

Minutes of the Special Joint Meeting of the Georgetown Township Board and Planning Commission, held Wednesday, January 7, 2026

Meeting called to order by Supervisor Jim Wierenga at 7:00 p.m.

Present:

Board members: Jim Wierenga, Kelly Kuiper, Gene DeWitt, Gary Veldink, Amy Grasman, Kevin Kelly

Planning Commissioners: Josiah Samy, Jeannine Bolhouse, Gary Veldink, Geoff Brown, Goris Passchier, Tom Healy

Also present: Justin Stadt, Township Superintendent; Andy Rienstra, Assistant Superintendent; Ryan Schab, Zoning Administrator (ZA); Tanya DeOliveira, Williams and Works

Absent: John Schwalm, Jessica Ulberg

#260107-01 – Overview of meeting from Supervisor Jim Wierenga

Jim Wierenga opened the meeting. He stated the Township Board was hoping to have a better understanding of items the Planning Commission is wrestling with currently and items possibly coming down the road. He was hoping that a dialog between the two groups would provide a better understanding between the Board and Commission about goals for the township.

#260107-02 – Overview of meeting from Planning Commission Chairman Josiah Samy

Josiah Samy informed the Board of where the Planning Commission was currently at in the Master Plan process and that they were starting to take the information from the survey and pop-up events and develop a set of goals for the township's future. He stated he felt it was a good idea to make sure both the Board and the Commission were on the same page about goals for the township.

#260107-03 – Approval of the Special Joint Meeting of the Georgetown Township Board and Planning Commission Agenda for [January 7, 2026](#)

Moved by Gary Veldink, seconded by Amy Grasman to approve the agenda of the [January 7, 2026](#) meeting as presented.

#260107-04 – Master Plan Discussion with Tanya DeOliveira, Williams & Works

Jim Wierenga asked Tanya DeOliveira to provide an overview of the Master Plan process thus far. She explained they have updated informational chapters about the township's demographics, natural features, and community facilities. She stated this fall they held two pop-up events where residents could participate in activities where they give their feedback about land use and development. The results of these events and the survey were compiled in a community engagement report which she encouraged the Board to read if they have not already. From that report, objectives will be developed by the Planning Commission. She stated once the draft of the Master Plan is created, there is a period of 63 days where the public is allowed to give feedback on it before the Planning Commission recommends it to the Township Board for adoption.

Jim Wierenga asked what step comes next in the Master Plan process.

Tanya DeOliveira stated the Master Plan the township currently has only has one goal. She stated she wanted the Planning Commission to develop more goals for different themes like transportation, housing, and community development. She stated the goal statements they develop will be used to inform decision making by the Board and Commission.

Jim Wierenga asked the Planning Commission members to comment on the Master Plan process thus far, and if they were looking to make big changes or smaller changes.

Tanya DeOliveira wanted to interject briefly to say usually large broad changes are not successful for different reasons. She stated usually change is incremental and happens over periods of time.

Geoff Brown stated he was impressed by the number of people who responded to the survey, showing how much the township's residents care about their community. He agreed with Tanya DeOliveira's statement that large sweeping changes were not a good idea, but felt there were areas of the current Master Plan where they need to change goals more than simply refine them.

Jim Wierenga asked Tom Healy what he thought about participation in the survey and how it impacts the view of the Commission on what direction they may head.

Tom Healy stated he felt the process has gone very well. The survey results were interesting to him, especially the comments on housing, which seemed almost contradictory in that the results called for more single-family homes, but also no new housing. He stated that contradiction may signify a divergence with the population, though he clarified the survey was not scientific [meaning those who took the survey were not a group selected to accurately represent the township's demographics; anyone could have taken the survey and anyone could have taken it more than once]. He brought up the fact that some of the grievances in the survey [like the issue of a lack of sidewalks] might be attributed to how certain entities do not need to be held to local ordinance, like public schools or renewable energy systems.

Jim Wierenga asked Jeannine Bolhouse if she thought the issue of schools not being subject to the ordinance changes the trajectory of the Master Plan, and if the township can defensively plan around the ability for schools to ignore local ordinance.

Jeannine Bolhouse stated one thing she has taken away from the process was that more communication and collaboration is necessary between the township and surrounding organizations. She stated when a community isolates itself, it has less input in what's happening around it. She stated she's been on the Planning Commission for almost twenty years, and she can't recall the Master Plan incorporating any major changes in goals, nor does she recall making any clear, concrete goals and objectives. She stated one thing they frequently notice in their discussions on the Planning Commission is how important it is that the commissioners have different backgrounds and opinions. She stated if board members and commissioners are only an echo chamber of their own opinions, that does not mean the entire community feels the same way. She went on to say there is usually no perfect answer, and aspirational goals do not mean definitive changes will be made. She stated everyone will not agree on everything, but that's a good thing as the township has different demographics which have different needs. She stated if a

plan or a goal meets the needs of every board member and commissioner, it's probably not meeting the needs of most residents.

Jim Wierenga asked Josiah Samy what aspirational goals he felt have emerged so far from the Master Plan process.

Josiah Samy equated the Master Plan process to his profession in the mortgage world. He stated it's like when an inspector comes to a home for sale and says that the home is great, but could benefit from small changes to make it even better. He stated the Planning Commission is excited to get started on the Master Plan goal-setting. He stated as far the comments they've been receiving, there is clearly a demographic shift in the township where there are two large camps; one that does not want change and one that does want variation in housing types, lot sizes, and less restrictions on buildings. He stated their goals are going to be less aligned with what they personally would like to see and more aligned with what the community as a whole will need over the next couple of decades. Their goal is to make the township stronger and to protect some areas of farmland. He stated they also discussed bringing in businesses so that residents do not have to leave the township for goods and services, which contributes to traffic congestion.

Jim Wierenga asked if there were specific areas or ideas that the commissioners all felt were important and goals could be formed around those ideas.

Tom Healy stated that one of the issues they were having as a commission is they don't know where the Board stands on some items. He cited renewable energy ordinances, development in the northwest quadrant of the township, mixed use developments, building heights, Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), and parking ordinances. He cited the recent Eastbrook Homes PUD (Loving Woods) that was denied where detached garages seemed to be an issue to the Board. He stated a PUD allows for deviation from the ordinance, but he asked if there were items the Board was not willing to hear deviations for.

Josiah Samy stated he also hoped to hear feedback from the Board about commercial sites, citing the old K-Mart property at Main Street and Chicago Drive.

Jim Wierenga asked Gary Veldink what his perspective was on what the Planning Commission is trying to accomplish with the Master Plan review.

Gary Veldink stated he felt the number of people who responded to the survey was so small compared to how many people actually live in the township. He stated he was concerned about making changes to the Master Plan based on the feedback of just those few people. He stated he felt it may not be fair to current residents to change ordinances to accommodate different groups of people to come in. Regarding the northwest quadrant of the township, he stated it would be an expensive process to get utilities to the area. He stated he hoped to develop a plan for the northwest quadrant to prevent Grand Valley State University from taking over more land there, as they are also an entity that does not have to adhere to local ordinance.

Jim Wierenga asked the commissioners to offer any ideas they've had about specific areas of the township or specific ideas for improvements that they would like to see. He asked them to imagine the Township Board was not a factor and to explain what changes they want to make.

Josiah Samy stated they haven't sat down and come up with a list of ideas yet. He stated they have identified certain areas thanks to the survey that are important to look at like the northwest quadrant, the old K-Mart site, and issues with Baldwin Street. He stated there may be areas where they can allow for higher density or taller building heights

Tanya DeOliveira stated part of her process is to help commissions and boards to get thinking about questions they may have never considered. She stated she asks questions to facilitate discussion, not because she wants to lead change, but because she wants discussion to occur between the commissioners.

Jim Wierenga stated in his line of work, and in Jeannine Bolhouse's line of work, mediators can be an important objective third party in a discussion. He stated he felt her feedback would be helpful in these discussions.

Tanya DeOliveira stated one of the things she does is compile a goals and objectives worksheet for the Planning Commission where she comes up with questions based on some of the conversations the commissioners are having. She stated the questions she adds to the worksheet are intended to spark discussion. She stated they are not at the part of the process where they are making specific plans yet.

Josiah Samy stated he was hoping to hear from the Board areas of excitement and concern when it came to the survey results or the worksheet.

Jim Wierenga stated he was hoping to hear more about what the commissioners were thinking in terms of what changes or goals they want to implement and did not realize they weren't there in the process yet.

Kelly Kuiper stated, more so to the Board members, that the Master Plan is a goal document and not a plan for concrete change necessarily. She stated certain goals in the Master Plan may not be able to take shape until the zoning ordinance is changed to allow it. The zoning ordinance is the ultimate legal document that regulates development; the Master Plan is a goal document.

Jim Wierenga asked if the Master Plan has an influence on the ability to change the zoning ordinance. He gave the example of PUDs, and he thought the Master Plan had an impact on the zoning ordinance when it came to PUDs.

Kelly Kuiper stated it can, but from a legal standing, a Master Plan is not a legally binding document; it is a goal setting document. She stated the PUD ordinance in the zoning ordinance is worded to suggest PUDs should relate to the Master Plan. She stated rezoning ordinances also refer to the Master Plan when it asks if the rezoning is compatible with the township's future land use plan. She wanted to make clear that just because the Board doesn't agree with every item in the Master Plan, that does not mean they will all come to fruition. She stated the Board has to approve any ordinance changes recommended by the Planning Commission. She went on to comment about how the Master Plan cannot be this particular Board's plan. It is the community's plan and the plan for the Board that will be sitting here in ten to twenty years. She commented on the Commission's question about the current parking ordinance and how it came to be and she believed that when parking ordinances were written decades ago, there were only a few attorneys who wrote them and many municipalities got the same parking ordinance. She also commented on some of the language in the current Master Plan which can be vague or cookie-cutter. Another

thing she was hoping to see in the new Master Plan is that it should be more than a vision for future land use, citing the example of interconnectivity of the township's parks. She stated the township doesn't have a separate strategic plan, and the Master Plan will act as a catch-all plan.

Tom Healy asked if the Planning Commission had the authority to require things like park connectivity in future developments.

Kelly Kuiper stated she thinks that's why it should be written into the Master Plan. If creating easements or park connectivity is important and it's documented in the Master Plan, the Commission can then initiate an ordinance change in the PUD chapter, for example, about requiring those connections if available.

Tanya DeOliveira stated the implementation chapter functions as a to-do list which the Board and Planning Commission may or may not get to.

Kelly Kuiper stated she was hoping to have sub-area goals. She stated a major issue that needs to be addressed is traffic on Baldwin Street. Businesses often have multiple access points to Baldwin Street and it is dangerous at busy times of day. She was not sure how much control the township had over closing extra access points, but by working it into the Master Plan, the township can create implementation strategies.

Tanya DeOliveira asked if the Road Commission has an access management plan.

Kelly Kuiper stated she was not sure if the Road Commission and township had access management reviews.

Tom Healy related the issue of access management to lot sizes. He stated at the end of Baldwin Street [near the I-196 entrance/exit] each lot has its own access point. He stated lot sizes also drive what type of businesses can go into a lot. He stated there are so many auto parts stores, fast food restaurants, and oil change shops at that end of Baldwin Street, because fewer stores can fit on those lots [due to ordinance requirements for setbacks and building size/height].

Kelly Kuiper stated in response to Tom Healy's comments, she believed it was the City of Grand Rapids that also wanted to decrease the number of driveways and fast food restaurants in their municipality so they strengthened the criteria for businesses to be able to go into certain locations. She stated the township can strengthen its ordinance to help solve some of these issues too.

Geoff Brown stated the commission was hoping to know what the Township Board wanted as the Master Plan is coming together so that the Planning Commission wouldn't be taking a shot in the dark as they draft the Master Plan.

Jim Wierenga stated he does not have specific ideas, but has more general thoughts. One of his concerns was how congested the township is. He stated the township has 56,000 people and he does not want their quality of life to go down. He stated he is concerned with more development in the northwest quadrant. He wished there were more entrance/exit points to the township, like another crossing the river, but there are so few, with Baldwin Street being a major point of exit for people in the northwest quadrant headed east.

Kevin Kelly stated he also wanted to have a different exit out of the township. He stated he realized the Ottawa County Road Commission has more power there to make changes than the township can, but also would like to another exit over the river. He stated he would like to see the township as a place residents can call home instead of work. He was concerned about housing prices, stating it's impossible to build a house for \$180,000 and rent can be \$2,500 a month. He stated he would love to see the township continue to grow residentially but admitted that is difficult to do when there are 55,000 residents all crammed into one area.

Tom Healy asked Kevin Kelly if he had any ideas for congestion in the northwest quadrant.

Kevin Kelly stated he did not know. He stated 48th Avenue did not have an effect on Grand Valley State University traffic as they hoped it would. He stated in general, Grand Valley students live right on campus [or just off it], but when they go grocery shopping, they come to the Jenison Meijer. He reiterated the importance of another bridge over the river. He stated his sister lived in Hawaii for a number of years and they had traffic control machines that changed the number of inbound and outbound traffic lanes depending on the time of day. He stated the township almost needs a system like that on Baldwin Street.

Josiah Samy stated the Planning Commission had discussed traffic calming techniques at a previous meeting.

Geoff Brown stated the issue of traffic on Baldwin Street was one of the most common concerns on the Master Plan survey.

Jim Wierenga stated when he is opposed to certain ideas about housing, it is less so about whether he would like a development, but how it is increasing a given problem. He stated he cannot control there being a bridge over the river out of the township, but he can control growth.

Amy Grasman stated she agreed about prioritizing park connectivity. She stated traffic is also a concern of hers, particularly around Jenison High School. She stated people will run red lights at Cottonwood Drive and Baldwin Street to avoid sitting there. She believed it would be best if the Ottawa County Sheriff sat at that light and started ticketing people until the accidents calm down.

Josiah Samy asked if the township had any control over the amount of enforcement the Ottawa County Sheriff provides for the township.

Justin Stadt stated he could ask, but ultimately it comes down to availability. As the township continues to grow, the calls for service to the Sheriff's Department grows too.

Kevin Kelly agreed that calls for service to a traffic accident or a domestic call will be more important than writing traffic tickets. He brought up that the Cottonwood Drive and Baldwin Street intersection made a list of the top worst intersections in the state of Michigan.

Kelly Kuiper stated that the data which made up that list reflected that over a third of the accidents were simply trucks running into things, not actual vehicle accidents.

Amy Grasman stated she would like to see more restaurants as well so residents don't have to drive to Grandville or Grand Rapids. She cited Chicago Drive as being a potential location for new restaurants.

Jeannine Bolhouse asked the Board if they have had any dialogue with the Road Commission.

Jim Wierenga stated he hoped to some day have representation on the Road Commission board, but have not yet. He encouraged the Planning Commission to have a Road Commission representative come to their meeting to ask questions.

Tom Healy asked who makes determinations about roundabouts.

Tanya DeOliveira stated the Road Commission makes those determinations.

Justin Stadt said there were three roundabouts coming to the area.

Tanya DeOliveira stated in her experience, someone needs to be a polite, but persistent, squeaky wheel when it comes to speaking to the Road Commission. She said regardless of if the intersection makes a list of worst intersections in the state, the township's residents are asking for change there. She stated while the traffic issues in Georgetown are important, so are the other traffic issues that get brought to the Road Commission. As a county agency, they have limited resources to spend over the entire county.

Jim Wierenga stated he felt like Georgetown was a sleeping giant. It runs quietly and smoothly so when there is money for projects, it does not flow this way.

Geoff Brown stated persistence is key. He related a story of when he was on the Jenison School Board and for a long time there were no flashing lights or safety measures, until a student got knocked over by a car while riding their bike. The child was fine, but it was an incident that sparked the installation of traffic lights to prevent future accidents.

Jim Wierenga stated there seemed to be a commonality of thought that the Board fears more congestion and doesn't want to make the condition worse.

Kelly Kuiper stated they also cannot make decisions in a vacuum. She stated there is also a concern about affordability in the township, but the reality of today's market is that the only way to get affordability is through higher density projects. She stated it would be wise to identify pockets of the township where high density developments could be constructed, and then identify physical characteristics or design goals for those developments.

Tom Healy stated sometimes one way to get the Road Commission to respond to traffic concerns is to increase population and traffic. He stated density drives change in these situations. He believed that's what drove adding an entrance/exit onto Baldwin Street to I-196.

Gene DeWitt stated he wanted to give the Planning Commission a lot of credit for approaching their agenda items having done research and asking questions. He stated he thought the Board needed to stand behind the Planning Commission as much as possible since they are doing 80% of the background work on agenda items. He stated the Planning Commission has a diverse group and they don't always agree with each other, but they can always come to a conclusion or compromise. He stated the commissioners all have their own opinions and as a board, they have to respect that.

Justin Stadt reiterated with the Road Commission, persistence is important and appealing to them in person can help, though their offices are in Grand Haven, which makes it difficult for Georgetown staff and officials.

Josiah Samy asked if the Road Commission responsibilities could be kept in-house.

Justin Stadt said they could look into that at Board direction.

Josiah Samy asked if the tax dollars Georgetown gives to the Road Commission get funneled out to other municipalities.

Justin Stadt confirmed that the tax dollars stay in Georgetown and are not getting spent in other municipalities.

Gary Veldink gave an example of Road Commission funding being repurposed in Charlevoix County after the ice storm they had last year. Since the money was spent in disaster repairs, they did not have money leftover to do road maintenance.

The Zoning Administrator encouraged Board members to come to Planning Commission meetings, read the Planning Commission meeting minutes, and have a conversation with him about questions they may have.

Geoff Brown stated it was good to hear about the Board's thoughts on the Master Plan as it sounded like they shared many of the concerns the Commission had. He stated the concerns about congestion reminded him of the Eastbrook Homes development that the Commission approved, but the Board denied. He stated one of the reasons why the Commission approved the development was because it was going to have 43 fewer homes. When the Board denied the alterations, it then brought the development back to the original plan to have 43 more homes, contributing to congestion. He stated the units in that development would have been for higher income households and it would have been good for the tax base.

Jim Wierenga stated the denial was not about the garages, but about health, safety, and welfare.

Geoff Brown said quality of life and congestion were taken into consideration when the Planning Commission approved the plan, which had been reviewed by the Fire Department for safety. He stated there will be compromises on how they accomplish achieving a good quality of life and minimizing congestion.

Tom Healy stated one of the things the Planning Commission wants to do is be defensible in its decision making so they can say, "The fire inspector approved it and it meets the fire code, who are we to change that?" He stated he understood the concern for health, safety, and welfare, but they also need to be concerned about being able to defend decisions.

Josiah Samy stated discussions at Planning Commission meetings go late sometimes because when they discuss changing one thing, it affects so many other things. He gave the example of wanting the township to be more of a bedroom community, but that leads to more congestion. He stated every meeting, the Planning Commission wrestles with how they can best benefit the community. He stated there was a big demand for more restaurants, but they are very costly and he stated that's where high density or mixed use comes into play to offset those costs.

Geoff Brown stated that every resident and business owner is concerned with their taxes. By eliminating the ability to be an attractive location for business, the township is eliminating a commercial tax base. The City of Grandville is benefiting greatly from their commercial tax base. He stated Georgetown residents take their money and spend it in Grandville.

Jim Wierenga stated he thought the City of Grandville just raised their millage by one mill. He stated he didn't get the impression they had a surplus of money. He then asked for Tanya DeOliveira to give a final comment before he opened the meeting to Public Comment.

Tanya DeOliveira stated she felt the Board and Commission had common goals, some of which is high quality of life and less congestion. She stated it's not something she always sees in other municipalities.

Jim Wierenga agreed that all board members and planning commissioners love where they live.

#260107-05 – Public Comments

Pete Plowman, 6877 Creek Ridge Dr., stated he agreed with the idea of defending against Grand Valley State University buying up more property which would then be non-taxable. He also agreed with the idea of rewriting some ordinances to allow for more businesses to use different lot sizes so there aren't as many fast food places or oil change places. He stated it would be a good idea for the Planning Commission and Board to meet more often. He stated the Eastbrook Homes development is a huge amount of units and would further burden the township infrastructure in that area. He stated he understood it was Eastbrook's property and can do what they want with it, but they shouldn't be allowed to do anything they want with it. He stated the Board should have the authority to deny a plan the Planning Commission approves, but that they should work together. He thinks the township should remain a low-density bedroom community.

Randy Koetje, 547 Baldwin St., stated he was hoping to start a development in the northwest quadrant near 48th Avenue and Bauer Road, which would be single-family residential. He stated he likes building in Georgetown because it's well run and the application process always goes smoothly. He's hoping to have two or three developments started between the Georgetown and Blendon townships. He stated he's hoping to get some smaller homes back in the game, but admits it is the reality of the present day that a 1,100 square foot ranch home costs \$450,000.

Shawn Haff, 1482 Winifred St., suggested having elected officials or commissioners take turns going to the Road Commission to be the "squeaky wheel" to hopefully get traffic issues resolved, since that's what it seems to take. He stated he realized the Board members and commissioners all have busy lives and they all work outside of their township responsibilities, but if they take turns, and possibly residents could get involved, they may accomplish some traffic goals.

#260107-06 – Adjournment

Moved by Kevin Kelly, seconded by Amy Grasman to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:04 p.m.