

# STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP

TUESDAY MARCH 11, 2025

Good evening and thank you for joining us for the 144th annual Gerrish Township State of the Township address. As your initially appointed Township Supervisor and later elected Township Supervisor, this will be my first address.

We have faced many challenges in this fiscal year cycle 2024-2025 to include an undefined true financial position, a delayed Township audit cycle and of course there had been a consultant contract hire of a third-party by the previous board member make-up to try and bring clarity moving forward to the financial picture. I am pleased to report to the community that that financial picture is well in focus as of this writing and our 2025-2026 proposed budget reflects this thanks to the election of James Anderson as Treasurer to clarify and properly account our revenues accordingly.

I will now make statements about each area of the budget for complete transparency.

## General Fund

We estimate a surplus (Revenues over expenditures) of \$212,842. The original budget was based on a break-even approach. The major differences are from:

1. Earning added interest of \$40,000 from what was budgeted.
2. Saving \$55,000 by using the existing accounting software rather than purchasing BS&A.
3. Road work with the Road Commission was roughly half of what was budgeted from the original projection, saving approximately \$20,000.
4. The Board health insurance was significantly less than the budgeted amount due to the changeover in the board make up and the actual cost of the insurance versus the budget assumption of possible increased costs estimated last year.

The budget for the upcoming year is balanced without reducing the fund balance carryforward. It does include a significant increase for road work, funds allocated for the "Health of Higgins Lake Steering Committee" and consideration of a 4% increase for all general township wages to protect employees from inflation.

## Fire Fund

2024/2025-year-end projects an increase in fund balances of just under \$300,000. The surplus is actually planned and set aside for future equipment purchases. The 2025/2026 budget includes a planned spend down of the fund balance of \$75,379. The Fire/EMS needs for more room to work are still under consideration as well as the shortage of volunteers.

## **Police Fund**

2024/2025-year-end projects an increase in fund balance of just under \$115,000. Just like the Fire Fund, the Police Fund sets funds aside for future capital expenditures for equipment and projects such as police vehicles, technology enhancements amongst other things. The 2025/2026 budget includes a planned spending down of the fund balances of \$124,402.

## **Parks & Recreation Fund**

The Park Fund was subsidized by the General Fund in the amount of \$82,000 in the 2024/2025 budget year to cover the local share of a \$200,000 grant project and the normal operations of the Parks. The 2025/2026 budget includes a transfer of \$30,000 from the General Fund to cover the operating expenses for the upcoming year. The upcoming budget includes a small, planned spend down of \$1,344.

## **Cemetery Fund**

The Cemetery Fund is projected to end the year with expenditures exceeding revenues by approximately \$3,000. This is after a General Fund subsidy of \$10,000. The 2025/2026 budget includes another \$10,000 transfer from the General Fund with expected operating expenses of \$20,856. Our board will be addressing a long-term plan for the future of the Cemetery to ensure that it is properly maintained perpetually.

## **Community Park (Marina)**

The Marina is expected to end the fiscal year with an approximate surplus of \$42,000. The budget for the upcoming fiscal year reflects an increase of approximately \$17,000. The Marina has a bond debt of \$627,000 with an annual debt service of approximately \$110,000. The debt will be paid off in 2030. The board will be working on a long-term strategic plan for the marina over the next year to enhance operations and the use of property.

## **Sanitation Fund**

The Sanitation Fund is expected to end the year with a surplus of approximately \$42,000. 2025/2026 is expected to be close to a breakeven with an approximate \$2,000 spend down on the fund balance. This fund is financed with a special assessment which is exclusively used for its operations. Our contracted Trash/Recycling service GFL's contract is due to expire March 31, 2026. An unknown to the budget in the future at this time is the effect that the State of Michigan's Material Management Law that was recently enacted. This required our Compost site to fall under the permits section of the law that began 2024.

## **Overall Township Financial Position**

The Township is in a solid financial position. However, we are constantly considering the inflationary effects on expenses and the need to address our aging infrastructure costs which have not been previously addressed. A long-term budget strategy will be considered over the upcoming year.

## **Operational Summary for the year**

On my arrival as an appointed official on April 1, 2024, I started looking at operations of the Township to include, policies, business procedures, employee discourse, board member discourse issues, and of course lack of board governance policy to understand what the Township needed in management for the future to come together amicably.

During those processes, I found board governance policies a priority that needed to be addressed to move forward to get to solid planning and managing for the future rather than a short-term approach to problem solving causing crisis management. I began to work on those policies and other policies that needed attention to include an update of the Gerrish Township Employee Manual that had not been kept current since 2021. I found internal communications and external communications in need of improving for the health of the organizational culture. Also, day-to-day business financial processes and roles needed clarification to operate more efficiently and to decrease the volume of errors being experienced. I also inherited items from the previous administration that had not been completed and thus handed off to this administration for completion. Improving these items will be a constant work in progress until achieved, nonetheless I have been working on those processes daily and with the aid of our talented board elected in the fall of the year 2024 we are making great strides.

The General Fund budget operational formulation process was overhauled for the 2025-2026 proposed budget to include input from internal stakeholders, managers, department head inputs and we have begun discussions of managing our fund balance long term, addressing aging infrastructure, and proper reserve funds for the future as needed. The budget expenses were stripped down line by line and rebuilt. The revenue lines were also rebuilt by proper assumptions and correct data. We now have an operational road map for the future for the budgeting process that is inclusive to the internal stakeholders' articulated needs for their areas of responsibility and much more accountable to the public.

Our current board as a whole is acting in the best interest of the Township, making proper evaluations to assure fiscal transparency and making proper corrections as needed to conduct the necessary tasks moving forward.

Gerrish Township continued to see many visual improvements to its building and grounds via grants and some general fund commitments.

Gerrish Township continues to improve our technology for the safety of those visiting and working in the hall and the Fire/EMS wing. Technology system upgrades have been made to provide access to meetings more of a convenience when not in the community as opposed to attending in person. Additionally, we launched a new website that replaced an 11-year-old product. We will be replacing the General Township Offices/Fire/EMS server and several workstations that have been attrited out by age as well.

In 2024/2025, The Gerrish Township Board continued to participate in the Gerrish Lyon Sewer Authority (GLUA). In January of 2025, the board voted to remove the previously approved Special Assessment District for the Gerrish Lyon Utility Authority in an effort to ease the minds of the public as in our opinions, the process was rolled out prematurely making a community effort to help focus on our lake health in the future be an uphill struggle. To that effect, also in January of 2025 the Gerrish Township Board authorized the Health of Higgins Lake Steering Committee to assist with the many facets of gathering data about the ongoing health of Higgins Lake in order to paint a better data driven picture moving forward with our new board wishes in hopes of better community collaboration. In the 2025-2026 budget, the board also created a line-item budgeted amount for the committee to function. The board intends to begin work on issues that can be mitigated as we move forward for solutions for a healthier Higgins Lake.

After the election in 2024 with a changeover of their board, our joint constituent Township partner, Lyon Township in the Gerrish Lyon Utility Authority made it very clear through their actions at the board level that their Township would not work toward the current proposed Step System Sewer Project nor any sewer solution. Additionally, they resolved not to have land in Lyon Township used for a proposed treatment facility. The articles of the corporation were clearly written to work towards a sewer to be deployed at Higgins Lake and therefore a way forward could not be achieved despite discussions to find any commonality for GLUA to have a purpose.

The Gerrish Lyon Utility Authority Board met on February 12, 2025, and voted on a motion to ask the constituent Townships of Lyon and Gerrish to dissolve the Gerrish Lyon Authority Board Corporation. The vote passed 5 votes yes and 1 vote no.

Therefore, acting on the request previously stated, the Gerrish Township Board resolved on February 20, 2025, to begin a dissolution of the Gerrish Lyon Utility Authority as under the authorizing act for the Authority, it was created to specifically work towards a sewer solution. Gerrish Township respects Lyon Township's right to decide what is best for their constituency, however without a partner in GLUA the continued journey seemed futile.

The Gerrish Township Board engaged in a board authorized committee called Health of Higgins Lake Steering Committee as an initiative to address the issues surrounding the health of our lake and will continue in the future. A full purpose and scope and further definition of the project is available on the Gerrish Township website [www.gerrishtownship.org](http://www.gerrishtownship.org).

Gerrish Township continues to prioritize staying on the 5-year road improvement plan and has worked with the Roscommon County Road Commission to do so even though costs are increasing and will require additional general fund supplementation to the 1 mil extra voted Roscommon County Road millage dedicated to road health.

This was a busy year for elections and with the recent changes in voting law in Michigan we saw increased costs to hold the elections and follow the law. Although initially the State paid for the elections occurring in 2024, there is no indication that the changes made to include 9 days of early voting will continue to be compensated by the State in the future, thus likely to become a financial burden for our general fund in the future. Our Clerk's office secured two other grants to help with the costs this year, however, that is no sign that those opportunities will exist in the future.

For a final comment about the General Township, the challenge for our board and boards of the future will be supporting aging infrastructure, providing quality services and balancing budgets in an increased cost economy. Gerrish Township General Fund continues to operate on a 1 mill voted for general expenses. It has been subject to the Headlee rollback for many, many years, therefore the Township does not have full access to the assessed increases without going back out for a Headlee roll back restoration vote in the future which is currently not on the immediate horizon. We will continue to seek grants when available to enhance revenue when available.

### **Gerrish Township Police Department**

Gerrish Township continues to operate a Police and Fire/EMS service for the health and welfare of the taxpayers. All departments function at an elevated level of professionalism and will continue to be funded by Special Assessment as voted by the public many years ago. These Departments represent the very spirit of being one with the Community. Operationally, this year has been a transition year with the retiring of the long-term Police Chief in March of 2024 and the appointment of Chief Eric Muszynski as a replacement at that time. Long time Police Sgt John Wybraniec also retired in December of 2024. Thus, the Department continues the process of promotions, filling of road patrol positions to replace those leaving. The authorized staffing level continues to be seven full-time officers, one full-time Administrative Clerk, and one part-time custodian. The largest problem facing the Department for the future is recruiting and retaining qualified certified officers in an extremely competitive environment due to the systemic lack of applicants in the State. The department is available through the Roscommon Central Dispatch via a non-emergent number of 989-275-0911, of course for emergencies 911 and of course at the department during the Monday-Friday Administrative hours.

The Department continues to serve under the agreement with the Roscommon Area Public Schools to provide a School Resource Officer. The officer engages with staff and students to help with security, safety, and parents in a positive productive manner. A Michigan Department of Education grant was received that covers 50% of the cost. The School District contributes 25%, and our Police Department funds the remaining 25% for this service to our

schools and community. The future of the grant is uncertain at this time after the current contract expires in February of 2026.

In a very important initiative, the Police Department is into their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a 3-year process to become an Accredited Agency through the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police and the State of Michigan. This is a progressive and proven way of helping Law Enforcement agencies evaluate and improve their overall performance and service. This includes the adoption of standards containing a clear statement of professional objectives. This process includes adding and revising department policies to meet 115 standards. Our Administrative Clerk functions in the Accreditation Manager role in this process. The Chief and Lieutenant function in the Accreditation process in this process as well as it is complex and requires depth to accomplish.

Additionally, our Administrative Clerk serves in a dual role with our Fire/EMS Department as an Emergency Medical Technician and is an American Heart Association CPR/AED and First Aid Instructor.

The Department continues to serve at a high level and continues its partnership with the Non-Profit ACT-NOW Organization to provide many programs and projects that our community has grown to expect and rely on. These partnerships will continue into the future.

Finally, the Police Department has always shown proper diligence in seeking grants to assist with the changing times for personnel, equipment and recruiting when they are available to offset operational expenses.

### **Gerrish Township Fire Department**

It has been an exceptionally busy year for the fire department. In addition to the regular duties such as conducting CPR and first aid classes, installing smoke and CO alarms, and responding to emergency calls, we also faced the unexpected and heartbreaking loss of one of our own. We came together as a family to grieve and support one another, and the community's compassion significantly strengthened our unity.

The members also undertook the monumental task of organizing our 75th anniversary celebration. This required extensive after-hours meetings to plan, organize, and advertise, but the effort was well worth it. The participation and support from the community, along with the backing from our department members' families, made the celebration a success. It was heartwarming to see everyone come together to celebrate and enjoy the event. This milestone not only honored our past achievements but also reinforced our commitment to continue serving and protecting our community with dedication and pride.

The Fire/EMS Department worked diligently towards looking to the future and proposed a new building for the future. The voters spoke and decided that the proposal was something they

could not back. The department understands and is not frustrated by the setback and will likely work in the future to explore other options that may be more palatable to the public to address their needs for the future.

Looking ahead, our fire department faces some challenges starting with the retirement of Chief Fisher and the appointment of Kristi Gilliam as the next leader. The department sees that moving forward with a smooth transition. They will continue addressing the ongoing issues of recruitment and retention, striving to attract and maintain dedicated personnel who share our commitment to service. Throughout this process, they are grateful for the community's involvement and support, which will be crucial in maintaining our vision, mission, and goals. By working with the community, they are confident that we can navigate these challenges and continue to provide exceptional service. With the strong foundation we have already, and the support of our community, we look forward to a bright and promising year.

### **Gerrish Township Building and Zoning Department**

117 Building Permits, 89 Electrical Permits, 72 Mechanical Permits, and 26 Plumbing Permits were processed. There was a slight downturn in permits that would be consistent with the current state of the economy.

### **Gerrish Township Cemetery**

We are happy to report that the Gerrish Township Cemetery records have been entered into the BSA Cemetery Software from the old handwritten records. Additionally, the Cemetery water pump was re-built this past summer so same was operational. The existing infrastructure is an old 2" well and an old, repaired motor.

The Cemetery is another budget center area that needs a more long-term solution financially as it expends more than its revenues as we wind down most all the "old" lots that have been sold or occupied. We will be releasing the newly plotted expansion of the cemetery to the South this year. Before this takes place, the board authorized Trustee Ostling to collaborate with the Sexton/Maintenance person Tony Ide to begin a list of things that need addressing for the future. Treasurer Anderson and I will work on a financial reserve plan to begin turning this budget center around and have money available to address future needs.

### **Gerrish Township Park and Marina**

Russ Hartner continued as the Marina Manager in 2024. The Marina offers 143 in-water boat slips, outdoor and indoor storage for eighteen boats, twelve jet ski slips, and two broadside overnight slips for transient customers. There are currently 145+ requests for slip space on the waiting list. At this time, we are not taking any requests to add to the waiting list. This year we

will begin conceptually looking at what could be done in the future to the site once it becomes unencumbered. We will embrace a committee of folks to look at planning for the future on the property soon.

## **Parks and Recreation**

The Parks and Recreation Committee and Gerrish Board have made good progress in 2024 toward the goal of improving our Parks and Recreation offerings.

Work is nearly fully completed on the Gerrish Township Park Improvement Project, which is the focus of a DNR Recreation Passport grant. Key elements of the project on Carlos Avenue include installation of a large play structure and safety surfacing, as well as a multi-position spinner with safety surfacing. An overall facelift to the bathroom building including new fixtures, stalls, flooring, ceiling, and paint. An extension of the boardwalk toward the swing set, a new bench and ADA picnic table, and the relining of the parking lot. Final touch-ups, including installation of the DNR Rec Passport signage will be done in Spring 2025.

The four pickleball courts at the Municipal Park were well utilized this year. Simple tools were added at the site to support cleanliness of the courts (mats, broom, squeegee), and a security camera was installed to cover the majority of the park, including the courts.

2024 marked the second year of the Memory Bench/Table Program, which provided 8 new benches and a 1 new picnic table (adding to the original two benches purchased in 2023). Gerrish is very thankful for those residents' donations to support our parks.

Updating the Gerrish Township's 5-Yr Recreation Plan began in Fall 2024. The suggested plan, to cover 2026 – 2030, will be posted to the Township website for public review and comment when it is completed, estimated Spring 2025.

Gerrish Township has various boards that have great folks working on our behalf. They are:

- **Roscommon Area District Library Board**-We have two representative seats on this board.
- **Gerrish Township Assessor and Board of Review**-The Gerrish Township Board contracts with Julie Tatro of MVW Associates and is available to meet with residents in the township offices on Mondays. Please call for an appointment. The assessor is also available by calling her office at 989-821-9313 ext. 222. In 2024 the Board of review met three times, March, July, and December. The Board of Review has 4 members.
- **Gerrish Township Planning Commission**-  
We have a 7-member Planning Commission that meets a minimum of 6 times a year. Every other month on the odd months.

Ten meetings were held in person with Zoom video teleconference participation.

- Regular Meetings – 5 [May, Jul, Sep, Nov, & Jan (no-Quorum)];
- Special Meetings – 2 [Apr & Jun];
- Public Hearings – 3 [Apr, Apr, & Jun] in person.

Four Site Plans (SPs) were reviewed that consisted of 4 Preliminary SP Reviews (PSPRs), 3 Final SP Reviews (FSPRs), and 2 Public Hearings (PHs), to include the following:

- Building Addition – Jim’s Collision, [PSPR];
- Storage Building – Northern Metal Roofs, [PSPR, FSPR]. GTPC approved.
- Mini-Storage (241 Units) – Higgins Lake Storage, [PSPR, PH, FSPR]. Gerrish Township Board (GTB) approved;
- Mini-Storage (135 Units) – Higgins Lake Boat & RV Storage, [PSPR, PH, FSPR]. GTB approved.

There was 1 review for re-zoning. Recommended a parcel be Re-Zoned from Low Density Residential (R-2) to Local Commercial District (C-1). GTB approved.

Master Plan Review: Began review for possible update, will continue in 2025.

Zoning Ordinance (ZO) Review: Several items in the ZO were identified for possible modifications, to include; multiple definitions, Shoreline Stabilization, Manufactured Housing, and Mini-Storage Facilities. The recommended modifications were sent to the GT Attorney for legal review.

New Ordinance Development: Three potential new ordinances are being considered. Two are continued from 2023 (Short-Term Rental Ordinance [STRO], and Septic System Ordinance [SSO]), and one was initiated in 2024 (Renewable Energy Development Ordinance [REDO]). The work on all of them will continue in 2025. They are summarized as follows:

- SSO: A preliminary review of Michigan Septic Ordinance-related regulations and proposed Legislative Bills was conducted. Other Townships Septic Ordinances that have been adopted or are being considered were reviewed. The GTPC is currently creating a draft of a possible GT Septic Ordinance to be submitted to the GTB for consideration.
- STRO: A preliminary review of Michigan STRO-related regulations and proposed Legislative Bills was conducted. GTPC members reviewed and met with neighboring Townships that have adopted a STRO or working on one. A possible GT STRO draft and checklist of administrative tasks were developed and will be submitted to the GTB for their consideration.

- Renewable Energy Development Ordinance: A preliminary review of the Michigan Public Act 233 of 2023 went into effect Nov 29, 2024, pertaining to local ordinances concerning future renewable energy developments, and related Michigan Township Association documentation was reviewed. Four GTPC members attended a Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) sponsored Workshop hosted by the Renewable Energy Academy (REA) in Jan 2025 to learn more about the issues. The workshop focused on local community considerations for planning and zoning of large, utility-scale solar, wind, and battery storage systems. Further GTPC action(s) on this matter are to be determined.

Minutes of all the meetings were approved and posted online at [https://gerrishtownship.org/minutes.php?type=planning\\_commission](https://gerrishtownship.org/minutes.php?type=planning_commission).

- **Gerrish Township Zoning Board of Appeals**-We have a 5-person Zoning Board of Appeals with one alternate that meets as necessary to hear cases of appeals.

Suffice it to say by the length of the address, your Township has been busy conducting the business of the Township diligently. Although we will not always please everyone as is the nature of politics and government, we will continue a professional approach to the Township's challenges that lay ahead.

In closing I want to thank the residents and guests that live, work, and vacation in Gerrish Township for the support of our community. I also want to thank the elected officials, employees and support staff for their dedication to making Gerrish Township the preferred destination to live and vacation in northern Michigan.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Brian A. Hill*

Gerrish Township Supervisor

Cc/file