

HELENA TOWNSHIP
ANNUAL BUDGET HEARING — FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027

Special Meeting — June 25, 2026 — Helena Township Hall, 8751 Helena Road, Alden, MI 49612

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

Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Supervisor Clark Peeples, Clerk Oryana Leffew, Treasurer Catherine Rice, Trustee James Schilling, and Trustee Charles (Butch) Bartz.

Approval of agenda: Motion by Schilling to approve the agenda, support by Bartz; motion carried.

Conflicts of Interest: None declared.

Public Comment (3-minute limit): The first public-comment period was held to the end of the meeting; members of the public were invited to ask questions throughout the budget presentation (see Public Comment and Discussion below).

PRESENTATION OF BUDGET

South Torch Lake Fire District. The Fire Chief presented the proposed (modified) fire district budget of \$634,348, which with banked interest and the EMS / first-responder contracts with Torch Lake and Milton Townships totals approximately \$676,148. Capital and building items include reconstruction of the failing retaining wall, reconstruction of the deck separating from the building, and a two-car storage garage (the department has lost basement storage to the ambulance service). The Chief reviewed required annual testing — SCBA flow testing, hydrostatic testing of the air/cascade tanks (every seven years, due this year), and pump, ladder, hose, and compressor testing — and replacement of all tires on both trucks (12 tires, ~\$14,000, per the NFPA seven-year requirement). Fuel costs were reduced from ~\$14,000 to ~\$3,800 by purchasing through the county. A new storage building near Aldridge, estimated at ~\$70,000, is being built for ~\$44,000 through donated lumber and labor. No separate action was taken on the fire district budget.

Helena Township. The proposed FY2026-2027 township budget was presented at a total of \$1,133,680, compared with the current FY2025-2026 budget of approximately \$1,074,000, and includes a 3% wage increase based on cost of living and the Consumer Price Index. The Board reviewed the multi-year trend: FY2023-2024, \$763,000; FY2024-2025, \$983,000; FY2025-2026, ~\$1,074,000; FY2026-2027, \$1,133,680. A carryover of approximately \$69,000 was noted. The Clerk reported rebuilding the township's books into a nine-digit chart of accounts following the State of Michigan uniform chart of accounts, reclassifying prior transactions, and migrating accounts payable/receivable and payroll to BS&A; trustees sign off on every invoice and check at each meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND DISCUSSION

Members of the public raised questions and comments throughout the presentation. The principal items were:

- **Fire district (audience questions to the Chief):** storage needs and the loss of basement space; tire replacement and whether the trucks carry a spare (they do not).
- **Accounting and transparency (a resident):** asked about projected revenues for the coming year (~\$1.3-1.5 million), current cash on hand (reported by the Treasurer as \$1,337,334), and whether the monthly check register and financials are published on the township website for residents. The Clerk explained that every invoice and check is recorded and signed off monthly and offered to share the new chart of accounts publicly for feedback.
- **COVID / ARPA funds (a resident):** asked how the federal COVID funds had been tracked and spent. The Board responded that the funds were carried in the general fund and applied to items including the BS&A accounting startup, signage, and building improvements, and that an accounting of the expenditures is available.
- **Records and data security (a resident):** questioned why the township's bank statements and certain financial records are kept at the Treasurer's home, who performs the monthly bank reconciliation (the Treasurer reconciles with the bank and the Clerk reconciles with the Treasurer), and whether records kept on a home computer should be integrated into the township office under township IT protection. The Board acknowledged the concern, noted recent cyber-attacks on the township, and explained that the move to BS&A/cloud and a new office computer will bring the records back into the building.
- **Parks and Recreation — Barry Snyder:** asked what is actually budgeted and spent on Parks and Recreation. The Board reported proposed park maintenance of \$20,000 and park projects of \$55,000, and that the prior year included approximately \$75,000 in park projects and \$10,000 in maintenance (covering mowing, trash pickup, janitorial, signage, and similar). Mr. Snyder asked for an itemized breakdown, which the Clerk agreed to provide, and expressed frustration that Parks and Recreation is told funds are unavailable and that no new amenities (parking, beach, pickleball, resurfacing) were completed.
- **Roads and downtown paving:** the Board discussed approximately \$200,000 currently in the roads account, an additional ~\$414,000 expected in December, three priority projects (Crystal Springs Road, Chapman Road, and a two-inch overlay on Page Road) estimated in excess of \$1,000,000, a Road Commission allocation of \$16,606, and chip-and-seal (~\$75,000) anticipated in mid-July. A member urged prioritizing repaving the downtown Alden corridor; others noted the county may repave downtown at no cost (anticipated 2027) and that downtown curbs and sidewalks are county property. No action was taken on road priorities.

- **Records archiving:** the office assistant reported that, while scanning and archiving township records, the resolutions for 2009, 2010, and 2011 and the entire 2011 board minutes appear to be missing, underscoring the need to retain secure copies at the office.

RESOLUTION — SALARY

A separate resolution to approve a 3% wage increase, based on cost of living and the Consumer Price Index, for the salaried positions was adopted by roll-call vote.

APPROVAL OF BUDGET

Motion by Schilling to adopt the July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027 Helena Township budget of \$1,133,680. The motion was supported and carried by roll-call vote: Leffew — yes; Rice — yes; Peeples — yes; Schilling — yes; Bartz — yes (5-0).

Deputy Clerk compensation: the Board discussed moving the Deputy Clerk, Victoria Bruns, from salary (approximately \$580 per month) to an hourly rate, with an expected schedule of roughly 10-15 hours per week tracked in QuickBooks. No action was taken; the matter will be brought back as a separate resolution.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Bartz to adjourn. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by Supervisor Peeples at approximately 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Oryana Leffew, Helena Township Clerk