

Au Train Township Board Special Meeting
January 26, 2023
6:00 o'clock p.m.

Pursuant to authorization and posting, the Au Train Township Board convened on the above date.

The Meeting was called to order by Supervisor Michelle Doucette, with the following members present: Mary Johnson, Clerk; Kristy Cota, Treasurer; Jake Miller, Trustee; and Tom Balmes, Trustee.

The purpose of the Special Board Meeting is to meet with State and Local Representatives, as well as residents who were affected by the Flooding Event December 22nd through December 26th, 2022 of the Au Train River, to initiate planning for future events. Where do we go from here?

*Visitors Present – Approximately 20 persons attended. A complete list is on file with Clerk Johnson.

*Agenda - Supervisor Doucette presented the Agenda for consideration.

*Welcome - Supervisor Doucette welcome State Agencies and residents of our Township to the meeting. Representatives who were also invited but did not attend was the US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

*Background - Supervisor Doucette provided some details on the current required permits status. The current permit with the USACE is good through 2025. The permit applied for and approved with the State of Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) is good through 1/19/2028. The Township was authorized to move not more than 5,000 cubic yards of sand over a 5 year period. The MDOT application has been submitted. In addition a grant application through Federal Emergency Management (FEMA) - BRIC (Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities) program was submitted, which would provide consulting and technical services to the Township on developing a solution to the ongoing issue which caused the flooding to occur in the first place. The grant awards will be chosen this Spring.

As noted, MDOT was not able to attend. Supervisor Doucette indicated that Dawn Gustafson, the Regional Manager stated their only concern was the bridge and State Highway M28. She also noted that because the State Highway M28 bridge piers are built on a sand base there is more concern about their stability in instances of ice blockages and removal of same. In addition, she noted that they would not allow residents individually to apply for and obtain a permit for dredging. A government agency (Township) must take out the permit for legal and liability reasons.

*Presentations - Supervisor Doucette noted that Agencies present and their representatives will now provide information to the residents.

Lt. Steven Derusha of the Michigan State Police Emergency Management and Homeland Security - Region 8 District Coordinator, provided information to the audience on the role they play in flooding events. They are the liaison for the State to work with local communities under Public Act 390. Lt. Derusha provided instances where they were able to provide assistance as a reference. The Department is concerned about Hazard Mitigation when local infrastructure is at risk or has been damaged beyond what a local community could respond to. He provided his contact information and noted he is available to answer any questions.

Residents then had the opportunity to ask specific questions of Lt. Derusha.

Linda Hansen - EGLE Representative and the UP Liaison for FEMA provided a presentation and handout to residents (which is now also available on the Au Train Township website). She provided information on the concerns about the river, the flooding history, possible solutions, the BRIC Grant application and how, if awarded to the Township could provide much needed direct technical services, and the process of obtaining flood insurance. Flood insurance is available for anyone in the Township to purchase as Au Train Township does participate in the National program.

A long term lasting solution to the problem will not be found on the beach, but rather in finding a solution to address the flood plain overflow.

Cassie Abrahms from EGLE was also present and provided assistance to Supervisor Doucette in the EGLE permit application and BRIC Grant application.

It was also noted that Renewable World Energies provided assistance during the event by reducing the flow over at the Forest Lake Dam for as long as they could.

Public Comment - A call for public comment was made. Comments were received by Daryl Kobie, Nancy and Doug Bailey, Jesse and Katrina Cadwell, Louie Eiseman, and Tom Hill.

It was overwhelmingly clear that residents want a commitment from the Township Board to go to legislature for assistance, develop an interim plan for immediate relief should an ice blockage occur again this winter, maintain the necessary permits to act immediately, and take on the financial burden and responsibility to cover the cost for relief.

Board Member Comments - Each Board member had the opportunity to express any of their concerns. They also provided clarification on some statements from residents. Clerk Johnson noted that the immediate action and the expenditure of funds for relief would need to be a Township Board decision. One Board member cannot have the authority to spend Township funds without prior approval and a blanket approval is not an acceptable appropriation. It was further noted that despite several attempts to have an General Operating Millage approved, Au Train Township currently governs its expenditures without one. The cost for dredging was \$7,260.00. These funds were not budgeted and will need come from the SLFRF monies awarded to the Township for COVID Relief. Funds were not appropriated to the Catastrophic Fund Budget item for the current year.

If there are further ice blockages this winter, and in the future, the concerns about the safety of the excavator operator will be assessed by the appropriate agencies before any final decision to proceed is made. And although suggested, maintenance dredging at the river mouth it is not option. This is not something the Township is authorized to do.

The relief and or solution goes back to MDOT. It is their bridge, their highway and their beach where the river flows out into Lake Superior. The Township and local residents will need their cooperation and willingness to assist in a long term solution to the ongoing vulnerability of the Au Train River mouth becoming blocked with ice causing a flooding event. Involving those who can work directly with MDOT is the ultimate goal. Our State Legislators will need to be contacted and become actively involved in helping our community develop a solution. Finally, it was stated that river front property owners have experienced flooding for years and will need to continue to be proactive in protecting their own property by whatever means that would take.

***ADJOURNMENT**

Being no further business, MOTION by Clerk Johnson and seconded by Treasurer Cota, to adjourn the meeting. MOTION CARRIED. MEETING ADJOURNED at 9:03 pm.

Submitted by: Mary Walther Johnson, Au Train Township Clerk