

Township Focus

AUGUST 2023

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

Angry citizens & 'constitutional auditors' When does freedom of speech cross the line?



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Planning ahead

I found my children’s snow sled 20 years ago, long before my wife and I found each other. I knew I wanted to be a parent, and I knew that it was the best sled design I had ever seen. My point is, we often know our aspirations long in advance and, with careful thought, can write the plans to achieve them. An author once said, “A goal without a plan is a dream.” There’s nothing wrong with recreational dreaming, but when you want to achieve something for your community, the process involves thought, gathering resources and executing the necessary steps.

One township leader who clearly understands the application of this approach to achieving positive results for his community is **Chesterfield Charter Township** (Macomb Co.) Supervisor **Brad Kersten** (pictured with me at right).



Brad keeps a 15-foot-wide whiteboard in his office’s conference space to share the key details such as budget, current status, project needs and next steps for the strategic initiatives he and his township board and departments colleagues are working on. Surrounding it are the current organization charts for the township staff and volunteers. Progress on the initiatives is reported out in printed reports as well as on the township’s website. Key obstacles and resources that need to be addressed are all clearly understood.

Effective planning and execution are also key to dealing with threats and surprise problems. My own planning commission experience included our planning and zoning administrator getting a call, “Hi, do you have an ordinance about boa constrictors?” The caller had accumulated 10 large boas. Our rural township had a county campground, a state park campground, and the region’s largest private kids summer camp—the thought of 10 large snakes getting loose prompted fast research and the writing of a new exotic

animals ordinance. The following year, we learned a business in our township was raising and renting out large predators for events. The ordinance helped to fairly and clearly work through the issues with the owners.

I use each autumn to assess where we are on our MTA organizational projects and how to achieve successful, on-time outcomes. Our departments forecast the opportunities and threats we face and match them up to our capabilities to address them. Together, we identify whether we have the right resources, approaches and prioritization of efforts. To help you and your teams lead on your own current opportunities and challenges, this fall, we are introducing a new **Strategy and Innovation** focus for our MTA Professional Development Retreats, which joins our usual line-up of two-day events for each elected office, and for planning and zoning. The Strategy & Innovation Retreat will be held Oct. 5-6 at the Highlands at Harbor Springs—all townships’ officials, employees and volunteers are welcome to join. Registration is open; use the “Learning” tab on our website or turn to page 27 for details. The topics will include:

- Attracting and Retaining Residents, Township Talent and Businesses
- Reimagining Redevelopment
- True Costs and Impact of Community Development
- Addressing Infrastructure
- Rethinking Resident Relations: Addressing Loss of Trust in Local Government
- Legislative Insights & Update

Summer seems to be passing pretty fast this year—enjoy the rest of yours!



Neil

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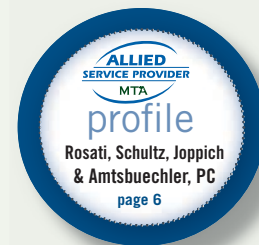
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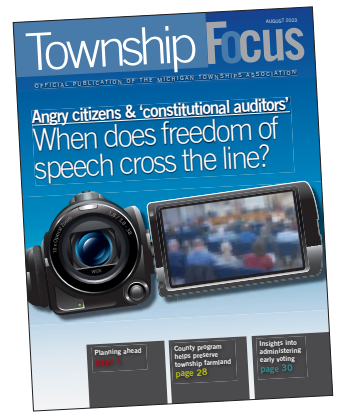
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mission statement

The Michigan Townships Association advances local democracy by fostering township leadership and public policy essential for a strong and vibrant Michigan.

Special insert

MTA's 2023 Township Vendor Directory



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Angry citizens, 'constitutional auditors' and more— When does free speech cross the line?

Has your township dealt with angry citizens at board meetings or on social media lashing out about something happening in the township? Or has a self-proclaimed "First Amendment auditor" visited your township office, video camera in hand, goading officials and employees? When are constitutional lines crossed—and how can (and can't) you respond if and when these situations happen in your township?

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County program helps preserve township farmland

Townships and farmers in one West Michigan county are taking part in a purchase of development rights program helping to maintain farmland that is an important part of the community fabric.

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Insights into administering early voting

As a result of Proposal 2022-2, all municipalities must offer nine days of in-person early voting before statewide and federal elections. What are early voting options and what considerations should townships weigh as we move closer to our first election with this new voter access?



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LCSA UPDATE

Notification of error in METRO Act payments

A distribution error in Metropolitan Extension Telecommunications Right-of-Way Oversight (METRO) Act payments from the Local Community Stabilization Authority (LCSA) has resulted in some townships receiving an overpayment while others received an underpayment. Under the act, all telecommunications providers must pay an annual permit fee to operate within municipal rights-of-way. Those fees assessed on providers are then distributed to municipalities. Townships that receive METRO Act payments should have received, or will soon receive, a notice of error from the LCSA, along with the corrective plan.

The 2023 METRO Act payments were distributed to 1,754 municipalities on May 31, 2023. After the distribution, the LCSA identified an error that was unique to the May 31, 2023, distribution only. The error resulted in some municipalities receiving an overpayment and some municipalities receiving an underpayment of METRO Act funds for 2023 distributions.

For 95% of municipalities, the LCSA will correct the error in next year's payment (May 2024) with an over- or underpayment equal to the error in the May 2023 payment. If the township would like to request consideration of another resolution, instructions are provided in the corrective action letter. For 5% of municipalities that received a very large overpayment relative to their correct distribution, the LCSA requests that the overpayment be repaid to the LCSA as soon as possible. Instructions for repayment were provided in the corrective action letter.

The LCSA has taken action to ensure a similar error does not occur in the future. To contact the LCSA, call (269) 888-3732 or (734) 726-4113, or email contact@lcsami.gov.

ARPA UPDATE

Survey: Local governments facing ARPA spending challenges

While Michigan local governments are facing challenges in spending American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars, according to a new Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) report, the vast majority report no concerns about putting the funds to use by spending deadlines.

The \$4.4 billion in federal ARPA funds allocated to Michigan local governments were intended to support municipalities to stabilize their budgets, invest in their communities and stimulate local economies following the COVID-19 pandemic. The most recent report results are from the Spring 2023 MPPS, which is conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy at the University of Michigan's Ford School for Public Policy. MTA is a partner in the survey, which asked respondents' experiences with ARPA funds in both 2022 and 2023.

A majority of local leaders statewide report concerns in 2023 about inflation and other cost challenges (63%; 58% for townships specifically), as well as problems with other procurement issues such as lack of available contractors and supply chain challenges (56%; 48% for townships). Overall, concerns with procurement issues increased compared with last year, while problems with navigating state and federal bureaucracies declined. However, a full 50% of smaller municipalities—those under 5,000 population—say they are still struggling with “bureaucracies.” These numbers hold true for townships, specifically, with half still calling state and federal bureaucracy a “somewhat” or “significant” problem.

Respondents did not, however, report issues with ARPA spending deadlines—obligating funds by the end of 2024, and fully spending funds by the end of 2026. The vast majority, 82% statewide and 71% of townships, called the spending deadlines “no problem at all” or “not much of a problem.” Considerable concern also continues regarding the one-time nature of ARPA funding and uncertainty about future funding once ARPA allocations are spent.

Among 13 project categories for ARPA spending presented on the survey, Michigan local governments most commonly report funding particular types of capital improvements, with a majority statewide (53%, and 58% of townships specifically) spending or planning to use funds for facilities such as public buildings, public parks, etc. Among townships, roads and other transportation infrastructure (42%; 38% statewide) and public safety (28%, with similar statewide numbers) are the next most common targets for ARPA spending. Some 19% of township respondents indicated broadband and water and sewer infrastructure were also spending priorities (compared to nearly 16% and 31%, respectively, for statewide respondents).

EMPLOYEE PROTECTIONS

New laws provide protections for pregnant, nursing employees

As employers, townships should be aware of two new federal laws offering workplace protections to pregnant and nursing employees.

Under the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, which was effective June 27, 2023, employers with 15 or more employees must provide “reasonable accommodations” to a worker’s known limitations related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions, unless the accommodation will cause the employer an “undue hardship.” According to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “reasonable accommodations” are changes to the work environment or the way things are usually done at work, such as the ability to sit, more frequent breaks to eat or drink, have flexible hours, or be excused from strenuous activities.

The Providing Urgent Maternal Protections for Nursing Mothers Act expands previous employer obligations to provide employees with reasonable break time and a private space for nursing mothers to express breast milk for one year after their child’s birth. The new law extends these accommodations to non-exempt nursing employees. Employers with fewer than 50 employees are exempt from this new law if compliance would impose an undue hardship.

Visit www.eeoc.gov for additional information, as well as resources for employers and employees.



NEW ONLINE CLASSES!

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- Breaking the Zoning Code
- Keep Calm & Carry On
- Nuances of the Right to Farm Act
- Providing a Safe Township Workplace
- Road Relations: Stay in Your Lane
- The Pursuit of Great Township Governance
- The Township Board Has One Voice. How Does It Sound?
- What Your Township Needs to Do to Prepare for Solar Energy
- What Every Township Needs to Know About Investments
- Who Can Talk to the Township Attorney...and When

If your township subscribes to MTA Online, you can watch most of these offerings for FREE! Visit www.bit.ly/MITwpsOnline to learn more. Detailed course descriptions appear online; visit <https://learn.michigantownships.org> to browse our online classroom.

MTA Online Learning Center

LOCAL UPDATES FROM ACROSS MICHIGAN

Township happenings

Green Lake Township (Grand Traverse Co.) Supervisor and MTA District 8 Director **Marvin Radtke, Jr.** recently received the 2023 Environmentalist of the Year—Public Service award from the Northern Michigan Environmental Action Council. “I am attempting to do the job that I was elected for to the best of my ability, as I realize any actions done or not done today will impact our community for generations to come,” Radtke said. “My personal belief that I try to live by is to leave what we are charged with in the same or better condition than when we started.” The honor recognizes those who protect the environment in northern Michigan through action and education. In additional township news, Green Lake Township has created a safe, secure exchange zone for online purchases made, for example, through Facebook Marketplace. Located in the main entrance of the township offices, the area is under 24-hour surveillance.

Visitors to Lake Township Park in **Lake Charter Township** (Berrien Co.) will see some new features and improvements in the 60-acre park, including a whole new playground—complete with two slides, a rock-climbing wall and multiple climbers—as well as new equipment at existing playgrounds, including new slides and swings.

Email YOUR Township Happenings to jenn@michigantownships.org. Add MTA to your newsletter mailing list! Mail to MTA, Attn. Jenn Fiedler, PO Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078, or email to jenn@michigantownships.org.



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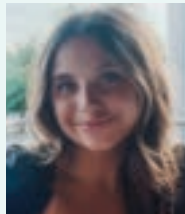
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EGLE The Recycling Partnership

MTA welcomes new digital engagement coordinator

Please join MTA in welcoming Dawson Bishop as our new digital engagement coordinator. In her role within the MTA Knowledge Center, Bishop is the lead project manager on all Association video production and design, including live-streamed and recorded webinars, and spearheads and creates MTA's social media campaigns and messaging. In addition, Bishop serves as webmaster of the Association's website and administrator of our *Community Connection* networking site, and assists in MTA digital marketing efforts.



Bishop

A native of **Georgetown Charter Township** (Ottawa Co.), Bishop attended Columbia College Chicago, where she earned a Cinema Art + Science degree. During her time in Chicago, she was successfully awarded a competitive internship at the prestigious Whitehouse Post, a post-production company. Prior to joining MTA full time at the end of June, Bishop previously was an associate multimedia producer at an international public relations and advertising firm based in Grand Rapids.

"I'm so incredibly grateful to join the Michigan Townships Association team where I've gained so much knowledge on townships already," Bishop said. "I get to be creative and produce work that allows our members and non-members to learn even more about the government closest to the people. I feel lucky to be given this exciting opportunity!"

Bishop, her rescue dog, Lucy, and partner, Jake, reside in **Meridian Charter Township** (Ingham Co.) where they enjoy exploring the various dog-friendly trails the township has to offer, as well as the weekly farmers market, golf courses and more.

Share MTA videos with your community

You can see Bishop's efforts on MTA's Facebook (www.facebook.com/mitownships) and Twitter pages (<https://twitter.com/MITownships>), as well as on www.michigantownships.org.



Her latest campaign—10 Facts about Michigan Townships—is a fun, three-minute video highlighting details and information about the Michigan township government. Townships can share the video on their own social media or websites to help educate residents and the public about township government. Watch the video at and link to <https://bit.ly/MiTwpFacts>. It is also posted on MTA's website on the "About Townships" webpage.

profile



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All Michigan townships—no matter the size—face increasingly complicated legal requirements and challenges in a rapidly changing world.

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Recognizing this, Rosati, Schultz, Joppich & Amtsbuechler, PC (RSJA) has assembled a team of 26 municipal law specialists to assist townships and their officials avoid and, if necessary, navigate through any such legal challenges whenever and however they might arise. Every attorney at RSJA has proudly dedicated their career entirely to the cause of serving the public and public officials through the practice of municipal law. And through their Farmington Hills and Lansing offices, RSJA provides attorneys across the state with deep knowledge and experience in essentially every area of municipal law.

As a result, all RSJA municipal clients, large and small, benefit from what amounts to a fully staffed, full-time municipal law department at their disposal. Each RSJA client has a primary attorney of its choosing on call 24/7/365 to help address day-to-day questions, advise the township board and administration, and attend meetings. Should specific legal issues arise in specialized areas or in the unfortunate event of a lawsuit, that lead attorney can immediately tap the considerable legal resources and specialties made available by the over two dozen other seasoned municipal attorneys in the firm, all of whom are here to assist in the defense of your township and resolution of its legal issues, whenever they may be needed.

"They have a wealth of knowledge," said **Mark St. Charles**, **Green Oak Charter Township** (Livingston Co.) supervisor. "It's like one-stop shopping. If I need a labor attorney, they have one. If I need a land use attorney, they have one. If I need someone for the Michigan Supreme Court, they have one. The whole firm is a very balanced, professional and knowledgeable group of attorneys."

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Share your input on MTA's 2024 legislative policy platform



MTA is committed to speaking on behalf of its members. This is evident in the development of our policy platform. The legislative policy objectives guide MTA's government relations and are reviewed and updated annually to reflect emerging issues and goals. MTA members are encouraged to review MTA's Board-approved 2023 Policy Platform and share any proposed revisions and suggested additions by **Monday, Nov. 27**. The policy platform can be found on MTA's website, www.michigantownships.org,

under "Advocacy."

Member proposed policy changes will be reviewed by MTA committees for word selection and legality, and to ensure they conform with the Association's overall goals and objectives. The proposed policies will be presented at the 2024 MTA Annual Meeting in conjunction with our Annual Educational Conference & Expo in April.

Contact the MTA Government Relations Department at (517) 321-6467 or legislation@michigantownships.org with questions, comments or suggestions.

MTA's lunchtime learning series, *Now You Know*, offers timely updates, insights from our experts and a chance to get your questions answered—all in just one hour! Don't miss our next episode coming:
Aug. 9 from noon to 1 p.m.

Spending Public Money

Now You Know

Wondering whether your township can spend money on an activity? Townships need statutory authority to spend public money. Why all the restrictions? Because it's "other people's money." If you can't point to a law authorizing the use of public funds on a particular activity, then it's an unlawful expenditure. Join MTA Staff Attorney Catherine Mullhaupt for an important review of general guidelines and specific examples of lawful and unlawful expenditures.

Register at <https://bit.ly/NYKmta> for just \$25 per session!

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By 1 Deadline for township or local authority to file Form 5608, *Portion of 2022 Essential Services Millage Rate Dedicated for the Cost of Essential Services*. (MCL 123.1353(7))

Deadline for township to file Form 5613, *Millage Rate Correction for the 2023 Personal Property Tax Reimbursement Calculations*. (MCL 123.1358(4))

Notice of the Aug. 8 election published. One notice required. (MCL 168.653a)

Petitions to place county or local ballot question on the Nov. 7 ballot must be filed with the applicable local or county clerk. (MCL 168.646a)

3 Public accuracy test for the Aug. 8 election must be conducted. (R 168.778) Notice of test must be published at least 48 hours before test. (MCL 168.798)

4 Electors may obtain an absent voter ballot via first-class mail for the Aug. 8 election until 5 p.m. (MCL 168.759)

Electors may submit a written request to spoil their absent voter ballot for the Aug. 8 election and receive a new ballot by mail until 5 p.m. (MCL 168.765b (1))

Electors who have returned their absent voter ballot for the Aug. 8 election may submit a written request in person to spoil their absent voter ballot and receive a new absent voter ballot in the clerk's office until 5 p.m. (MCL 168.765b(3))

Electors who have lost their absent voter ballot for the

Aug. 8 election or not yet received their ballot in the mail may submit a written request to spoil their absent voter ballot and receive a new absent voter ballot in the clerk's office or by mail until 5 p.m. (MCL 168.765b(5))

7 Electors who have lost their absent voter ballot for the Aug. 8 election or not yet received their ballot in the mail may submit a written request to spoil their absent voter ballot and receive a new absent voter ballot in the clerk's office until 4 p.m. (MCL 168.765b(7))

8 Emergency absentee voting until 4 p.m. (begins Friday, Aug. 4 at 5 p.m.) (MCL 168.759b)

Election Day.

Registrants may obtain and vote an absent voter ballot in person in the clerk's office or vote in person in the proper precinct until 8 p.m. (MCL 168.761)

9 Local clerk delivers results of the Aug. 8 election to county clerk by 11 a.m. (MCL 168.809)

10 Boards of county canvassers meet to canvass the Aug. 8 election by 9 a.m. (MCL 168.821)

15 Ballot wording of proposals qualified to appear on the Nov. 7 ballot certified to local clerks by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.646a)

17 Local clerks receiving ballot wording for the Nov. 7 ballot must forward to county clerk. (MCL 168.646a)

SEPTEMBER

14 Summer taxes due. (MCL 211.107)

Interest of 1% per month will accrue if the payment is late for the State Education Tax and county taxes that are part of the summer tax collection. (MCLs 211.905b(9) and 211.44a(6))

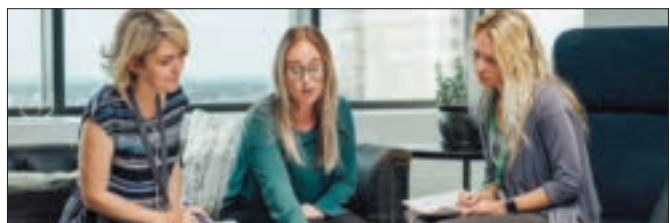
By 23 Clerks shall electronically transmit or mail (as requested) an absent voter ballot to each absent uniformed services or overseas voter who applied for an absent voter ballot 45 days or more before the Nov. 7 election. (MCL 168.759a; Mich Const. Art. 2, Sec. 4)

28 Absent voter ballots must be available for issuance to voters for Nov. 7 election. (Mich. Const. Art. 2, Sec. 4)

through Oct. 17. Precinct inspectors appointed by local election commission for Nov. 7 election. (MCL 168.674)

30 Township clerk delivers to supervisor and county clerk a certified copy of all statements, certificates, and records of vote directing monies to be raised by taxation of property. (MCL 211.36(1))

Financial officer of each township computes tax rates in accordance with MCLs 211.34d and 211.34 and governing body certifies that rates comply with Section 31, Article 9, of the 1963 Michigan Constitution and MCL 211.24e, Truth in Taxation, on State Tax Commission Form L-4029 on or before Sept. 30. (MCL 211.36)



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To donate, visit www.michigantownships.org and click on "Friends of MTA" under the "Advocacy" tab (log in is required to donate), or call (517) 321-6467!



What is the difference between a regular meeting and a special meeting?

The Open Meetings Act (OMA), MCL 15.261, *et seq.*, provides for only two types of meetings of township public bodies: regular and special meetings.

Regular meetings

Regular meetings are “regular” because they are on the schedule of meetings posted at the beginning of the year. At the beginning of each public body’s “year,” the body—like the township board—sets its schedule of regular meetings and must post that schedule within 10 days after the meeting where the schedule is set. Some township bodies, like the zoning board of appeals, might not have regular meetings every year. But the township board, planning commission, board of review, elective park commission or elective library board will always have at least some regular meetings.

A public body may change its regular meeting schedule if it needs to move dates of existing meetings or votes in a meeting to add new meetings to the schedule. The new regular meeting schedule must be posted within three days after the meeting at which the change is made, and at least 18 hours prior to the starting time of the next new meeting.

Special meetings

The only reason a meeting is “special” is because it was not on the schedule of regular meetings posted at the beginning of the year and was scheduled later because the body needed to meet between its regular meetings.



When do we have to post meeting notices for meetings?

Under the OMA, every township public body, including but not limited to the township board, board of review, planning commission and zoning board of appeals, is required to post a public notice stating the dates, times and places of its regular meetings within 10 days after the first meeting of the public body in each calendar or fiscal year. A public body can choose to use either the calendar year or its fiscal year as its “meeting year.”

If a change is made in the schedule of regular meetings, the public body must post a public notice stating the new dates, times and places of its regular meetings within three days after the meeting at which the change in the schedule is made.

Both regular and special meeting notices must always also include the name of the public body to which the notice applies, its telephone number if one exists, and its address.

In addition, when a regular meeting is rescheduled or a special meeting is called, the public body must post a public

notice stating the date, time and place of the meeting at least 18 hours prior to the meeting. The notice must be visible to the public at all times during those 18 hours for the 18-hour requirement to be met. (MCL 15.265)

Website posting

If the township has a website that includes monthly or more frequent updates of public meeting agendas or minutes, a special meeting notice must also be posted on either the homepage or a separate webpage dedicated to public notices for special meetings and accessible via a prominent and conspicuous link on the website’s homepage that clearly describes its purpose for public notification of those special meetings. (MCL 15.265)

Although this requirement does not apply to a township that does not have a website (or has one but does not post its meeting agendas or minutes there), it is important to note that when it does apply, it is part of OMA compliance and failure to meet this requirement—even if it is the only omission—can still result in the township being found to have violated the OMA. (*Spalding v. Swiacki*, 338 Mich. App. 126, Docket No. 354598, July 8, 2021)

Emergencies

The OMA notice requirements do not bar a public body from meeting in emergency session in the event of a severe and imminent threat to the health, safety or welfare of the public when two-thirds of the members serving on the body decide that delay would be detrimental to efforts to lessen or respond to the threat.



How is a special meeting called?

The OMA does not address how a special meeting is called, and you start with the authorizing statute for the specific statutory board or commission to find if there are any procedures for calling a special meeting.

Note that the OMA requirement for notice posted at least 18 hours prior to a special meeting applies to all public bodies. The authorizing statute might require additional forms of notice.

For example, here are the rules that apply to a special meeting of a township board:

General law township

A general law township board special meeting may be called by: (1) the board at a meeting, (2) the supervisor, or (3) a majority of the board, in a written request to the clerk stating the specific reason(s). (MCL 41.72a)

MTA recommends that the board and supervisor also notify the clerk in writing when calling a special meeting, including the specific reason(s).

When the supervisor calls a special meeting, the clerk must give notice of the meeting to each board member, either in person or by leaving a written notice at the member's address. (MCL 41.72a) MTA recommends always giving each board member notice of any special meeting.

Charter township

A charter township board special meeting may be called by: (1) the board at a meeting, (2) the supervisor, in a written request to the clerk stating the specific reason(s), or (3) two members of the board in a written request to the clerk stating the specific reason(s). (MCL 42.7) MTA recommends that the board also notify the clerk in writing when calling a special meeting, including the specific reason(s).

At least 24 hours' written notice of the time, place and reason(s) for any special meeting must be served personally or left at each charter township board member's usual place of residence by the township clerk or someone designated by the township clerk. (MCL 42.7)

For a special meeting of either a general law or charter township board (not other public bodies), a special meeting notice must also include the purpose(s) for which the meeting was called. If all of the township board members attend the special meeting, then the board may address the purpose(s) listed in the notice, plus any business that could lawfully come before the board. But if any of the township board members do not attend a special meeting of the township board, then the board may address only the purpose(s) listed in the notice for which the meeting was called (plus the one public comment period required by the OMA at all meetings).



Where should public meeting notices be posted?

The public notice for a meeting of a township public body must always be posted at the township's principal office and any other locations considered appropriate by the public body. An OMA notice must be posted where it can be seen by the public at all hours.

Any township's public meeting notices posted on its website, cable access or social media must be done in addition to—not instead of—the physical posting of the notice at its principal office. That must be done for all meetings.

If a township does not have a principal office, the public notice must be posted in the office of the county clerk.

Note that "post" is different from "publish." "Post" means to put the notice up or make it available where people can see it; "publish" means to print it in the newspaper.



Don't some meeting notices also have to be published?

There are several types of meeting or hearing notices that are required by laws other than the OMA to be published in addition to the OMA meeting notice posting. For example, the Uniform Budgeting and Accounting Act requires the notice for a budget public hearing to be published. Notice of the March board of review meetings must be published, according to the General Property Tax Act (but not the July or December meetings). Zoning public hearing and approval notices must be published, according to the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act.



Is a township required to post its meeting agendas?

No, a township is not required to post meeting agendas, although a meeting notice may include the meeting agenda. But, as referenced previously in the case of a township board special meeting, the meeting notice becomes the agenda if any of the township board members are not present at the special meeting.

Hello, MTA ... ? provides general information on typical questions asked by township officials. Readers are encouraged to contact an attorney when specific legal guidance is needed. Member township officials and personnel may contact MTA Member Information Services with questions or requests from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., weekdays, at (517) 321-6467 (press 1) or fax (517) 321-8908.



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Reporting of sexual assault changes now law

A six-bill package—debated in prior legislative sessions because of the Dr. Larry Nassar scandal—is now law. Two of the changes—Public Acts 46 and 49 of 2023—impact local units of government.

PA 46 requires the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to create training materials for individuals who are considered mandatory reporters, including law enforcement, to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Employers are required to make these materials available to mandatory reporters unless they have a training program that is updated annually and is similar in substance to the materials provided by MDHHS. PA 49 prohibits individuals from using or attempting to use their professional authority to prevent certain crimes, including child abuse and criminal sexual conduct, from being reported to law enforcement or a Title IX coordinator at a postsecondary education institution.

The new laws take effect on Sept. 26, 2023.

Local intergovernmental agreements subject to bargaining



Local units that have collective bargaining agreements will soon have their intergovernmental agreements subject to collective bargaining agreements under legislation approved in late June. Public Act 115 of 2023 deletes current prohibitions against certain subjects being included in a collective bargaining agreement. While part of a public school/labor package, the change impacts public employers and intergovernmental agreements.

The Public Employment Relations Act previously prohibited decisions of a public employer to enter into an intergovernmental agreement from being subject to collective bargaining, allowing it at the sole discretion of the public employer. PA 115 deletes that language and will allow, once in effect, a decision as to whether the public employer will enter into an intergovernmental agreement to consolidate one or more functions or services to be subject to bargaining. The bill did not receive immediate effect and thus will not take effect until 91 days after the Legislature adjourns for 2023.

New law sets criteria for townships to create a land bank authority

Public Act 52 of 2023, recently signed into law, will allow townships with a population of 50,000 or more located in a

county without a county land bank authority to create a land bank authority. The measure provides the same to cities of the same population not located in a county that already had a county authority.

The bill did not receive immediate effect, so it cannot take effect until 91 days after the Legislature adjourns for 2023.

Expansion of PACE program

The scope of the Property Assessed Clean Energy Act (PACE) will soon be expanded under two bills that received approval by the Legislature in late June and the governor in July. Public Acts 106 and 107 of 2023 expand current provisions to include agricultural property—in addition to current commercial and industrial property—and allow a local unit of government to contract and finance for an environmental hazard. Environmental hazard projects would generally include the installation of equipment or materials intended to mitigate environmental hazards like contaminants, floods or severe weather. In addition, the bills modify proposed PACE program project reporting requirements and specify that, for all new construction energy projects, a report would have to include a requirement that the building or other structure exceed applicable Construction Code, Uniform Energy Code and Administrative Code requirements.

The bills did not receive immediate effect and will take effect 91 days after the Legislature adjourns for 2023.

Michigan Energy Assistance Program to continue

Set to expire after Sept. 30 of this year, the Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) will continue to aid eligible low-income households with their home energy costs. Public Act 105 of 2023 repealed the end date for the program, which was originally enacted in 2012 and extended twice since that time.



The law requires the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to establish and administer MEAP through payment or partial payment of eligible low-income households for electricity, natural gas, propane, heating oil or other heating fuel bills. The assistance also includes services that will enable participants to become more self-sufficient in minimizing, budgeting and paying their energy costs. The department, in consultation with the Michigan Public Service Commission, can contract with public or private

entities, including local units of government, to provide energy assistance.

The bill took effect on July 27.

Peace officer definition expanded in Mental Health Code

The Mental Health Code authorizes a peace officer to take an individual into protective custody if, for among other reasons, the person presents a danger to themselves or others due to a mental illness. The provisions generally included only state troopers, county sheriffs and deputies, and local police officers. Public Act 56 of 2023 expands the definition of peace officer to now include individuals licensed under the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards Act to include conservation officers such as park rangers, and other officers such as members of a campus public safety department.

These officers undergo similar training in both de-escalation and use of force. If an individual is incapacitated or in distress and in need of being placed in protective custody and transported to a hospital or mental health screening facility for their own safety or the safety of others, the first on the scene is often a conservation officer for an incident at a state park or a department of public safety officer on a college campus. The changes took effect July 12, 2023.



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Legislative lowdown

A quick look at critical bills that MTA is following as they move through the legislative process. Watch our weekly *Township Insights* e-newsletter, sent to all MTA member officials each Friday, for updates.

SB 10 & HB 4036: Public utilities—Prohibit local units of government from imposing a ban on the use of natural gas or installation of natural gas infrastructure. *MTA opposes.*

SB 17: Fireworks—Modifies the days that fireworks use may be regulated by a local unit of government and increases penalties for certain violations. *MTA supports.*

SB 40: Unemployment—Increases maximum number of unemployment benefit weeks. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 41: Construction—Prohibits local units from enacting an ordinance prohibiting use of energy-efficient appliances in new or existing residential buildings. *MTA opposes.*

SB 47: Farmland—Allows relinquishment of portion of farmland from agreement or easement to make boundaries more regular. *MTA neutral.*

SB 55: Property tax—Provides retroactive application of poverty exemption. *MTA supports.*

SBs 95-96, 454-455 and HBs 4894 & 4895: Disabled veterans property tax reimbursement—Provides a mechanism for the state to reimburse local units of government for the property tax exemption available to veterans classified as 100% disabled and their surviving spouses. *MTA supports.*

SB 150: Michigan Tax Tribunal—Expands methods for tax tribunal to hold small claims hearings to include telephonically or by videoconferencing. *MTA supports.*

SB 155: Voting equipment—Prohibits use of electronic voting systems that contain certain parts or equipment. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 169: Collective bargaining—Requires public employers to provide public employee contact information to bargaining representatives. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 171 & HB 4231: Local government—Repeals the Fair and Open Competition in Governmental Construction Act. *MTA supports.*

SBs 176, 330 & 364 and HB 4896: Disabled veterans property tax exemption—Allows one-time filing for exemption and an unremarried surviving spouse to retain exemption. *MTA monitoring.*

SBs 182-183 & HBs 4274-4275: Revenue sharing trust fund—Establishes a “Revenue Sharing Trust Fund” and dedicates portion of general sales tax revenue to the fund to distribute to townships, cities, villages and counties. *MTA supports.*

SB 244: Workers’ compensation—Extends presumption of causation of heart and respiratory diseases to certain members of police, fire and public safety departments. *MTA opposes.*

SB 277: Solar operations—Allows policy for farmers to rent land for commercial solar operations while enrolled in the PA 116 program. *MTA monitoring.*

inside Lansing

SB 293: Housing—Modifies and expands the housing and community development fund to make financing available to middle-income households. *MTA supports.*

SBs 401-404: Elections—Creates state voting rights act. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4012: Speed limits—Modifies procedure for establishing speed limits. *MTA supports.*

HB 4023: Underground storage tanks—Revises placement distance of underground storage tanks from a public water supply. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4033: Elections—Requires state to reimburse costs for certain special elections. *MTA supports.*

HB 4044: Labor—Eliminates requirement that wages and benefit levels be “frozen” during contract negotiations for public employees (*Note: public employees subject to compulsory arbitration are currently exempt*). *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 4129-4130: Elections—Prohibits intimidating an election inspector or preventing an election inspector from performing his or her duties. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4185-4190: Asbestos abatement—Modifies and creates new acts relating to the regulation of asbestos handling and removal activities and how public entities may enter into contracts and agreements with contractors engaging in those activities. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4207-4208: Broadband equipment—Exempts eligible broadband equipment from personal property taxes. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4210: Elections—Provides for the electronic return of absent voter ballots by military voters and their spouses. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4230: Labor—Removes prohibition against deduction from a public employee’s wages for certain political purpose. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4321: Environmental protections—Provides criminal penalties and civil fines for unlawful dumping of garbage. *MTA supports.*

HB 4360: Local government—Allows emergency services authorities to serve partial municipalities. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4382-4383: Drain Code—Revises Chapter 22 of Drain Code process through determination sufficiency of petition and proposed boundaries. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4428: Public notices—Revises publication of legal notices and creates the Local Government Public Notice Act. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4479-4480: Statewide septic code—Provides for the assessment and regulations of on-site wastewater treatment systems. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4486: Governmental immunity—Eliminates governmental immunity and allows governmental agency and employee liability for criminal sexual conduct. *MTA opposes.*

HBs 4502-4503: Election challengers—Provides requirements and training requirements for election challengers. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4526-4528: Local preemption—Preempts local authority for regulations for mining of sand and gravel operations. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4548: Notaries public—Provides fee for remote notarization. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 4553-4554 & SB 331: Local government reimbursement—Creates local government reimbursement fund, provides for distribution of money to the fund to reimburse local governments for revenue lost due to the increase in the small taxpayer exemption. *MTA supports.*

HB 4566: Vehicle registration—Allocates revenue from vehicle registration fees to county where registrant resides and distributes per lane mile to local road agency. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4567: Elections—Removes certain references to challenged ballots. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4568: Elections—Eliminates prohibition on hiring transportation assistance to the polls. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4569: Voter registration—Provides preregistration to vote at age 16. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4570: Absent voter ballots—Provides online application for absent voter ballots. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4572: Property tax assessments—Exempts transfer of ownership of certain real property to certain individuals from uncapping of taxable value upon transfer. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 4605-4606: Public safety—Creates the public safety and violence prevention fund and provides for the earmark and distribution of 1.5% of the 4% of sales tax revenue into the fund for disbursement. *MTA supports.*

HB 4693: Open Meetings Act—Allows nonelected and noncompensated public bodies to meet remotely. *MTA monitoring.*



Township Vendor Directory

2023 edition

Looking for product or service for your township? Pull out this Vendor Directory and place it somewhere convenient. When your township is looking for a company that provides the services you need to run your township efficiently, this listing will help you find a good fit! An online vendor listing, including description of services and links to company websites, is also available at <https://michigantownships.org/vendor-directories>.



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269-381-1173 | www.bfgroup.com



David Chapman Agency

5700 W. Mount Hope Hwy., Lansing, MI 48917
517-214-7837 | www.davidchapmanagency.com



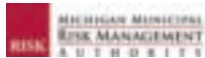
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269-327-2700 | www.DKRagency.com

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Hartleb Agency, An EMC Insurance Company

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269-385-5911 | www.hartlebagency.com



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734-513-0300 | www.mmrma.org



Michigan Township Participating Plan

1700 Opdyke Ct., Auburn Hills, MI 48326
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webuildfun
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800-722-8546 | www.webuildfun.com

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517-788-1215 | www.consumersenergy.com



DTE Energy
1011 Hastings St., Traverse City, MI 49686
313-235-6751 | www.dteenergy.com



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877-482-4829 | www.itc-holdings.com

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231-333-6874 | www.meadhunt.com

Web Design



AccuNet Web Services
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248-684-8715 | www.civicclarity.com



Shumaker Technology Group
3721 W. Michigan Ave., Ste. 103, Lansing, MI 48917
517-325-3121 | www.stgmunicipal.com

Beyond the Vendor Directory

MTA provides many ways to connect you with companies supporting Michigan townships.

- More information, including company descriptions and links to company websites, can be found on **MTA's website**, www.michigantownships.org (click on "Vendor Directories").
- Get peer recommendations on **MTA's Community Connection** members-only social networking site. Access under the "Member" tab on our website; after logging in with your email address on file with MTA, you can ask questions in the "All Members" community or group for your role in the township and receive feedback from your fellow township leaders.
- Meet some of the vendors listed in this directory, as well as others, at our **Professional Development Retreats** held this fall at The Highlands in Harbor Springs or at **MTA's 2024 Educational Conference & Expo** in April at the Grand Traverse Resort in Acme Township (Grand Traverse Co.).



How often must our township have an audit?

Per MCL 141.425, the township board must have an annual audit of the financial status of the township. However, Public Act 146 of 1996 amended MCL 141.425 to allow townships with a population of less than 4,000 to have the audit performed every two years.

An annual audit is required for charter townships, regardless of population. This does not mean that the smaller units cannot have an audit every year. The Michigan Department of Treasury strongly recommends an audit every year, stating in its *Audit Manual For Local Units of Government in Michigan* that, “the audit will help to assure compliance with the law, that systems are in effect to adequately safeguard assets, compliance with the provisions of the state uniform chart of accounts, and that financial statements are fairly stated in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. The independent [certified public accountant (CPA)] should provide the local units with constructive recommendations to improve efficiency, safeguard assets, make budgets more useful as ‘tools to management,’ and ensure that financial reports are fairly presented.”

If your township does not retain a CPA for its annual or biennial audit, the state treasurer must perform the audit or appoint a CPA at the township’s expense.



How does the township go about finding an auditor?

The request for proposal (RFP) process is an integral part of choosing an auditor, helping to ensure that the audit performed is of the highest quality. According to the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), in its resource *Procuring Governmental Audit Services*, “The purpose of an RFP is to provide potential auditors with enough information to develop proposals that address all of your organization’s audit needs and concerns.”

While an RFP is not required for an audit to be performed, it is highly encouraged so that the township can make the most informed and educated auditor selection. The information obtained through a request for proposal is only as good as the questions asked. It is also critical that the audit firm is presented by the township with all the necessary information to compose a comprehensive request for proposal. The AICPA states that, “The RFP should outline the proposal and selection process, as well as summarize the background, objectives, expectations and requirements of the engagement to be undertaken.”



How do we best choose an auditor?

When choosing an auditor, the township board should take into consideration the qualifications and reputation of the firm, and must do their due diligence of selecting a reputable firm. Another consideration is likely to be the cost associated with the audit. While price should not be the driving factor in choosing an audit firm, price can provide perspective as to the reputation of the firm and the quality of their work. A low price may not guarantee a quality audit; on the other hand, a high price may not guarantee a quality audit either.

Remember, the size of a firm does not determine the quality of their work. The peer review program is in place to give insight as to the reputation of the quality of a firm’s work. The latest peer review is not always provided during the auditor selection process. The AICPA states that, “If a firm doesn’t provide the results of its latest peer review with its proposal, ask for it.”

Once these items have been considered, it is time to make your firm selection. While it is wise to rotate audit firms, local governments can continue with the same audit firm after the contract is up if they so choose. There is no state law that prohibits local governments from continuing on with the same audit firm.

Information provided in *Financial Forum* should not be considered legal advice, and readers are encouraged to contact their township auditor and/or attorney for advice specific to their situation.



Angry citizens, ‘constitutional auditors’ and more

When does free speech cross the line?

The man strode into the township hall, silent, video camera in hand. Standing at the counter, he ignored greetings and inquiries of, “How can we help you today?” from the treasurer and other staff. First filming through the plexiglass divider, he then silently walked through the hallways, attempting to zoom in on computer screens, paperwork on desks, and even circling outside the building to record through office windows.

Conway Township (Livingston Co.) had its first experience with so-called “First Amendment auditors”—an experience becoming more and more common in townships and other municipalities of all sizes across Michigan and the country. Individuals, often armed with cell phone or video cameras, visit public spaces, municipal offices or public meetings, extolling their constitutional right to enter and record in public buildings and meetings—though often in an attempt to goad or provoke some sort of response from these public servants. These interactions are frequently posted on social media, online or even covered in the local press.

Such experiences, particularly in these times of increased societal and political tumult, can be nerve-wracking and alarming to public officials and staff, who may fear for their safety. In Conway Township, officials dealt with the experience as best they could—and made plans for the next time something similar may happen.

“It’s this individual’s right to do this,” acknowledged Supervisor **Bill Grubb**. “But it certainly upset people in the office. [First Amendment auditors] want to elicit a response, or capture something controversial. But we just let him go—that’s the biggest thing. We were not going to give him anything controversial.”

Since that first experience, the township has signage on office doors limiting entrance for authorized personnel only. And when they heard another “auditor” was making the rounds in their area again, they made sure to let staff know.

“Everyone is aware of what happened, and that it could happen again,” Grubb said. “This time, we will be better prepared.”

What can—and can’t—townships do to prepare their leaders and their staff, and even their residents, for this trend of citizen activism? How can these situations be best handled—and what should be done when things cross the line?



A sacred right—and seeking a gotcha moment

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution has the following to say about free speech, freedom of religion and petitioning government for a redress of grievances:

Congress¹ shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

As every reader of this article knows, this is one of the most sacred set of rights in America. But sometimes, letting people talk and having to hear what they say is hard to do, especially when what they say is directed against you or your township. It becomes even more difficult when you believe the accusations are mischaracterizations, embellishments or just plain wrong. Add other circumstances to the scenario, such as a person using their cell phone to videotape you while they try to goad you into a “gotcha” moment, or where the encounter takes place at your township hall or some other public place with employees or members of the public present. Then top it off with the person becoming angry, loud, swearing, and in extreme situations maybe even threatening you or others.

As township officials, if you haven’t already encountered a scenario like this, there is a high probability that you will at some point in time. It might be at the front counter in your township hall, in the parking lot after a board meeting, on a phone call, in an email exchange, or virtually anywhere. What will you do? How will you react?

If not handled well, the situation can potentially get out of control and result in a lawsuit for violating free speech rights, or something worse. So, going forward, this article presents some of the things you should be aware of and prepared for, as well as ways to handle or potentially even avoid these types of encounters.

Remember who you are: a government official

Without even realizing it, people often mirror each other’s emotions while communicating. So, when engaging with a person who is loud and angry at you or your township, it is not unusual to react by becoming loud and angry right back at them. It is also common to react as a protector, especially when encountering a person verbally attacking fellow township staff or board members.

It is important to remember that you are a government official, and you are held to a higher standard than most others. Keep in mind that whatever you say and do may be perceived by others as having the weight and power of the township government behind it, and in some cases it may very well include the exercise of that power (e.g., if you order the person removed from the premises or if they are arrested).

Recognizing this, it is important to maintain your composure, listen carefully, assess the situation, and react in a reasonable, disimpassioned and appropriate manner that is based on the circumstances and law. By doing so, there is a good chance you will bring the temperature down and possibly the person will start to mirror you. Or, if the situation calls for it, you will be able to take appropriate other steps, including seeking the assistance of law enforcement.



Constitutional auditors typically sell ads and have “followers” or even paying “subscribers” on their webpages. More followers equals more ads, which equals more money for them. If they are unable to elicit a dramatic video to post for their followers at one location, they will often leave and go elsewhere. Therefore, should you encounter such an individual, one option is to simply ignore them.

Be safe: Situational training from law enforcement is well worth the time

Every scenario is different. In some instances, the situation might involve a citizen who is simply upset or frustrated about something and wants to air their grievances to a public official. That person may not be the world’s best communicator, which is where your effort to listen and identify an appropriate reaction may help bring the matter to a close for the person without incident. In other situations, the individual may become loud to the point of being disorderly and verbally abusive or threatening. In these situations, you obviously should not put yourself or others in harm’s way, so it may be appropriate to contact law enforcement.

But how do you know when it’s time to call the police? Most, if not all, police and sheriff departments in Michigan have provided their officers and deputies situational awareness training to assist them in assessing and properly and handling intense, emotionally charged scenarios. These departments, if asked, may be willing to provide this type of training to township officials and employees. If not, there are service providers that are readily available to assist with this training. It is an invaluable tool for public officials that is interesting and easy to learn, and it will help township officials know what to do at what points in time and how to avoid falling into litigious traps.

Be aware of constitutional auditors

Not all situations start out with a confrontation. Say for example, a person is walking around your township hall filming the facility and township workers going about their daily business. You see or receive reports from staff that this person is talking to employees and asking questions while filming them. The person might even be walking into rooms or office areas, if they are unlocked and not marked as “non-public” areas. Township staff are uneasy, and so are you. What should you do?

This person is probably part of an unorganized and unofficial group of individuals who claim to be “constitutional auditors” or “First Amendment auditors.” They are self-appointed, do not have any actual official authority, and are typically not lawyers. But, by baiting public officials into confronting them and citing snippets of what they authoritatively assert to be their rights under the law, they attempt to goad and catch government officials saying or doing something that looks bad or violates their constitutional rights, while on video. The video is posted on YouTube or elsewhere, with editing (such as sub-text and graphics) to poke fun at government officials who take the bait, and some of these persons will subjectively “grade” the government officials they encounter in the video. In extreme cases—for example, if they are detained or arrested—they will file a lawsuit alleging violations of their rights.

Constitutional auditors typically sell ads and have “followers” or even paying “subscribers” on their webpages. More followers equals more ads, which equals more money for them. So, naturally, if they are unable to elicit a dramatic video to post for their followers at one location, they will leave and go elsewhere. Therefore, should you encounter such an individual, one option is to simply ignore them. However, in today’s world, it is right to be alert and concerned about public safety when a person is engaged in an unusual activity like this. Seemingly aware of that, these individuals will often dress or act in a manner that heightens those types of public safety concerns to entice engagement (e.g., dressing in fatigues or acting peculiarly). So, some level of interaction may be necessary and appropriate. If possible, contacting law enforcement is an option, considering the likelihood they have been better trained to ascertain whether there is any danger and handle such matters in a manner that doesn’t violate rights.

Should law enforcement not be a readily available option, and you find yourself engaged with a constitutional auditor, keeping your cool and exercising the situational awareness practices described in this article will be important (*see page 23*). Additionally, being aware of the law and having a solid facility use policy—both of which are discussed further in the article—may be helpful.

Be aware of the law and the extent free speech rights

The First Amendment is a single sentence, but its words have resulted in a gigantic body of case law and legal treatises that take up entire sections of law libraries across the country. For purposes of this article, there are some key aspects of this area of law that township officials should be aware of when confronted with scenarios like those described previously.

It is often the case that when a person expressing their anger at government is challenged or told they must leave, they will exclaim something like, “I have a constitutional right to say whatever I want wherever I want, and you can’t stop me!” This is not an accurate statement of the law. Yes, in a certain subset of public locations, individuals have a very robust and almost limitless right to say what they want, but in most public places that is not the case. Moreover, there are some categories of speech that are simply not protected at all under the First Amendment.

For instance, while a government restriction of speech based on what is being said (i.e., the content of the speech) is presumed to be unconstitutional, the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that the First Amendment permits the government to prohibit certain speech that falls within a few limited categories, which include obscenity, child pornography, defamation, fraud, incitement, fighting words, true threats, and speech integral to criminal conduct.² It is important to keep in mind, however, that courts will construe these exceptions to the First Amendment in a very narrow and limited manner. For example, courts have found that false statements, outrageous statements, violent speech and depictions of illegal acts of animal cruelty are not exempt from First Amendment protection.³

Additionally, be aware of your location and surroundings, because they will not only influence any decisions you make for personal or public safety purposes if things get out of hand, but they will impact the extent of a person’s free speech rights. First Amendment law has identified the following three types of “forums” in which different levels of free speech protection exist:⁴

Traditional public forums. These are places that courts have concluded are traditionally devoted to and open for public assembly, communication and debate in the United States. In this forum, a person is afforded the highest level of protection for their speech. A government or government official restricting or prohibiting a person from communicating in this forum will be subject to what’s called a “strict scrutiny” test, in which the government can regulate the time, place or manner of speech, but only if that restraint is narrowly tailored to not involve or refer to the content or subject matter of the speech, serve a legitimate and significant governmental interest, leave open ample alternative channels for the person to communicate the information, and is not substantially broader than necessary to achieve the government’s interest.⁵ Examples of public forums include public sidewalks, public streets, public parks and public squares.

Situational awareness and preparedness

Conflict resolution

- Actively listen and choose the right words
 - ✓ Emotional and procedures
 - ✓ Conflicting needs and policies
- Don’t allow your ego into the situation
- Constructively deal with emotions
- Treat them respectfully and professionally
- Listen until you experience their side
- Don’t argue
- Use “please” and “thank you,” and build rapport

Presentation and greeting

1. Meet and greet
 - ✓ Identify yourself and your title
 - ✓ Watch body language—yours and theirs
2. Tell them why you are there or the correct contact person
 - ✓ Ask if there is any justification for their behavior
3. Tell them what you need them to do or what you are going to do
4. Listen/observe their response
 - ✓ Positive response: stay the course that you laid out
 - Negative response:
 - ✓ Offer options with beneficial reasons to cooperate
 - ✓ Ask, “Is there anything I can do or say to change your mind?”
 - ✓ Wait for a response and watch body language
5. Repeated negative response = ACTION
 - ✓ Hands-on involvement
 - ✓ De-escalation applicable protocols
 - ✓ Policy and procedure applications

Indicators of a threat

- Inability to manage distance
 - ✓ Distance = safety and comfort
- Failing to control positioning
- Excessive repetition
 - ✓ Shows their anger
- A change in hand and body movements
- Ability to take action and level of irritation
- Eye focus
 - ✓ Tells their intent

Excerpted from “Keep Calm and Carry On,” presented at MTA’s 2023 Annual Educational Conference, by Mike Wierenga, Co-founder, Two the Rescue, LLC. Additional panelists include Attorney Steve Joppich, Rosati, Schultz, Joppich & Amtsbuechler, PC; and Allie Walker, Vice President, Truscott Rossman. Visit <https://learn.michigantownships.org> to purchase the 75-minute webinar and watch on demand.



In today's world, all officials and personnel benefit from having at least general information about the First Amendment and methods to address challenging situations with individuals expressing themselves.

Designated public forums. These include any public place, public building or room in a public building that is not a traditional public forum, but where the government has made an affirmative choice to open up its property for use by the public for purposes of assembly, communication and debate, it has created a “designated public forum.”⁶ Any action by a township or township official to restrain a person’s speech in a designated public forum is subject to the same strict scrutiny test applicable to traditional public forums. Examples of designated public forums could include, if designated, a township board meeting chambers, an auditorium, rooms or parts of a public building or property, etc.

Non-public forums. These include any public place or public building (or part of it) that is not by tradition or government designation a forum for public communication. A limited or non-public forum can be made available to a select group subject to obtaining permission or for a select or limited purpose without becoming a designated public forum. Any action by a township or township official to restrain a person’s speech in a non-public forum is subject to a “reasonableness” test—i.e., whether there is a reasonable basis for the restraint.⁷ Examples of non-public forums include government offices, fields at a municipal sports complex, meeting rooms, etc.

Therefore, if you encounter an upset citizen or other person communicating something, take note of where it is happening and gauge your actions accordingly. If it is in a

non-public back-office area of the township hall, you may have more legal support for bringing a conclusion to the encounter than if the communication occurs in a public park. As discussed below, having a comprehensive public facility use policy in place can be of great assistance in addressing and possibly even avoiding these situations.

Be prepared: Adopt a public facility use policy

There are both legal reasons and practical/administrative reasons for having a facility use policy for all township-owned public lands and facilities. For example, having a public facility use policy:

- Provides an official written source and support for administrative decision-making in sometimes uncomfortable situations (i.e., enables township employees and officials to hand out the policy and explain that they have no choice, because it’s the rules)
- Helps to avoid arbitrary and inconsistent decision-making by different township employees and officials in similar situations, which can be the basis for claims that township employees or officials have violated free speech or other constitutional rights
- Helps to address and avoid claims of bias, content or viewpoint discrimination
- Reduces confusion by township employees and officials
- Promotes transparency and reduces confusion by members of the township community visiting or using the public facilities
- Lowers the likelihood of citizens being at risk of having government action taken against them, because there is a higher likelihood that they will either read the policies in advance or read them upon presentation and voluntarily decide to comply
- Helps avoid unintentionally violating constitutional rights

In developing a facility use policy, it is a good idea to initially identify the various free speech scenarios and citizen inquiries you may encounter at the township’s public facilities. Some of them are discussed previously, but there are many others. For example, you may encounter people or groups who want to engage in the following activities inside or outside township facilities: demonstrations, marches, strikes, petition signing, campaign or other political events, religious services or events, club meetings or events, leafleting, educational events, homeowner association meetings, soapbox preaching or speeches, and more.

A well-crafted facility use policy should, at a minimum, cover the following basic elements:

- Include a detailed purpose and intent statement, which includes the intent to recognize and respect First Amendment rights

- Identify and address each of the township's public properties, buildings and facilities
- Describe the purpose of each facility
- Categorize each facility, or parts of facilities, as a traditional public forum, designated public forum or non-public forum
- Describe the permitted uses, rules and regulations (general and special) for each facility and, where necessary, areas within facilities, subject to the level of scrutiny applicable under free speech law to the type of forum identified for each facility or parts of facilities
- Identify a person responsible as the manager of each facility and the manager's administrative powers and authority
- For facilities that are made available for public use, designate which require payment of a fee and which do not, as well as any time restrictions and priority of use rules
- Address public safety issues, damage to public facilities and personal property losses
- Describe enforcement for violations of the policy
- List exceptions to the policy, if any

As some additional suggestions, it may be helpful to post the policy on the township's website, if any, and otherwise make it available to the public at the township hall. It would also be beneficial to provide the policy to township staff with training on its contents and usefulness in responding to public inquiries or situations involving entry upon and use of facilities. Additionally, it is advisable to avoid creating separate policies for each facility, because experience tells us that, over time, the policies are likely to be amended in different ways leading to inconsistencies, confusion and undermining the purpose of having the policy in the first place.

Seek the assistance of legal counsel

Every situation and township is different. In today's world, all officials and personnel benefit from having at least general information about the First Amendment and methods to address challenging situations with individuals expressing themselves. How your township addresses particular situations, as well as potentially developing a facility use policy for your township should be accomplished with deference to and the assistance and advice of the township's legal counsel. These actions can help prepare and protect your township leaders and staff to deal with these issues if—and when—they arise.



Steve Joppich, Shareholder
Rosati, Schultz, Joppich & Amtsbuechler, PC
Contact Joppich at sjoppich@rsjalaw.com or
(248) 797-0870, or visit www.rsjalaw.com.

Learn more at MTA's Professional Development Retreats this fall

Handling First Amendment issues and confrontational citizens is a difficult—but important—topic for all local leaders—and you can learn more about this challenging issue from Attorney (and this month's cover story author!) Steve Joppich at MTA's Professional Development Retreats, coming to The Highlands at Harbor Springs this fall. At Joppich's sessions, "Gotcha! Don't take the bait" and "When free speech crosses the line," held at five of our six retreats, you'll learn what the law allows and take away tips for handling (maybe even avoiding) this type of troubling encounter. Retreat details appear on page 27 and on www.michigantownships.org (click on "Upcoming Training" under the "Learning" tab).

End notes

¹ The application of the First Amendment has been extended beyond just "Congress." It also applies to essentially all levels of federal, state and local government and government officials.

² *United States v. Stevens*, 559 U.S. 460, 468 (2010).

³ *United States v. Alvarez*, 567 U.S. 709, 718 (2012); *Brown v. Entm't Merchs. Ass'n*, 564 U.S. 786, 792 (2011); *United States v. Stevens*, 559 U.S. 460, 468 (2010); *Hustler Magazine v. Falwell*, 485 U.S. 46, 55 (1988).

⁴ Obviously, due to limited space, this article barely scratches the surface of First Amendment law. Therefore, readers are advised to communicate with your township attorney to learn more.

⁵ There is a lengthy list of U.S. Supreme Court cases on the strict scrutiny test, but the following two are excellent examples: *Ward v. Rock Against Racism*, 491 U.S. 781, 798–99, 800 (1989); *Heffron v. ISKCON*, 452 U.S. 640, 650 (1981).

⁶ See *Cornelius v. NAACP Legal Def. & Educ. Fund*, 473 U.S. 788, 802 (1985); see also *United States v. Am. Library Ass'n, Inc.*, 539 U.S. 194, 206 (2003).

⁷ *Id.*

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upcoming MTA workshop

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Emerging Issues in Emergency Services

A community that's truly prepared is one that's always looking ahead. This rings especially true in today's era of new and emerging threats. MTA can help you stay on top of the hot issues facing your fire department and emergency services personnel. Township board members, fire chiefs and officials, and anyone serving on your emergency services team is welcome at our annual event designed to provide both an update and a better understanding of current challenges.

Join MTA and a wide variety of experts—including State Fire Marshal Kevin Sehlmeier—at this full-day event **coming to the Bavarian Inn Lodge in Frankenmuth on Sept. 12**. Topics include:

- An update from the state Bureau of Fire Services and review of new training requirements, including mandatory minimums for fire chiefs
- Insights from the state Bureau of Emergency Preparedness, EMS, and Systems of Care on agency and vehicle inspections, equipment list changes, new education grants and more
- An overview of the newest policy updates required by MIOSHA to help ensure your community is in compliance
- The role of the modern fire chief, aligning responsibilities with expertise and expectations
- Keeping pace with the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS)

The event is held from 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. and includes a continental breakfast and lunch. Register by Aug. 28 and save up to \$50 per person.



Cancellations and Substitutions—Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office by Aug. 28 will receive a full refund. No refunds will be issued after Aug. 28 without extenuating circumstances. You may substitute another individual from your township without incurring a charge; please notify MTA of the change.

Emerging Issues in EMS Registration Form

Township and County

Name and Title

Email

Name and Title

Email

Registration Rates and Dates

Early-bird rate*: Expires Aug. 28

\$125/person

Regular rate*: From Aug. 29 to Sept. 5

\$150/person

Late rate*: After Sept. 5

\$175/person

\$ _____ (rate*) x _____ (# registered) =

AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$ _____

*Rates applies to MTA members. Non-members, call MTA for rates.

Save time; register online at:
www.bit.ly/twptraining

NOTE: Payment must accompany form in order to be processed.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Check enclosed (payable to MTA)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Charge to: (circle one)	MasterCard	VISA
Card #		Expires
Print Card Holder's Name	CSV 3-digit code	Signature



Send your completed registration form with payment to MTA, P.O. Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078; fax: (517) 321-8908. Or register online at www.michigantownships.org. Need event registration assistance? Call (517) 321-6467, ext. 226. For other event-related questions, call (517) 321-6467, ext. 221.

upcoming MTA events

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

2023 Professional Development Retreats

As a township leader, you are expected to have solutions for a wide variety of challenges. How do you ensure you're equipped to anticipate, and develop strategies to overcome, virtually any situation that arises in your community? Join fellow officials from across the state this fall at **The Highlands in Harbor Springs** for MTA's Professional Development Retreats. You'll walk away with insights tailored to your role in the township and connections that will last a lifetime!

Content, connections and camaraderie: Each retreat offers a learning experience geared to your role on concepts, trends and pressing issues for townships. Educational sessions are designed for officials at every level, and will help you develop new skills while providing you with knowledge of the statutory duties and responsibilities required of you. Detailed descriptions for each retreat were mailed last month and are also available online at <https://bit.ly/MTAretreats>

Lodging: Housing is not included in retreat registration rates. Make your reservations with The Highlands at Harbor Springs directly. Room types, rates and online reservations available at <http://bit.ly/mtaretreats> OR call (800) 462-6963. When calling, reference "MTA Retreats" to obtain discounted rates.

Event sponsors:



UPCOMING RETREATS

CLERKS
SEPT. 26-27

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OCT. 3-4

P&Z TEAM
OCT. 3-4

SUPERVISORS
OCT. 5-6

STRATEGY &
INNOVATION
OCT. 5-6

TREASURERS
OCT. 10-11

Cancellations and substitutions: Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office four weeks prior to the event will receive a full refund; two weeks prior will receive a half refund; and no refunds will be issued thereafter without extenuating circumstances. Registered attendees who are unable to attend in person will be given access to the virtual version in MTA's Online Learning Center. Or you may substitute another individual from your township for the same retreat. Contact MTA to let us know of the switch. Changes to hotel reservations must be made directly with The Highlands.

Registration Form

Township and County

Name and Title

Email Address

Name and Title

2nd registrant saves \$60!



Email Address

NOTE: Payment must accompany form in order to be processed.

- Check enclosed (payable to MTA)
- Charge to: (circle one) MasterCard VISA

Card #

Print Card Holder's Name

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CSV 3-digit code

Which retreat do you wish to attend?

- Clerks
- Trustees
- Supervisors
- Treasurers
- P&Z Team
- Strategy & Innovation

Save \$60 off your second full-program registration by bringing your deputy, a fellow trustee, manager or superintendent OR a member of your township planning and zoning team. Must register both individuals for the same retreat at the same time to take advantage of the savings!

Full-program rates: Includes all sessions, meals, refreshments and evening activity. Housing is NOT included; see lodging details above on booking your room.

- Early-bird rate \$365/person
- Regular rate \$415/person within three weeks of event
- BONUS: I saved \$60 on a second full-program registration!**

Single-day rates: Includes that day's sessions, meals and refreshments. Day One includes evening activity. Housing is NOT included; see lodging details above on booking your room.

Check the day you wish to attend: Day 1 OR Day 2

- Early-bird rate \$230/person
- Regular rate \$280 within three weeks of event

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$ _____

Above rates are for MTA members; non-members, call MTA for rates.



Send your completed registration form with payment to MTA, P.O. Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078; fax: (517) 321-8908. Or register online at www.michigantownships.org. Need event registration assistance? Call (517) 321-6467, ext. 226. For other event-related questions, call (517) 321-6467, ext. 221.

Forever farms

County program helps preserve township farmland

Howard Fink believes in local decision-making. That's not surprising, as he leads day-to-day operations in **Park Township** (Ottawa Co.) as township manager. With 5½ miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, popular public beaches, dunes and historic vacation homes, Park Township is a destination. It also is home to iconic agriculture—long-standing farms that are part of the fabric of the community.

When the Park Township board voiced interest in preserving the rural character of the township, Fink and other officials took heed. "Our board and our community recognize the significant cultural heritage farms bring to Park Township," said Fink. "We also acknowledge there is quite a bit of pressure, from a development perspective, on ag properties within our township."

Now these concerns can be addressed with action: this spring, the Park Township board adopted a resolution to participate in Ottawa County's Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program. This means Park Township landowners can take steps to ensure their farms stay farms long after they've harvested their last crop.

An opportune time

As the Park Township Planning Commission is embarking on a refresh of the township master plan, this was an opportune time to add farmland preservation to the planning toolbox.

"Two of the big issues that the planning commission has identified are housing and agricultural, and specifically, agricultural preservation," said Park Township Community Development Director **Meika Weiss**.

Next steps, according to Weiss, include meeting with local farmers to understand their perspectives, and share information about the county's farmland preservation



Park Township (Ottawa Co.) is taking efforts to preserve the area's iconic farmland by participating in the Ottawa County Purchase of Development Rights Program.

program. "We want to get a sense of where they're at," she said. "It will be a good opportunity to talk about it."

"It's a very valuable program," Fink said. "It takes a lot of foresight to think about what the agricultural community will look like in 10 to 20 years, even 30 years, and what's the value to the land use policy in our region? So now the hard work begins to try to figure out how to effect that change. That's going to be our charge."

Grants protect neighboring farms

While Park Township has just begun its agricultural preservation journey, two abutting **Zeeland Charter Township** (Ottawa Co.) farms—owned and operated by the Jongekrijg family and by the Holstege family—are moving one step closer to protecting their respective properties. Both farms have been awarded funding to create agricultural conservation easements.

The 92-acre Jongekrijg farm is receiving funding from two separate sources—the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program by way of the most recent federal farm bill.

“My parents told me they always wanted to see it stay a farm,” said Mark Jongekrijg. “I thought, ‘Well, I’m going to do what I can to preserve it that way.’ With these funds, I believe we can.”

A certified Michigan Centennial Farm, the 38-acre Holstege parcel is receiving funds to go toward preservation via the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, also through the federal farm bill.

For Jongekrijg and Tom Holstege, the process of protecting their farms has been a joint effort. But it began with Holstege. After initially learning of the county program, he reached out to Ottawa County Farmland Preservation Analyst Julie Lamer.

“When Tom first approached us about farmland preservation, Zeeland Charter Township had not yet approved a resolution to allow for participation in our program,” said Lamer. “I explained the process to him, and explained we needed the township to support a resolution before he could apply.”

The duo then attended a number of township board meetings in 2019 to ask township officials to approve the resolution. Reflecting on the process, Holstege said, “We were the pioneers, the pilgrims (of preservation in Zeeland). We were the first.”

Having neighboring farms pursue preservation fits in with the county's Focus on Agriculture plan, an economic development guidebook created following its 2019 Farmland Preservation Survey. The survey, which asked Ottawa County agricultural landowners and producers about how best to protect local farmland, showed strong support for preservation efforts.

“Protecting neighboring properties from development provides both economic and environmental benefits,” said Economic Development Coordinator Becky Huttenga. “Most farmers have several tracts of land they farm. When those tracts are separated by miles of other non-farm properties, it is much less economical and environmentally responsible to farm them because you have to move machinery and equipment longer distances. Larger tracts also provide more area for conservation efforts, such as groundwater recharge, wildlife habitat, and maintaining soil health. It's a net positive.”



Zeeland Charter Township (Ottawa Co.) has been part of the county's farmland preservation program since 2019, allowing township farms to better protect their farmland into the future.

Protecting a valuable, iconic industry

Each year, the Ottawa County Agriculture Preservation Board accepts applications to the PDR Program. To participate, applicants must own agriculturally zoned property within a municipality that has adopted a resolution to support the Farmland Preservation Program. The board then scores applications and selects just a few properties for preservation.

This year, at the close of the application cycle on March 31, the board received 13 applicants.

Landowners who choose to participate in the program can protect their farmland by selling the development rights to the county, creating a permanent agricultural conservation easement. Landowners still own the land, retain all rights associated with it, and are compensated for lost development potential.

No county monies are used to fund PDR. This program is completely funded through a combination of state and/or federal grants, private donations and landowner contributions. “Funding and grant funding is pivotal to the success of this program,” Lamer said.

All told, 11 of the county's 17 townships are participating in the program, with Park Township being the newest. “The program momentum continues to build,” Huttenga said. “We're excited to have such a unique township [like Park Township] working with us to protect our valuable and iconic ag industry.”

This article is excerpted and reprinted with permission from an April 20 Ottawa County e-bulletin. Learn more about the Ottawa County Farmland Preservation program at www.miottawa.org/farmland.



Insights into administering early voting

One of the biggest changes brought about by Proposal 2022-2, approved by voters in November 2022 to enshrine expanded voting rights in the state Constitution, was nine days of in-person early voting before statewide and federal elections.

This is required for every jurisdiction for these elections, starting with the 2024 presidential primary (whose final date has not yet been set). While townships have *the option* of providing early voting for other elections, it is only required for statewide and federal elections. As implementation legislation has now been signed into law enacting Proposal 2 changes into statute, continued questions and concerns may linger for clerks and elections administrators on how to accomplish this new requirement.

What are early voting options and what considerations should townships weigh as we move closer to our first election with this new voter access?

What's in the new law

As shared in the July issue of *Township Focus*, under Public Act 81 of 2023, townships can run early voting on their own, or enter into an agreement to work with other municipalities or the county to offer this new requirement. The township must submit a voting plan to the county on how early voting will be conducted. Under the new law, the state must create sample voting plans and agreements (watch MTA publications for

updates on when these become available). The municipal and county agreements will include information such as number of precincts of participating municipalities, how voters will be notified of early voting sites, budgeting and cost-sharing procedures, supervision, staffing, and more.

PA 81 also outlines deadlines for when county clerks must notify municipal clerks in their county if the county clerk intends to conduct early voting, when a township can withdraw from a municipal or county agreement, and notification requirements to voters of early voting sites.

A look at other states

In other states across the country, elections and early voting are administered at the county level. There is generally no attempt to provide early voting sites by municipality. Rather, early voting offers more options for voting in person—such as the nine days in Michigan—with a trade-off of traveling further than on Election Day to vote, but with the convenience of selecting the day the voter wishes to vote. Generally, early voting accounts for upwards of one-third of the total vote, reducing mail voting and taking pressure off Election Day.

In Ohio, for example, there is one early voting site per county regardless of the size of a county. Miami-Dade County, Fla. has nearly 1.5 million registered voters, who are served by 28 early voting sites. In Tennessee, which has conducted early voting since the 1990s, Knox County—with 300,000 registered voters—has 10 early voting sites. Tennessee’s Montgomery County, which is similar to Michigan’s Berrien, Jackson and Monroe Counties, has 118,000 registered voters and two early voting sites.

While Illinois has townships, they don’t administer elections. Perry County in southern Illinois, with a population of nearly 21,000, has two early voting sites, one beginning in late September and the other beginning in mid-October. These two early voting sites serve all the townships in Perry County.

Early voting sites are frequently located where voters typically travel for shopping, work or school. While there appears to be concern that Michigan early voting requires voters to leave their township to early vote, this is typically the case in states where early voting is used. Voters in more rural areas often drive considerable distances for work, shopping and school. Early voting is no different, as it is spread across nine pre-election days covering two full weekends. Of course, each voter’s Election Day precinct will remain open and available on Election Day, and absentee voting also remains an option.

Working together for successful elections

While some assert that Michigan’s decentralized electoral system is its strength, there is also the assertion that intergovernmental collaboration makes our elections process work as well as it does. Both county and municipal clerks are necessary for successful elections in Michigan. Bringing together this expertise is essential to Michigan voters having an excellent early voting experience.

Some county clerks who have not conducted elections at the municipal level may be reluctant to offer a countywide agreement to the municipalities in their respective counties. However, if these agreements are offered with municipal clerk involvement, the county clerk can play a coordinating role while each municipal clerk steps up to supervise an early voting site on one of the early voting days, rather than supervising an early voting site for nine days. This relationship can work in either county agreements or municipal agreements.

Regardless of the early voting approach—stand-alone, municipal agreement or county agreement—county clerks will be intimately involved in early voting. In most counties, they will do most of the training of election inspectors who will conduct early voting. They will have to closely work with municipal clerks to accurately program the early voting tabulators, which will be more complicated because multiple precincts will often be programmed on a single tabulator. They will program the vote accumulation software to accurately report the unofficial and official results from each early vote tabulator. Finally, they will conduct the canvass and, when required, the recounts of early voting results. Both will require troubleshooting when issues arise.



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MAP’s annual conference offers sessions customized for township land use leaders. Keynotes include Sarah Lucas, AICP, Director of Rural Development, sharing how rural Michigan is poised for exciting new opportunities; nationally recognized Doug Griffiths provides practical tips from his book **13 Ways to Kill Your Community**; Alan Mallach will present strategies from his new book, **Smaller Cities in a Shrinking World**. Breakouts include: renewable energy, short term rentals, and small town and rural economic development. Complete the **MSU Extension Citizen Planner Program** in three days. **Register today!** www.planningmi.org

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feature

There are counties where collaboration discussions have been occurring to create county agreements that could effectively serve the voters without exorbitant fiscal outlays. These counties include Ottawa, Oakland, Hillsdale, St. Joseph, Saginaw and Washtenaw.

Many municipal clerks serve on a part-time basis, making nine days of early voting administration a hardship, particularly if the clerk has another job. At a minimum, municipal clerks who do not enter a countywide agreement should seriously consider entering a municipal agreement with other municipal clerks in the county. This can be an agreement with a handful of municipal clerks or with all the municipal clerks in a county.

There is, of course, a cost to implement and administer early voting, and there are substantially higher costs to municipalities that decide to go it alone instead of joining an agreement. The Fiscal Year 2023-24 budget did include up to \$30 million for incentive grants to counties to coordinate implementation of early voting and incentivize multi-jurisdictional coordination. By joining a county or municipal agreement, a substantial amount of the early voting expenses will be paid by the incentive grants. And while the Legislature may appropriate funding for tabulators and election inspectors for 2024, it is very questionable whether this appropriation will be made in future elections. To date, the Legislature has never appropriated funds for municipalities to defray statewide elections in August and November.

Additional guidance to come

Additional guidance and training from the state Bureau of Elections will continue to be released over the next few months. As township boards, clerks and election administrators discuss and make decisions on how best to implement the changes required by Proposal 2, MTA will share updates and information as they become available to help ensure that townships can continue to provide efficient, effective elections for their voters.

Chris Thomas, fellow at the Bipartisan Policy Center, and former Michigan director of elections (1981-2017)

With contributions by MTA staff

BOE launches early voting webpage

Just prior to *Township Focus* press time, a new “Early in-person voting” webpage was launched by the Michigan Department of State, Bureau of Elections (BOE), sharing answers to many frequently asked questions regarding early voting and early voting sites. The page, designed to inform clerks, partners, stakeholders and the public, will be updated on an ongoing basis to answer additional questions. You can access the page on www.michigan.gov/elections; click on “How to vote in Michigan,” then “Early in-person voting.”



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Want to see your township in the pages of *Township Focus*? It's easy! Simply contact ashley@michigantownships.org to get started. You can submit article copy and photos, or supply us with the details and we'll write it for you.



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