

Cass Lake Village Charter Commission Minutes

December 2 , 2025

Charter Commission Present: Bob Redner, Cathy O'Connell, Brik Prado, Chris LaDuke, Jon Kellner. Attorney Jerry Fisher

Residents Present: 11 Residents

Meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chris LaDuke.

Roll Call: All 5 Commissioners were present.

Minutes: - The meeting started with a review of the minutes of the Brik Pardo, the secretary, read aloud

Review and Amendment of Previous Meeting Minutes. The discussion included reviewing the minutes of the previous meeting, where a motion was passed for the village name to be Cass Lake Village. The commissioners debated term lengths; the minutes initially stated a four-year term for the President and Vice President and two years for others for staggering. This was contradicted by an existing note that stated terms are two years, which was unanimously approved.

Clarification on Term Lengths and Officer Selection. The commissioners agreed to amend the minutes to eliminate the conflicting four-year term for the President and Vice President. They also agreed that the motion for staggering the terms of the top three vote-getters was not for office assignment, as the council elects the President and Vice President, not based on votes.

- ✓ **Acceptance of Amended Minutes and Agenda.** A motion was made and passed to accept the minutes as amended. A subsequent motion to accept the agenda, including the addition of the township letter discussion, was also made and passed.

Township Letter on Services and Costs Cass Lake Village Information shared context on a letter received from the township's law firm, which followed previous meetings regarding potential additional costs for the village. The speaker maintained the position that the village should only entertain additional costs resulting from their change in status, such as administering elections, but not services like police or sewer that are already covered by taxes. The township suggested costs like special trailers and fire truck expenses, which Cass Lake Village Information dismissed as "silly".

- The speaker noted that the village provides a \$20 million upside for the township by taking over infrastructure problems and, in exchange, the township should continue providing existing services without additional charges. The speaker acknowledged the township's leverage regarding service continuation but also

- highlighted the residents' leverage to make elected officials' lives uncomfortable through public comment if necessary.
- The discussion covered the township's potential loss of constitutional revenue sharing, estimated at about \$50,000 annually, as the village would receive those funds. Jerry Fisher advised that police and fire services are typically funded by special millages, which residents are currently paying. Cass Lake Village Information noted that more than 50% of current taxes are special millages, which the village could potentially opt out of, but agreed that full separation from services like the library was not the intention.

Appointment of Negotiators with the Township Jon Kellner, a commissioner, volunteered to participate in negotiations with the township, leveraging their experience, specifically noting that the specialized fire truck was likely used elsewhere and that the police and fire services were geographically convenient. Cass Lake Village Information clarified that the Charter Commission's role is to lay the groundwork for these discussions, but the authority to execute a formal agreement rests with the future elected Village Council. Chris LaDuke and Jon Kellner representatives.

- Motion Passed Cass Lake Village
 - Bob Redner Motion
 - Second Cathy Oconnell

Filling Council Vacancies Jerry Fisher presented draft language for filling council vacancies, suggesting a majority vote of remaining council members within 90 days of the vacancy, with a special election called if no appointment is made within that time. The appointed or elected person would serve until the next regular election. A motion was made and passed to accept the language for filling vacancies.

- Motion Passed Cass Lake Village
 - Jon Kellner Motion
 - Second Bob Redner

Determining Compensation for Council Jerry Fisher advised that council member compensation should be set by ordinance, rather than in the charter, to allow for easier amendments over time. The compensation for the first elected council would be specified in the charter until an ordinance is passed, with any new compensation taking effect for the next term. The commissioner and Jerry Fisher agreed that a simple majority vote should suffice for determining compensation, even though a two-thirds vote is sometimes used in other charters.

- Motion Tabled

Elections and Signatures The commission discussed the number of signatures required to run for council, noting that state law likely prescribes 25, or possibly 20, signatures. Cass Lake Village Information confirmed that the requirements would be consistent with state law. During public comment, L Um global run 4552 prospect confirmed that

renters, if legal voters in the precinct, are eligible to sign petitions. The commission moved to align the signature requirement with state law.

- Follow State Law

Clerk and Treasurer Responsibilities The discussion covered the duties of the clerk and treasurer, referencing the model from Metamora Village where the clerk worked about 30 hours a week and handled day-to-day matters like collecting water bills, while the treasurer worked about 5 hours a week and handled property taxes. Cass Lake Village Information suggested that for the first year or two, the clerk could work 15 hours a week and the treasurer 5 to 10 hours a week, and noted that two signers are necessary for checks, especially since officials may take vacations. A motion was passed to follow the draft recommendations for the clerk and treasurer duties, subject to modification by ordinance.

- Follow Draft Charter

Village President's Duties Jerry provided recommendations for the president's duties, focusing on day-to-day administration and overseeing department heads, as directed by the council. The president is expected to make executive decisions when immediate action is needed, such as when problems arise that cannot wait for a monthly board meeting. Cass Lake Village Information suggested including serving as the nominal head and presiding officer and representing the village to other governments. The commission tabled a formal decision on the president's duties to allow Jerry to return with more specific language

- Motion Tabled

Annual Audit and Fiscal Year The commission clarified that the treasurer does not perform the annual audit but secures it, as required by state law. Kathy recommended changing the fiscal year from the current April 1st to March 31st to either July 1st or January 1st. It was noted that only the audit, not a tax return, may be required for the municipality. The commission decided to table the fiscal year start date until they determined if they would engage with outside professional advice, such as from an auditor, who could also provide guidance on cash on hand requirements and millage.

- Motion Tabled

Notes Length: Standard

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- Motion Tabled

- **Council's Power to Borrow Money** The meeting addressed whether the council should have the authority to borrow money, particularly for infrastructure projects such as the state revolving fund for drinking water, noting that the ability to borrow is driven by the manner of repayment. Cass Lake Village Information suggested that not having the authority could delay critical projects, potentially forcing a wait until the next election to authorize borrowing. The consensus was to include broad powers for borrowing, to the extent authorized by law, as such power is necessary for managing infrastructure needs and is subject to checks and balances like special assessments and referendums.

- Follow Draft Charter

- **Budget Shortfall and Amendments** The commission concluded that budget shortfalls could be managed by amending the budget, which is a common practice. Jerry and Cass Lake Village Information agreed that budgets are amended constantly to accommodate unanticipated events, such as securing grants.

- Motion Tabled

- **Ordinance vs. Resolution Rules** The discussion centered on whether the charter should define rules and require an ordinance or resolution for certain actions,

noting that resolutions deal with temporary matters and ordinances are permanent. Cass Lake Village Information suggested that some financial matters might require a supermajority or advance public notice, to prevent decisions from being "snuck through". The commission agreed to have Jerry draft language for consideration at the next meeting, consistent with state law

- Motion Tabled

- **Referendum and Recall** The commission discussed the concept of a referendum, which allows the public to file a petition to cancel an ordinance, as opposed to recall, which applies to officials. Cass Lake Village Information suggested that allowing referendum provides a check on a potential "runaway council" and gives the people a degree of authority, with a common threshold being around 15% of registered voters to suspend an ordinance. The commission passed a motion directing Jerry to draft language regarding referendum for the charter.

- Motion Tabled

- **Late Fees and Dock Rentals** The commissioners discussed authorizing the village to assess late fees on water taxes and docks. Cass Lake Village Information clarified that they rent docks as part of a marina and that authorizing the ability to assess late fees does not mean they would necessarily implement them, suggesting an ordinance would detail penalties for the marina. The commission unanimously approved the authorization.

- Motion Passed Cass Lake Village

- Chris LaDuke Motion
- Brik Pardo Redner

- **Meeting Schedule and Timing** A discussion was held regarding including language in the charter to set the schedule and timing of all meetings, such as whether they would be monthly or on a fixed day. Cass Lake Village Information stated this is normally set at the beginning of each year. A motion was made, seconded by Bob, to direct the setting of the meeting schedule at the beginning of each year, and the motion was approved.

- Motion Passed Cass Lake Village

- Cathy OConnell Motion
- Second Bob Redner

- **State Government Grants Management** The topic of managing state government grants was raised, specifically whether any wording about this is needed in the charter. Cass Lake Village Information acknowledged that they may need to check on this and mentioned the authority to apply for grants on behalf of the village. They also noted that having a separate account for state grants makes it easier for management and auditing purposes.

- **Land Management and Property Sales** The discussion focused on whether the council or the people should have the authority to make decisions on land management and property sales, referencing an instance in Orchard Lake where an election was required to sell a road end. Cass Lake Village Information suggested that the council should have the ability to approve the sale of any property, noting that a cut-off amount for authorization is typical but thinking the council should approve all sales to protect the president. A motion was made to give the council the authority to sell property with a majority vote, and after a second, there was a decision to check the Home Rule Village Act regarding the sale of certain property, like parks, before approving.
 - Motion Passed Cass Lake Village
 - Brik Pard Motion
 - Second Chris LaDuke
- **Legal Aspects Against the Village** The commissioners discussed the need to address legal actions against the village in the charter, specifically giving the village council the authority to defend the village, including the ability to hire counsel. A motion was made and approved to allow the council to hire legal counsel and take necessary action to defend the village in cases of legal lawsuits.
 - Motion Passed Cass Lake Village
 - Brik Pardo Motion
 - Second Jon Kellner
- **Special Assessments and Public Involvement** The handling of special assessments was discussed, which Cass Lake Village Information noted would be part of the Home Village Act and was being considered for inclusion in the village's powers. Jerry brought up the option of having two separate public hearings to maximize public involvement and the possibility of a provision where a petition from 51% of property owners could authorize or kill an assessment. Cass Lake Village Information shared an example of a special assessment district for roads that required a 50% plus one vote to pass and their concern about the township's claimed authority to force assessments without a vote if a bridge failed. Jerry stated that in such situations, if the township initiated it and 20% of the property owners petitioned against it, a 51% petition would still be needed to move forward with the assessment. Jerry was asked to do further research on whether the authority to force an assessment without a vote exists in law. The discussion concluded with a motion to adjourn.
 - Motion Tabled

Meeting Adjourned

Suggested next steps

- ✓ Cass Lake Village Information will review other villages of similar size to assess their relationships with their townships, in addition to Metamora.
- ✓ Cass Lake Village Information will amend the minutes to (1) reflect that the term length for officers is two years, (2) remove the mention of top vote getters being office assignment, and (3) reflect that compensation for council members serving as department heads would require a two-thirds vote.
- ✓ Cass Lake Village Information will distribute the letter received from the township to the commissioners.
- ✓ The commission will consider a simple majority vs. a two-thirds vote for compensation.
- ✓ Cass Lake Village Information will add the discussion of the amounts people will get paid for council members, president, and vice president to a subsequent agenda.
- ✓ Cass Lake Village Information will table the discussion on the duties of the clerk and treasurer, specifically the division of financial responsibilities, so that the group can get a better perspective of all the duties of each position.
- ✓ Cass Lake Village Information will table the decision on the fiscal year start date until the group determines if they will engage with any outside professional advice.
- ✓ Cass Lake Village Information will table the discussion on defining rules and if they require an ordinance or resolution.
- ✓ Cass Lake Village Information will double-check the information regarding special assessments and prepare a discussion for the next meeting.