



A Prime Community

Township Board Orientation/Training Strategy

Meridian Township, 5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864

meridian.mi.us

June 2023



General Information

Introduction

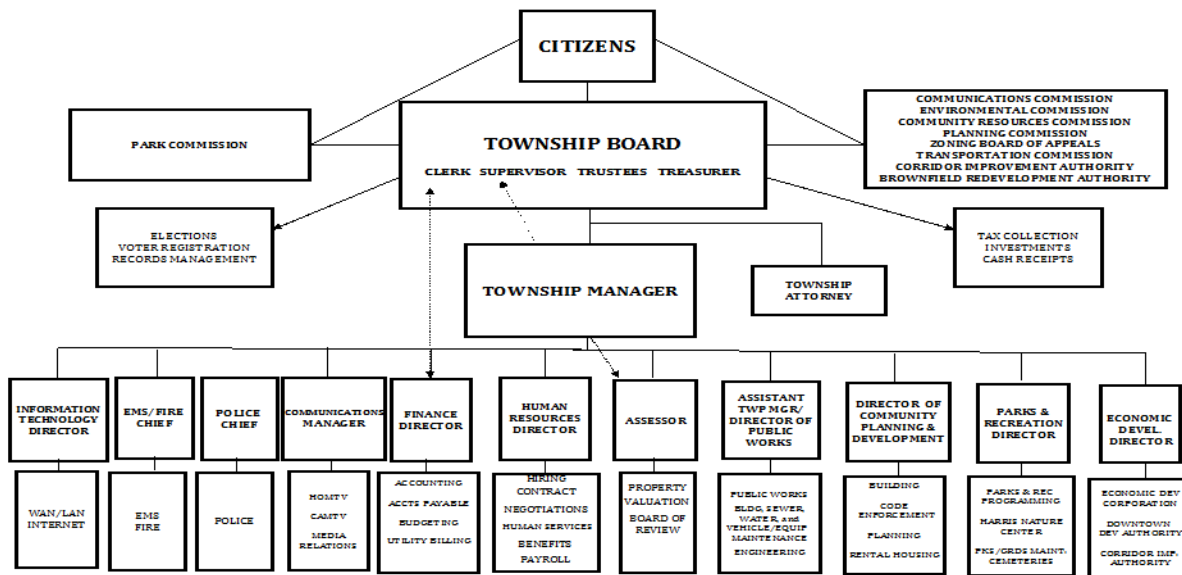
Meridian Township became certified with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program in 2018 to help enhance its local planning, zoning, and development review process. As part of the certification, the township encourages ongoing training for staff, elected officials, and appointed officials charged with making development related decisions for the community. Meridian Township's development decision-making boards and commissions include the following:

- **Planning Commission (PC)** The Planning Commission serves in both an advisory and administrative role for matters relating to land use and development. The Planning Commission prepares the Township's Master Plan, hears and decides special use permits and makes recommendations on amendments to the zoning ordinance text or map, subdivisions, planned unit developments and mixed use planned unit developments. The Planning Commission consists of nine members appointed by the Township Board to serve a three-year term. Candidates must have an interest in planning and zoning and a willingness to learn.
- **Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)** The Zoning Board of Appeals serves as a quasi-judicial body which hears and decides matters relating to the application of the zoning ordinance such as a variance from an ordinance standard, an appeal of a zoning official's decision or an interpretation of the ordinance. The ZBA consists of five members and two alternates, who are appointed by the Township Board to serve a three year term and have the ability to understand or learn zoning ordinances. One member is from the Planning Commission and one is a Township Trustee.
- **Downtown Development Authority (DDA)** In 2005, the Meridian Township Board adopted Ordinance 2005-12 creating the Meridian Township Downtown Development Authority to encompass the area commonly referred to as "Downtown Okemos" and/or commonly known as the "Okemos Village Area." The DDA was created to halt property value deterioration and increase property tax valuation where possible in its business district, to eliminate the causes of such deterioration and to promote economic growth in and surrounding the Downtown Development Authority District and to adhere to the powers, duties, and limitations as prescribed by Public Act 197 of 1975. The DDA consists of up to twelve members, a majority of whom must live, own land or have a business interest within the DDA district. Members serve a four year term and have experience in business, real estate, law, finance, or development.
- **Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA)** The Corridor Improvement Authority was established to correct and prevent deterioration in business districts, encourage historic preservation, authorize the acquisition and disposal of interests in real and personal property, authorize the creation and implementation of development plans and development areas in the districts, promote the economic growth of the districts and to adhere to the powers, duties and limitations as prescribed by Public Act 280 of 2005. The CIA consists of between 5 and 9 residents, who serve four year terms, a minimum of two who represent residents and the others who have business and/or land ownership interests along the corridor. Members have experience in business, real estate, law, finance, or development.
- **Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA)** The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority reviews proposals for the redevelopment of eligible property and determines what financial incentives are necessary to assist the redevelopment. The authority prepares or reviews plans for an eligible brownfield project cleanups. The authority then recommends to the Township Board that a public hearing regarding the plan held and action taken on the request. The Township Board is the final approval authority for any Brownfield Plan. The BRA consists of seven total members, serving three year terms, as follows: the Township Manager, a member of the Planning Commission, Economic Development Corporation and Environmental Commission as well as three members having an interest and expertise in the fields of engineering, finance and law.



- Economic Development Corporation (EDC)** The Economic Development Corporation was founded in 1981 and operates independently of the Township government, but its actions are review-able by the Township Board. It is a locally charter public corporation whose purpose is to encourage economic development in the Township. The State Legislature authorized the formation of such public corporations by passing the EDC Act of 1974 (PA 338). The EDC works with local business owners, the Meridian Area Business Association (MABA) and regional partners like the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP), the Lansing Regional Chamber and Tri-County Regional Planning Commission to boost the economic vitality of the Township. The EDC consists of not less than nine members who serve a six year term and have experience in business, real estate, law, finance, or development.

Township Organization Chart



Dotted Lines – Denotes Relationship defined by State Statute

Township Goals

In the fall each year, the Township Board establishes the creative vision for the upcoming year. Below you will find the link to the current year’s goals and action plan.

<https://www.meridian.mi.us/home/showpublisheddocument/25652/63806019013760000>

Township Board Policy Manual

Below you will find the link to the Board’s Policy Manual.

<https://www.meridian.mi.us/home/showpublisheddocument/25922/638108636367870000>

Township Board Orientation

We appreciate your interest in serving as an elected official in Meridian Township. We hope the new Board Member Orientation below will provide you with a comprehensive overview of our operations.



Accounting and Budgeting

The Department of Accounting and Budgeting is responsible for all aspects of the Township's accounting system. The Department performs accounts payable, pension, and purchasing functions, utility billing, financial reporting, budget development and monitoring. The Department maintains the general ledger, processes all outgoing payments through the accounts payable system, reviews purchase orders, and prepares and monitors the budget. The Department is also responsible for preparing and collecting utility bills for 13,000 customers.

Assessing

Assessment data, which include a legal description, building specifications, building and land sketches, building photos, and other information, are computerized for each parcel of property located within Meridian Township. The information is continually updated and available to the public on the Township Website and in the Assessing Department office. Property owners, property owners' representatives (e.g., realtors, private appraisers, attorneys, etc.), and other Township departments rely heavily on information maintained by the Assessing Department.

On March 15, 1994, the voters of the State of Michigan approved Proposal A which made significant changes to the Michigan Constitution. Starting in 1995, property taxes have been calculated using taxable value, rather than State Equalized Value (SEV) which was used prior to 1995. The revised property tax levy calculation is as follows:

Taxable Value x Millage Rate = Property Tax Levy

Using the data created and maintained by the Assessing Department, the Assessing Department has the responsibility of determining both the SEV and taxable value of all parcels of real and personal property within the Township each year. According to Michigan law, SEV is to be set at 50 percent of true cash value which is synonymous with market value.

Planning Division

The Planning Division is involved with long range planning, zoning administration, and coordinating the review of new development projects and a variety of special projects. The Township's Master Plan established goals and objectives for growth and development. This long-range plan includes a future land use map, standards for parks and other public facilities, and a thoroughfare plan. The vision-based plan establishes the foundation for adopting the zoning code, subdivision regulations, and other plan implementation tools that are also administered by the Planning Division.

Building Division

The Building Division consists of three building inspectors. Building inspectors administer and enforce the State construction code and must be registered with the State. The primary responsibilities of the building inspectors are for plan review, foundation inspections and structural inspections for residential and commercial buildings. The Chief Building Inspector also serves as an ex officio member of the Building Board of Appeals. The Township has a contract with the City of East Lansing for the city to provide plumbing, electrical, and mechanical inspections. The Township also has a contract with the City of Mason for the Township to provide the city with plan review and building inspections.

Rental Housing Division

The rental housing program was started in 1993 to establish a process for the continued maintenance of a sound stock of rental housing within the Township. A building or premises used for dwelling purposes that is rented or leased is required to be registered with the Township. The Township has two part-time (25 hours per week) rental housing inspectors. The rental housing inspectors perform annual inspections of structures and properties.



Code Enforcement Division

The Township has one full-time code enforcement officer. The responsibilities of the code enforcement officer include responding to complaints concerning abandoned vehicles, tall grass, trash and debris, illegal signs and other violations of the Township's Code of Ordinances.

Communications

The highest priority of the Meridian Township Communications Department is to provide residents with an increased access to transparency in governance with relevant information in a timely fashion. The Department is responsible for coordinating a strategic and comprehensive effort to inform the public of the Township's goals, plans, activities and events through various multimedia platforms including web, digital and print. The Department ensures that all media and communications successfully reaches their intended audience. Other main functions of the Communications Department include: serving as the Local Franchise Authority for nine Public, Educational and Governmental (PEG) Channels in Meridian, providing assistance to the community pertaining to cable concerns, overseeing the operations and production for HOMTV (Government Access Channel) and CAMTV (Public Access Channel), operating a multimedia television internship training program and providing staff support to the Township's Communications Commission.

Economic Development

The Economic Development Department supports and facilitates development, redevelopment, and business retention efforts to encourage a sustainable and vibrant community where businesses thrive and residents have a variety of local shopping, dining and housing options.

Fire Department

The Meridian Township Fire Department (MTFD) is an all service fire department providing fire suppression, fire prevention/education, fire investigation, advanced life support, and technical rescue covering a fire district of 32 square miles. We are a 36 employee department including: The Fire Chief, Administrative Assistant, Fire Marshal, Training/EMS Chief, two Battalion Chiefs, three Captains, seven Lieutenants, and 20 Firefighters.

Units staff and respond out of three stations:

- Station 91 located at 5000 Okemos Road (including Administrative Offices)
- Station 92 located at 2140 Haslett Road
- Station 93 located at 3711 Okemos Road

MTFD operates on a two shift/platoon model. Each shift is on 24 hours, off 24 hours, on 24 hours, then off 72 hours. Our daily staff includes a minimum of seven employees: 1 Battalion Chief, 3 Lieutenants, and 3 Firefighters. Response is provided 24/7, 365 with an average of 5,000 emergency calls annually.

Human Resources

The Human Resources Department is an administrative division of the Township Manager's Office and is responsible for multiple employment matters and labor relations currently serving 151 full-time employees, as well as, additional part-time interns and seasonal workers.

The Human Resources Director, under the direction of the Township Manager, represents the Township in contract negotiations with the following 7 (seven) unions:

- Administrative Professional Employees – TPOAM



- Department of Public Works Employees – TPOAM
- Non-Supervisory Professional Employees – TPOAM
- Professional Supervisory Association – Serviced by TPOAM
- Police Officers Association of Michigan (Non-Supervisory) -- POAM
- Police Supervisory Unit – CCLP (Capitol City Labor Program, Inc.)
- Meridian Township Fire Fighters Association – IAFF (International Association of Fire Fighters)

Information Technology

The Department currently provides oversight and support to all technology related operations in the Township. This extends to all Township departments at more than eight facilities, interconnections to neighboring communities for regional sharing of data and services, maintenance of more than 30 virtual & physical network servers & appliances, integrations with four (4) hosted services, connection to multiple regional cooperatives, support of over 170 workstations & mobile devices, connection of approximately 275 telephones and oversight of more than 600 total network devices. These are connected across a network of private fiber, copper cables, and leased network services from a variety of commercial service providers. Over time the Department of Information Technology has become increasingly involved in all areas throughout Township operations. Technology remains central to improving efficiency and productivity across the organization.

Parks

The Meridian Township Park System consists of 958 acres of land in 30 sites (parks) throughout the Township. A five (5) member elected Park Commission oversees the park system. The Park Commission holds 12 regular televised meetings and various special and committee meetings as required throughout the year. The Director of Parks and Recreation provides staff support to the elected Park Commission, who work together to prioritize and implement all aspects of park planning, design, acquisition and development. The parks are funded by a .667 mill Park Millage (renewed through 2026) and an allocation from the General Fund.

Police Department

The Meridian Township Police Department (MTPD) is committed to establishing and maintaining partnerships in our community; and with understanding, cooperation and equality we strive to enhance the quality of life and protect the rights of our community. Since 2011, the Meridian Township Police Department has contracted with Williamstown Township to provide law enforcement services in our neighboring community.

The Meridian Township Police Department is currently authorized for 41 sworn positions. There are 3.5 civilian positions, six crossing guards and nine part-time cadets.

Department of Public Works

Created by Township Ordinance in 1974, the Department of Public Works is headed by the Director of Public Works & Engineering and is responsible for all matters related to the management, maintenance and operation of the Township public water and sewer utilities, dumps and landfills, facilities, grounds and cemeteries.

The Department employs 26 employees and 2-3 part-time employees each summer. The Department is organized into five (5) divisions: Administration, Engineering, Field Services, Environmental Programs and Geographic Information System (GIS).

Types of Training

- **Webinars and YouTube Videos** Many organizations offer online resources and presentations on relevant



development and land-use topics. Webinars allow individuals to save time and money, avoid the need to travel, and gain an added element of convenience and flexibility to suit trainee's schedules.

- **On-Site Training Workshops** This allows for training topics to be brought in-person to Township Hall, these types of trainings are typically provided by industry professionals or other experts in the field. It is more convenient and often more cost-effective for large groups rather than traveling to an off-site conference. On-site workshops also allow for collaboration between boards and commissions and potentially with other communities.
- **Off-Site Conferences and Workshops** These trainings are available across Michigan and across the country. They cover a wide variety of topics and allow for networking in addition to educational benefit.
- **Article Discussions** Staff may present articles of interest and relevance which may facilitate general group education and discussion.

Training Resources

The following organizations offer relevant trainings, workshops, and conferences which may be available to Meridian Township's development related elected and appointed officials and staff members.

- Michigan Townships Association (MTA)
- Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP)
- Michigan Association of Planning (MAP)
- Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
- Michigan Municipal League (MML)
- Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSDHA)
- Michigan State University Extension (MSU-E)
- Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) Library

Staff Contacts

Each Township Board member is encouraged to reach out to the Township Manager with suggestions and requests for training. Although this guide provides a recommendation on training curriculum, it is important that board members communicate to township staff if they are interested in certain training opportunities to pursue, either individually or as a group. Township staff will communicate potential training opportunities to board members as they become available.

Frank L. Walsh, Township Manager walsh@meridian.mi.us

Michelle Prinz, Executive Assistant prinz@meridian.mi.us

Tim Schmitt, Community Planning & Development Director schmitt@meridian.mi.us

Policies and Procedures

Training Expectations

RRC strongly encourages Meridian Township to establish annual training targets for Board members. Doing this in the form of hours allows the township to measure progress, but also affords flexibility to members to meet those goals in whatever way is easiest for them. As such, each Board member, shall strive to attend a **minimum of four hours of training annually**.



Annual Joint Meeting

To improve communication and collaboration between development related boards and commissions, the township has established a tradition of holding an annual joint meeting of the Planning Commission and Township Board at the beginning of each year. Additional joint meetings or trainings can be scheduled, as needed.

Training Reminders

Township staff will include a standing agenda item on all of its development related board and commission agendas. This encourages consistent reminders about upcoming trainings and report outs from recent training events. Township staff will also encourage training by emailing opportunities to board members or including training opportunities as part of meeting packets. Board members are encouraged to share training opportunities they come across with each other.

Post-Training Communication

Upon completion of training, staff and board members are asked to share their lessons learned. This can be done via email, through handouts included in meeting packets, or verbally at the following meeting of the board. Township staff will remind board members who attend trainings of this expectation.

Funding

The Planning and Economic Development Department, Administration Department, along with the Township Board each have a budget line item dedicated to professional conferences and dues. Utilization of township funding for training is subject to availability and approval from the Planning and Economic Development Director and/or the Township Manager.

Annual Update

Training priorities will likely shift from year to year depending on emerging trends and the community's planning goals. As such, this document should be reviewed each year and adjusted for the upcoming year.

Recommended Training

Training is an essential activity to keep staff and officials current on emerging trends, mitigate risk to communities, and help communities achieve the goals outlined in their plans. The following table outlines some recommended topic areas that the Township Board may wish to explore.

Topic	Resources
Michigan Townships Assoc.	Annual Conference, Capital Conference, New Officials Orientation, MTA Publications, MTA Online Learning Center, Township Governance Academy
Michigan Municipal League	Annual Convention, Elected Officials Academy, CapCon, Newly Elected Officials Training, Parliamentary Procedure
Code Enforcement	RRC Quicksheet: The Ordinance Enforcement Team
Conditional Rezoning	RRC Quicksheet: Conditional Rezoning
Density	AARP Livability Fact Sheet - Density RRC Quicksheet: Density and Efficiency



Topic	Resources
Development	RRC QuickSheet: Benefits of Mixed-Use Development RRC QuickSheet: How Development Impacts the Community's Budget
Development Review Process	RRC QuickSheet: Understanding the Development Process RRC QuickSheet: Streamlining Development without Sacrificing Quality
Electric Vehicles	SEMCOG Planning for Electric Vehicles (EV)? Here is what you need to know
Housing	AARP's Making Room: Housing for a Changing America RRC Quick Sheet: Affordable Housing Myths RRC Quick Sheet: Missing Middle Housing Solutions
Master Plan	RRC Master Plan Update Guide RRC Quick Sheet: Getting What You Want: Master Plan to Zoning to Development RRC Quick Sheet: Translating Community Values into Land Use
Meetings	Open Meetings Act Handbook MML: Successful Meetings RR Quick Sheet: How to Conduct a Meeting
Open Space	RRC QuickSheet: The Value of Public Open Space
Parking	AARP Livability Fact Sheet - Parking RRC Quick Sheet: Do You Really Need All that Parking? Strong Towns: Parking Minimums: From 101 to Taking Action
Placemaking	MML: A Decade of Placemaking in Michigan AARP The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit
Roundabouts	AARP Livability Fact Sheet - Roundabouts
Streetscape	AARP Livability Fact Sheet - Street Trees RRC Quick Sheet: Designing Better Streets RRC Quick Sheet: Pedestrian Scaled Design
Stormwater Management	RRC Quick Sheet: Green Infrastructure and Stormwater Management
Traffic Calming	AARP Livability Fact Sheet – Traffic Calming AARP Livability Fact Sheet – Road Diets