

MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION
2022-23 Proposed Legislative Policy Platform

VISION STATEMENT

The Michigan Townships Association envisions a 21st Century Michigan where:

- Townships have statutory authority and state financial support sufficient to provide high-quality services and infrastructure consistent with community needs and expectations, and to enable full compliance with ever-expanding state-imposed mandates without cutting local spending priorities
- Elections are accurate, secure, fair and a high percentage of registered voters participate
- Townships are valued and respected for solving local and regional challenges through visionary, ethical leadership and collaboration
- Natural resources are utilized in a manner consistent with township regulations that protect public health and safety and property values
- There is clarity of roles and responsibilities among township officials essential for efficient and effective services to the public
- Townships retain authority to protect and regulate the public rights-of-way and other land uses in the interest of the public
- State laws recognize that township officials are elected by and accountable to their residents for the township's governance, financial position, programs and services consistent with community values

Assessment and Taxation

The Michigan Townships Association supports property tax fairness, equity, and efficient assessment and collection by public servants who are accountable to township officials to ensure public trust and locally accessible information and assistance. Valuation should be based on sound assessing principles. Local governments should be reimbursed by the state for property tax revenues lost due to statutory exemptions. State government should provide local governments with education and technical support to develop and defend their assessment rolls.

As lawmakers and regulators enact changes to current tax laws and local government requirements, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

- Require the valuation of big box stores to be determined using the same assessing methodology as other commercial properties and prohibit the consideration of private deed restrictions or covenants imposed to reduce the value of the property or exclude competitors of the grantor from the market
- Oppose expansion of property tax exemptions without replacement of local revenue, and support the state assuming administration and funding of disabled veteran's property tax exemption
- Clarify property tax exemption eligibility for nonprofit charitable institutions
- Raise the current charter township 10 mill tax limitation to allow charter townships, with voter approval, to address legacy costs, meet demands for expanding services and offset millage rollback requirements
- Recodify Michigan township statutes to include clarification that assessors are accountable to the township board when the supervisor is not certified to perform assessing functions
- Increase the specific tax on mobile homes located in licensed parks and levy on park owner rather than individual occupied dwelling owners
- Exempt minimal personal property tax obligations resulting from minor property improvements on mobile home lots such as small decks, stairs and porches
- Allow option for a local excise tax for the purpose of providing public recreational facilities and/or public safety expenses related to increased tourism

Elections

The Michigan Townships Association supports fair, transparent, efficient and secure elections administered by township officials that encourage high voter participation and procedures appropriate to varying community resources and population densities.

As lawmakers and regulators enact changes to current election laws, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

- Preserve authority of townships to convey information on ballot proposals to their residents
- Preserve the authority of townships to place millage and bond proposals before voters at any election
- Permit the option for nonpartisan township offices to be approved by the township board and the electors
- Permit the pre-processing of absentee ballots
- Allow option to increase the active number of registered voters per precinct
- Require election challenger training

Environment and Land Use

The Michigan Townships Association supports state laws that enable townships to efficiently and effectively plan for land uses and adopt zoning ordinances to protect the public health, safety and general welfare. State and federal regulations should not impede local government growth and development policies and objectives. Further, local authority over land use decisions must be protected: preemption of that authority to resolve proven issues of exceptional statewide impact must only be used when all other possibilities are exhausted and must maintain the ability for townships to have continued input to serve and protect their community residents.

As lawmakers and regulatory agencies enact changes to laws addressing township land use and environment, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

- Ensure any statewide septic system maintenance standards adopted reduce septic system failures that create serious public health threats and expose townships to liability for expensive public sewer systems
- Preserve landfill capacities by directing appropriate materials to waste utilization facilities and support an increase in the state tipping fee to a rate competitive with nearby states while preserving a local tipping fee option
- Preserve local authority on zoning issues that are local in nature
- Increase state funding for environmental programs to address issues such as brownfield redevelopment, contamination and invasive species
- Ensure that the definition of Waters of the United States, subject to permitting processes of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers, is not extended to non-navigable waters such as roadside ditches, field drainage systems, and culvert installation and maintenance

Intergovernmental Relations

The Michigan Townships Association supports township officials having the discretion to resolve policy issues that are manifestly local in nature. MTA also supports state laws that encourage intergovernmental collaboration to restore economic prosperity, efficiently and effectively deliver programs and services, and solve other challenges. State laws should allow creativity, flexibility and incentivize fair and equitable cost-sharing benefits and governance in interlocal agreements. State laws authorizing economic development tools and other powers should be based on community characteristics relative to policy objectives, rather than city or township legal status. State taxation and spending policies should mitigate adverse revenue impacts on townships.

As lawmakers and regulatory agencies consider altering the fiscal relationship of the state to local governments as well as powers and authorities of local governments, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

- Ensure state laws allow township officials to solve local issues in a manner consistent with local values, priorities and needs rather than impose a one-size-fits-all approach
- Guarantee full funding to townships for payments-in-lieu-of-taxes for state purchased lands, commercial forest lands and swamp tax / tax-reverted properties
- Expand the number of townships eligible for statutory revenue sharing and grants
- Ensure a local government consolidation process continues to require voter approval

Township Operations

The Michigan Townships Association supports state and federal governments granting to Michigan townships broad discretion and autonomy to govern the funding and delivery of programs and services. MTA also supports state reimbursement to townships for increased costs resulting from new mandated services and state regulations.

Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

- Clarify and strengthen the governance role of township boards to establish policy direction and manage operations for their community
- Enact appropriate, cost-effective training requirements for township planning commissioners and zoning board of appeal members to reduce costly lawsuits and improve township decision-making by key appointed boards
- Grant township supervisors the authority to perform marriages
- Permit members of a public body to participate in a public meeting remotely

Transportation and Infrastructure

The Michigan Townships Association concludes that Michigan's transportation system will continue to require more funding than is currently anticipated in law to ensure that county primary and local roads are safe and convenient for travel. As townships are major financial contributors to road maintenance and construction costs, the Michigan Townships Association supports the inclusion of township officials in transportation policy discussions at all government levels. Michigan has also under-invested in other infrastructure necessary to remain economically competitive and protect the health, safety and general welfare of residents. The Michigan Townships Association supports the State of Michigan working with township officials in planning, funding and delivering infrastructure needed by every community to be economically viable and free of environmental threats and risks.

As lawmakers and regulators address pressures to better address Michigan's infrastructure, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

- Increase funding above current statutory levels for primary and local roads and increase state funding for water, sewer and communications infrastructure
- Allow for a county road agency in conjunction with a requesting township to lower the speed to a level deemed necessary for motorist or pedestrian safety on a gravel or unimproved surface road
- Allow townships to create special assessment districts for high-speed internet
- Allow townships to create special assessment districts for the replacement of privately owned sewer leads
- Encourage county road agencies to provide matching funds for township road construction and maintenance projects to be spent at the township's discretion
- Expand engineering and safety data to include pedestrian-vehicle impact data and multiple modes of transportation to properly manage speed limits