

Helena Township Board Meeting Minutes

August 13, 2026, 7:00 PM

8751 Helena Road, Alden, MI 49612

Helena Township Minutes are posted at www.helenatownshipmichigan.gov

DRAFT

1. Call to Order: Supervisor Peeples called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 PM.

2. Pledge of Allegiance: All present participated. A moment of silence was then observed in memory of a recently deceased long-time Township resident and volunteer.

3. Roll Call:

Present: Supervisor Butch Peeples; Clerk Oryana Leffew; Treasurer Catherine Rice; Trustees Bartz and Trustee Jim Schilling.

Absent: None.

4. Approval of Agenda:

Motion by Trustee Schilling, supported by Clerk Leffew, to approve the August 13, 2026 agenda as presented. All in favor. Motion carried.

5. Conflicts of Interest: No conflicts of interest were declared.

6. Public Comment (3-minute limit per speaker):

- A resident/community participant thanked those attending Township meetings and volunteering on Township committees and election work and encouraged additional residents to serve as election inspectors.
- At the Board's request, Antrim County Sheriff's Detective Martin introduced the department's dual-purpose narcotics K-9 Sgt. Zeke and summarized the K-9's work during the prior year. Helena Township recognized the K-9 as an honorary Township citizen and presented an award and dog treats.
- No additional public comment was offered before the Board moved to approval of minutes.

7. Approval of Minutes - July 9, 2026, HTBOT Regular Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Treasurer Rice, supported by Clerk Leffew, to approve July 9, 2026 Regular Meeting minutes. All in favor. Motion carried.

Follow-up: A question was raised regarding budget figures published in the Antrim Review following the budget meeting. Clerk Leffew agreed to review the publication/affidavit and submit a correction if needed.

8. Treasurer Report:

Treasurer Catherine Rice presented the July 2026 Treasurer's Report:

- Beginning Balance (7/1/2026): \$1,321,601.51
- Total Receipts: \$7,307.99
- Total Disbursements: \$84,418.29
- Bank Balance (7/31/2026): \$1,244,491.21

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Discussion: The Board discussed a Visa charge appearing under Supervisor C.C. Peeples' name. It was clarified that the Township Visa card is issued in his name and that the charge represented Township purchases, including materials for the Community Center bathroom project. The report description was requested to be revised to avoid confusion. Intuit charges were identified as QuickBooks/payroll-related expenses.

Motion by Trustee Butch Bartz, supported by Trustee Jim Schilling, to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented. All in favor. Motion carried.

9. Presentation of Bills: July vendor expenses presented for Board review totaled \$58,139.07. The Board noted that payroll was not included in that vendor-only report.

10. Fire Chief / Sheriff / County Commissioner / TAA Reports:

a. South Torch Lake Fire & Rescue – Fire Chief Jesse Lane: Reported 49 calls for service in July across EMS, structure fires, crashes, alarms, water rescue and storm-related activity; overall activity is substantially above the prior year. Three personnel completed Emergency Medical Responder training and were awaiting National Registry testing. Annual vehicle service/testing was completed successfully, and station repair/construction projects were reported complete.

b. Antrim County Sheriff's Office – Sheriff K. Hoch: The Sheriff's Office reported approximately 140 calls for service in Helena Township, including 31 traffic stops and multiple water-rescue assists. Sheriff/departments representatives addressed public questions regarding Flock license-plate cameras, emphasizing that the system captures still photographs rather than video, does not use facial recognition, and does not see inside vehicles. The department also reported recent narcotics seizures, progress training new deputies, work on a Community Mental Health partnership/grant approaching \$300,000, and exploration of expanded drone capability. The Election Day suspicious-package response was reviewed; the building was evacuated for approximately an hour, emergency personnel secured the area, and voting resumed without reported loss of voting opportunity.

c. Antrim County Commissioner – T. VanAlstine: Reported that a FEMA in-person assistance site for April flood relief had opened in Central Lake and that the County Public Safety Center project was progressing toward a bid package.

d. Township Ambulance Authority – M. Robinson: Reported completion of EMR course testing and provided information on the annual Advantage Plus enrollment program. Program information and contact details are available at the Township; residents with Medicaid/spend-down questions were advised to confirm eligibility directly with program representatives.

11. Speaker: No scheduled speaker.

12. Communications:

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a. Election Update – August 4, 2026 Primary: Clerk Leffew reported 89 Early Voting voters over the nine-day period and fewer than 400 total voters on Election Day, absentee voting and Election Day. The Board discussed the cost and staffing burden of nine days of Early Voting for a township of Helena's size. Clerk Leffew reported an upcoming Northern Michigan clerk roundtable with Attorney General Dana Nessel's team and Secretary of State representatives and identified Early Voting requirements as a topic she intended to raise. County officials complimented the Township election team for reconciling successfully despite the Election Day evacuation.

b. Upcoming Election Inspector Training – September 29, 2026 at 2pm: Training is scheduled for September 29, 2026 at 2:00 PM at the Antrim County facility. Additional election inspectors are being recruited for the November election.

13. Committee Reports:

a. Zoning – J. Petersen — L4029 Author: New Zoning Administrator Jackie Petersen reported that she had not yet issued new permits but was actively handling zoning inquiries and had met with Township counsel regarding enforcement. She is drafting a new nuisance ordinance. The Board discussed the L-4029 form and requested correction/verification of the preparer line before filing because Clerk Leffew's name appeared as preparer although she did not prepare the document. The Township's new web contact form is routing zoning inquiries and creating an administrative record of submissions.

b. Parks & Recreation – Seeking Volunteers: The Township is seeking volunteers. Remaining members reported that they are continuing to track pending grant opportunities and other ongoing Parks & Recreation matters so projects.

c. Planning Commission – J. Gurr: The Commission approved final language adding data centers to the Township's renewable-energy/battery-storage ordinance and forwarded the amendment to the Antrim County Planning Commission for review. The report emphasized that the amendment is intended to preserve Township review authority and conditions if an application is received. The Commission is also refining its minutes/meeting process procedures and welcoming new member Rian Wanstreet.

d. Roads – Bartz: Reported continued delay in the contracted chip-seal work because the contractor had not yet reached Antrim County. Seasonal-road washout and grading concerns were discussed. Residents were encouraged to contact the Road Commission regarding specific maintenance issues.

14. Old Business:

a. Municipal Civil Infractions Ordinance Adoption – In Progress: Zoning Administrator Petersen explained that the ordinance establishes a municipal ordinance violations process/bureau to allow local handling of ordinance violations before escalation to district court. Township counsel's revisions have been incorporated.

Motion by Trustee Schilling, supported by Clerk Leffew, to adopt the Municipal Civil Infractions / Municipal Ordinance Violations Bureau Ordinance dated August 13, 2026. All in favor. Motion carried.

b. Speed Signage Programing Update – Update on MPH Signage: The LED speed signs are installed and are to be paired with 35 MPH regulatory signage where applicable. Traffic-count/data reporting is being prepared for publication on the Township website. Discussion noted that speed-limit changes on unposted roads require State Police review.

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- c. Ball Park Update – South side fence has been installed:** The south-side fence has been installed, separating Township property from the adjoining private property.
- d. MOU – Historical Society Update:** The MOU had not yet been signed; final review remained pending.
- e. Community Center Bathroom Remodel Update:** Materials have been obtained. Work includes replacement of deteriorated partitions, floor refinishing, updated fixtures, ADA mirrors/benches, and a baby-changing station in the men's room.
- f. Bridge / Walkway Update:** The pedestrian bridge has been fabricated/donated by Tim and Lori Stone. Volunteers and an engineer are working on the foundation/support design. The Township expects to fund the connecting sidewalk and related protective/ADA features. Rain-garden/drainage improvements are also being coordinated to reduce sand and stormwater entering Spencer Creek.
- g. Anavon IT Update:** Clerk Leffew reported ongoing cybersecurity hardening of Township systems, including the .gov website, firewall protections, Township devices, email and authentication. The Board discussed recent phishing attempts targeting municipalities and election operations. Maner Costerisan are expected to return with recommendations and to assist with written IT, equipment/property, password and data-protection policies.
- h. BS&A Cloud Update – Tax & Assessing Modules:** Tax and Assessing modules remain in transition. BS&A requested feedback on Cloud implementation. The Board discussed completing .gov email migration, multi-factor authentication and the availability of Anavon/BS&A remote support.
- i. Trimedia / Cemetery QR Codes:** Ground-penetrating radar and cemetery mapping work is progressing. A public-facing QR/search interface is being developed so users can locate burials and view headstone/lot information. The internal version will ultimately include plot ownership, reserved/open lots, GPR results and editing tools. Data import and deed verification remain in progress.



15. New Business:

- j. Downtown Sidewalks & Curbs:** Supervisor Peeples reported on discussions with Antrim County Road Commission representatives, local business owners, and an engineer regarding downtown Alden improvements. The Antrim County Road Commission is responsible for the roadway and planned paving, while Helena Township is responsible for the curb and gutter. The adjoining property/business owners were identified as responsible for the sidewalks. An engineer is developing cost information for needed curb repairs, particularly along the more deteriorated south side, so Township work can be coordinated before the County paving project. Sidewalk replacement and funding will be considered separately. No formal action was taken.
- k. DYKEMA Franchise Request / Resolution:** The Board reviewed a broadband/fiber right-of-way request involving use of existing public right-of-way, with Frontier identified in the materials. The Board expressed agreement to proceed with execution of the submitted documents.
- l. Resolution – Bank Records Authorization:** The Board considered a resolution authorizing the Township Clerk to obtain ten years of historical Township bank records, preferably in electronic form, as part of the ongoing records review.

Motion by Trustee Schilling, supported by Clerk Leffew, to approve the Bank Records Authorization Resolution. Roll call vote: Supervisor Peeples – Yes; Clerk Leffew – Yes; Treasurer Rice – Yes; Trustee Schilling – Yes; Trustee Bartz – Yes. Motion carried 5-0.

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m. Resolution – Township Recording Secretary: The Board reviewed a resolution establishing a Township Recording Secretary function to improve consistency and timeliness of minutes for Township boards, commissions and committees. The resolution appoints Clerk Leffew to the function for separately assigned meetings and provides compensation of \$150 per meeting, with zoning-related administrative duties continuing to be coordinated with the Zoning Administrator.

Motion by Trustee Schilling, supported by Supervisor Peeples, to adopt the Township Recording Secretary Resolution. Roll call vote: Supervisor Peeples – Yes; Treasurer Rice – Yes; Trustee Schilling – Yes; Trustee Bartz – Yes; Clerk Leffew – Abstain. Motion carried 4-0-1.

n. Vendor Requesting Electronic Payment / U.S. Postal Service: The Board discussed vendor requests for ACH/electronic payment because of mail delays, stolen checks and check-washing/fraud risks. Members discussed prior incidents involving altered or fraudulent checks and the administrative cost of paper checks and the administrative labor cost. The discussion supported moving toward secure electronic payment for requesting vendors, subject to appropriate banking controls.

16. Announcements:

- A dam presentation by Leslie Meyers is scheduled for August 26, 2026 at 6:00 PM at the Clearwater Township community room.
- The Antrim Conservation District has made progress on staffing/leadership and finalized arrangements to return to its Bellaire facility.
- The Sheriff's DARE golf fundraiser is scheduled for September 7 at Hawks Eye Golf Course.
- The Alden Volunteers Poker Walk is scheduled for August 29.
- The Board acknowledged notice from the Antrim County Clerk's Office regarding the passing of Star Township Clerk Hoogerhyde and extended condolences.

17. Public Comment on above items (3-minute limit per speaker):

Data Centers: Discussion continued regarding the Planning Commission's proposed data-center language. A resident asked whether the amendment would preserve the Township's ability to address noise, utilities, water and other impacts. Planning Commission representatives explained that the amendment is intended to preserve local review and conditions and that the County Planning Commission will review the language before it returns to the Township Board. Gary Mayes, participating by Zoom, advocated consideration of a temporary data-center moratorium while the Township studies infrastructure, water, noise and other impacts. No Board action was taken.

18. Motion to Pay Bills:

Motion by Trustee Bartz, supported by Clerk Leffew, to pay the bills as presented. All in favor. Motion carried.

19. Adjournment: Supervisor Peeples adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:06 PM.

Recorded & Submitted by: Oryana Leffew | Helena Township Clerk

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