

**Health of Higgins Lake Initiative Committee Report**  
to the Gerrish Township Board  
February/March 2026

**Steering Committee**

Joint Steering Committee & Subcommittee Chairpersons Work Session Overview - February 9, 2026

- The Septic Ordinance Draft was reviewed, members requested clarifications, and Ostling noted modifications.
- Funding sources and resources were explored, and subcommittees were encouraged to assess and define current and future funding needs.
- Monthly reports, sub-group action reports, membership, project timelines, subcommittee quarterly meetings, and documentation of monthly and final action reporting procedures were also reviewed.
- The HOHL purpose & scope, progress & planning, funding, legislation and other items were revisited collaboratively.
- Next joint meeting was set for March 9, 2026 at 1:00PM. Agenda items to include:
  - Create a team to update and seek funding for the Watershed Management Plan to pursue grants, etc.
  - Legislation - develop a local and northern Michigan partnership plan to better support the concerns of the HOHL and surrounding area.
  - Create a team and plan to expand our pool of expertise in cooperation with other local and central/northern Michigan entities.
  - Discuss a year-end report concept, e.g., top five accomplishments, top three discoveries/setbacks, and three goals for the coming year.

Steering Committee Meeting – February 17, 2026

- The Septic Ordinance Draft was approved as presented and forwarded to the Gerrish Township Board.
- Subcommittees provided general reports. See individual reports below.
- Chaney presented possible form letters that we might send to our state and federal legislators, asking for assistance with gaining updates of pending or existing legislation in relation to our endeavors of HOHL. The letters were to be reviewed by Gelderman, Voigt and Panyard, who would report back on tailoring the letters or exploring other options to gain consistent legislative updates and project assistance.
- Next meeting set for March 17, 2026.

**Communication Committee Report**

The Communications Committee continues to make steady progress in strengthening outreach and engagement efforts.

- **Email Campaigns**  
Our email distribution list has grown to approximately 280 individuals plus 50 committee members addresses. The *Ripple Effect* in February highlighted the members of the Science committee. Two *Ripple Effect* are planned for March overviews of invasive species. A third *Ripple Effect* about invasive species with “what can you do” will be published in April.

- **Social Media & Website**

We are using the battery of factual responses to Facebook posts. Any concerns will be passed on to the steering committee.

We are looking into starting an Instagram account.

Analytic for the website are going to start being tracked. Numbers will be available next month. Discussions with a website professional is planned in the spring.

- **Community Outreach**

We have made contact with several associations around the lake, and we will be attending their summer meetings. Some associations are willing to give us some time to speak, and others have full schedules but have welcomed us to hand out materials and gather emails.

There was some discussion of giving a “reward” for washing boats at the wash. Perhaps some sort of coupon. This is still in discussion.

- **Collaboration & Research**

The committee has reviewed the septic map that has been created. This is great work, but the communication committee believes that publishing the population map should wait until the septic part is ready. The general opinion is that unless there is something for the reader to act on, it should wait.

- **Committee Development**

Our two new committee members will be trained in Nextcloud in March.

The committee met on Feb 25.

Next meeting scheduled is March 9.

## **Funding Subcommittee – Summary of Activities**

- **Donation button implementation:** Coordinating with Treasurer and Communications to implement a Donate button on the HOH-Lake.org website, in progress.
- **Grant opportunity review:** Continuing review of potential funding opportunities aligned with identified water quality priorities, ongoing.
- **Partnership outreach:** Identifying and evaluating potential collaboration opportunities to support Higgins Lake water quality initiatives, in progress.
- **Township funding fact sheet:** Working with the Communications Committee to develop a concise fact sheet describing the Health of Higgins Lake initiative and its activities, for potential use by the Township in discussions with funding sources.
- **Watershed management planning:** Recognized the potential need for an updated watershed management plan as discussed within related committees, and encouraging Steering Committee direction so coordinated funding strategies can be developed in a timely manner.

## **IT Subcommittee – Summary of Activities**

- **Nextcloud operations:** Continued monitoring and maintenance to ensure stable and secure collaboration environment for all committees.

- **Certificate automation:** Ongoing implementation of automated certificate renewal and validation processes to reduce risk of service interruption.
- **Septic Information Map coordination:** Worked closely with the Septic, Science, and Communications Committees on development and internal evaluation of the Septic Information Map, including technical support and implementation.
- **Database development:** Initiated development of a database to support septic and related project data to improve consistency and internal analysis capabilities.
- **Website donation coordination:** Coordinated with the Funding and Communications Committees on technical implementation of the website donation functionality.

### **Road End/Fertilizer Committee – no report**

### **Science Subcommittee Monthly Report to the HOHL Steering Committee**

Science Committee members continue to work in their respective subcommittees. We met as an entire group on February 18 at the Township Hall. Several committee members attended via Zoom.

The latest project we are examining is developing a Mathematic Model on Higgins Lake. The concept was briefly presented at the last Steering Committee meeting. Since that time Ryan McClure, a product of Roscommon Schools and a Data Scientist and Ecosystem Modeler, joined the Science Committee at our February meeting. Ryan’s presentation was well received by the Science Committee and a decision to continue discussions with Ryan was approved.

A Science sub-committee is meeting with Ryan on March 4 to draft a proposal detailing the potential scope of Ryan’s work. That proposal will be discussed at the March Science Committee meeting and is expected to be forwarded to the Steering Committee after. The Science Committee members are extremely excited about this potential project.

March 11 is the next Science Committee meeting.

### **Septic Committee report to the Steering Committee**

Since the Draft ordinance was submitted, the Septic Committee has enjoyed an abbreviated schedule. The Septic Committee met on February 10 last month.

**Septic Ordinance Draft Submitted** – The Steering Committee members had comments and suggestions for the Septic Ordinance and those changes were made.

**Database** – Work continues on the database development for the Health of Higgins Septic Committee. We are (as of the end of February) in a position to make some initial statements about where we have data and where we are lacking. But first, a little background. As has been stated, Septic Committee personnel first requested demographic information from the Assessor in both Gerrish and Lyon Township for a list of basic information on each property in the respective Townships. Property ID, Owner name and address, mailing address, location information, subdivision, etc. We also determined the GPS location of each property, size, classification (residential, commercial, vacant, etc.).

We requested information from the CMDHD about each property to associate their FETCH information with what we had already assembled. Tank size, permit information, drain field size and type, all provide critical data.

We also went to the EGLE Wellogic site to capture domestic well information. Size, casing, depth, permits dates, etc. were appended to the database.

The specifics can now identify what information is available and can be used to “rate” each property against the overall total of Gerrish information. Some sites have an abundance of information and others have nothing on file. This now reinforces our original objective of securing data on all sites to determine the overall sum of information available.

Once the data was assembled into one document, we applied some math to rate each parcel. Twenty-two categories were considered and each assigned a “weight” based on its impact on the environment or importance. This allowed us the ability to consider many items and give each a percentage factor – based on the overall impact each has. Each topic was then further evaluated and its condition rated from one to five. A parcel in a high-density subdivision potentially has more of a negative impact than a parcel on 10 acres away from the lake. A new raised drainfield with a new tank has much less impact on the environment than a site with no record of a drainfield at all. This rating approach will help to identify properties that are at most risk of impacting the public health and environment.

Scores for individual properties ranged between one point and 78 points. There are approximately 884 parcels that score under 20 points, 981 parcels between 20 and 40, and 1564 over 40 points. We can further break these numbers down by their proximity to the lake, whether they are homesteaded, lakefront, or high-density subdivisions. Dates for permits will identify sites that have current information and sites with small tanks can be sorted out.

We also considered the way this information will eventually be made available. Currently I have been developing the reports in MS EXCEL. The file is getting very big and becoming slow to use. Ed Panyard has been developing the use of a SQL database to evaluate the data. We are comparing the results and will decide soon as to the best tool to manage the info.

**New Map** – Now that this data is available and the sites are rated, Ed is entering the info into the program he developed to display the condition of each parcel on a map of the township. This “Heat Map” draws attention with hotter colors for problem areas and is very telling. We are now beginning to see the picture anticipated early on in the goals and objectives of the HOH over a year ago.