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M-119 TUNNEL OF TREES SCENIC HERITAGE ROUTE COMMITTEE

DRAFT Minutes

Tuesday, August 12th, 2025

Cross Village Township Hall

5954 Wadsworth Rd, Cross Village, MI 49740

Present

Laurelynn Harris, Cross Village Township
Garon Gopigian, West Traverse Township
Sue Rentrop, Cross Village / Emmet County Lakeshore Association
Joey Arbaugh, West Traverse Township
Jerry Root, Readmond Township
Naomi Singer, Cross Village Township
Sgt. Cole Brady, Emmet County Sheriff's Office
Heidi Phaneuf, MDOT
C. Ben Taylor, MDOT
Isha Pithwa, Networks Northwest
Cassidy Robarts, Networks Northwest

Online presence – Clayton Sigmann, MDOT; Neil Ahrens, Emmet County Commissioner; Jamie Judson

Absent

Dale Scott, Friendship Township (Chair); James Fisher, Friendship Township, Larry Wallen, Readmond Township; Don Schaplowsky; Readmond Township; Carolyn Sandford, West Traverse Township; Franz Neubrecht, Emmet County Lakeshore Association; Jim Anderson, Friendship Township

I. Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 9:34 by temporary Chair Laurelynn Harris. Attendance was recorded for those present and of online participants.

II. Public Comment

None.

III. Law Enforcement Presence during October

Sergeant Cole Brady addressed concerns about road policing on M-119, particularly during the Fall season. He noted challenges in enforcing private property parking without homeowner complaints or clear signage. It was suggested that the unspent budget for FY 2025 could be used for temporary "private property no parking" signs at key entry points along the tunnel, however Clayton Sigmann (MDOT) noted that the funds could only be used for designing signage, not printing.

Sergeant Cole informed the committee about current staffing shortages within the Sheriff's Office, with only two to three deputies available at a time for the entire county, due to five new deputies

being in training. He also clarified that for non-emergencies, individuals should still call 911, as this allows for immediate location tracking, unlike the administrative line.

Motion to send the request for temporary signage along the Tunnel of Trees for the Fall season to MDOT for consideration by Joey, supported by Sue. All in favor, none opposed.

IV. Review and Adoption of Minutes from July 8th, 2025

No additions or corrections. The July meeting minutes were adopted as distributed.

V. Reports

a. Chair Opening Remarks

Isha read Dale's chairopening remarks. See attachment with the minutes.

b. Emmet County Planning and Zoning

Laurelynn reported on behalf of Tammy Doernenburg from Emmet County Planning and Zoning. Their office is working on two complaints filed. Both properties are within Friendship Township. One complaint is related to soil erosion and the other is related to setback & fence zoning standards. They have been working with the property owners to resolve the issues.

The Emmet County Master Plan process is underway. The website is live and is available via the County's home page or Planning & Zoning page. There will continue to be opportunities for people to get involved in the process.

The Harbor Inc. Annual meeting will be held August 13th, 2025 at the Cross Village Township Hall at 9 AM.

c. Pure Michigan Byways Workshop

The Pure Michigan Byways Workshop will be held on November 3, 2025 in Gaylord at the University Center. Isha encouraged all Committee members to attend.

d. Cross Village Township

There is concern about invasive species along roadways, particularly on properties bordering them. The main species of concern are Poison Hemlock and Spotted Knapweed.

e. MDOT - Update

MDOT is continuing to prepare for the 2026 chip seal of the entire corridor.

VI. Unfinished Business

a. Ice storm public info session update

Tabled until September meeting.

b. Networks Northwest

o FY 2025 Work Plan/Activities

Cassidy reported that there is about \$1000 left in this year's budget to be spent by September 30th and that at the July meeting there was some discussion about using the funds for the Ice Storm public info session or printing pamphlets.

o Website Hosting

Cassidy reported that a few committee members, Isha, and herself had met with Jamie Judson to discuss the committee's website needs. She had received a quote from Jamie which outlined the cost for the site migration, hosting, search engine optimization, site maintenance, and a possible website rebuild. See attached quote to minutes for more information.

A motion was made to accept Jamie's proposal in its entirety, with an amendment to limit the expenditure to no more than \$4,100, covering all potential costs including the optional backend rebuild, taxes, and fees by Garon, supported by Naomi. All in favor, none opposed.

o Other Updates

Cassidy reported that the committee will need to work on the Annual Evaluation over the following two settings and have it approved in the October meeting so that it can be done in December. A testimonial will also be needed.

It was brought to Cassidy's attention that the M-119 welcome letter had some inaccuracies, being that the letter stated that the Tunnel of Trees was 20 miles long and did not refer to the current designation as a Scenic Pure Michigan Byway. After some discussion amongst the committee it was decided that no changes to the welcome letter would be made.

c. Tree Cutting Ordinance

Tabled until September meeting.

VII. New Business

a. Information to realtors

The committee discussed creating an informational brochure about regulations and restrictions along the byway to provide to local realtors and the Emmet County Builders Association. They agreed to review existing materials, suggest content via email before the September meeting, and to finalize and share the materials with Isha before the September meeting. The goal of the brochure is to help ensure that realtors and builders are informed about the relevant regulations.

b. Committee Chair & Vice Chair selection for 2025-2026

The committee revisited a previous discussion about not rotating by township for chair and that the chair could serve for a two-year term. Jerry nominated Garon as Chair, however Garon stated

that he could not be the Chair this year but would be Vice Chair. Naomi asked if Garon would help her if she offered to be the Chair. Garon agreed.

Motion for Naomi to serve as Chair and Garon to serve as Vice Chair for FY2026 by Jerry, second by Joey. No objections; motion passed unanimously.

VIII. Public Comment

- a. None

IX. Adjourn

Next meeting on September 9, 2025 Friendship Township Hall – 3018 Beacon Hill Lane Harbor Springs, MI 49740 at 9:30 AM.