing even a further reduction in our ability to attract local residents.

The Lake is the reason we are all here – full stop!

By many measurements, Higgins is allegedly becoming less than pristine. As Township officials, we have responsibility to do whatever we can to maintain the resources of our thirty-six square miles of God’s Country and keep it safe and secure for those to follow.

Since being selected as a candidate in the August Primary, I have been reading, writing, thinking about, discussing, and generally assembling ideas on how to step back and take a fresh look at how we might be able to make a significant impact on the overall health of Higgins Lake. That includes trying to learn from the work that has already been done over

the years and applying an unbiased approach to how we can best use that information, gather new and apply reasonable solutions that will eventually be effective.

I have found that there is strong passion from several distinct organizations with an interest in the area. Some that are ready to start digging a new lake wide sewer system tomorrow, some think that the next dollar spent on a sewer is too much, and some that want to take a true measured scientific look at the needs. I land in the last category.

Gerrish Lyon Utility Authority (GLUA) 's future may be fuzzy. Lyon removed their support for the Member-at-Large approved by the previous Board. Some wonder if Lyon will remove others from GLUA leaving it without the necessary authority to conduct business. Right now, GLUA is doing good constructive engineering work to answer questions surrounding a potential sewer system and other productive projects. They have secured a grant to pay for this work and we need to support their efforts. We as a Township Board need to drive the public face to the health of the lake and use GULA to drive the technical effort, as necessary. Right now, we need the support of both – headed in the same direction – a healthy lake.

I have put together a lengthy presentation that I am happy to share with anyone interested, as well as a much more brief high-level talk that hopefully lays out a vision for the direction we should take as a board.

I hope you view the vision as a co-operative/collaborative effort to get all those that are genuinely interested in the overall health of Higgins Lake to join in and lend a hand to move this effort forward. We need to tap into the vast expertise – administrative, scientific, data, financial, community outreach, etc. – that is all around us to help lead and turn the crank. I have no illusion that this will be an effortless walk in the park or short-term venture.

This is the first public presentation of this work and is intended to get your sincere and critical opinions as to its overall message and the direction that we need to take. I welcome all comments – and I really hope that you don't all walk out in the middle of it...

With your suggestions, I will refine the presentation and, over the next weeks and months, lay out more detailed descriptions of how we may address specific components.

Sincerely,

Jim Ostling
Trustee 1
Gerrish Township Board

Cc: Hill, Anderson, Squires, Oppy, file