

Michigan

AUGUST 2025

Township Focus

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

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Rolling out the welcome mat

Think back to when you were first elected to office or appointed to a township board or commission. How did you feel? Anxious, excited, eager ... terrified?

Becoming a public servant is an experience like no other, and most of us don't come to this position equipped with all of the necessary skills, information and experiences to jump right into the role.

That's where mentoring comes in—helping to lead and guide those new to township service or assuming a new position, to be fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, the processes and requirements, the culture and policies of the community they now serve.

As you know from my previous messages to you, a key focus of my year as your MTA president is to encourage our members to **recruit** new leaders for our township, **mentor** them to ensure success and continuity, and engage with **youth**, who are the future of our communities. This month, I am reflecting on the need and the value of mentoring in the township government.

Why is mentoring important? Put simply, it is essential to ensuring the success of those with whom we serve—to make sure they are knowledgeable and equipped with the skills and information to help lead our communities. When a new individual is elected or appointed, as well as deputies and others in the township, we can't just say, "Well, there you go" and leave them to learn on the go or trial by fire. We need to help them, work with them and train them. This is what is needed for our townships to continue serving our residents and communities. It also helps to make sure we have qualified individuals who can step in to serve when vacancies and opportunities occur. Through mentoring, we can do just that.

I have been supervisor of **Burt Township** (Cheboygan Co.) for nearly 30 years. There will come a time when I'm going to say to my township, "OK, someone else needs to come and help run this ship." And I am going to be more than willing to help them with the transition. Some township officials out there, when they get defeated in an election, go hide in the corner and take their knowledge with them. That's not me, and that's not how my township operates, and I hope that all other townships and officials can rise above and find a new path. Whether it's for the office you hold, or the board as a whole, passing down your knowledge and experiences to your successor is crucial. You are not elected to serve your own self-interests. You are here for the betterment of your community.

Mentoring can take on different forms. In my small township, our mentoring is a more casual, informal process—and it's ongoing. It's regularly checking in and having open communications—making sure new leaders know they can reach out for help and to ask questions. In other townships, the process may be more formalized. I asked some colleagues on the MTA Board their approach to welcoming new leaders.



One township, for example, has a four-step onboarding process for new board members, including updating the township's *New Township Officials Handbook* and holding a special meeting of the board in which each department head discusses what their department does. The township manager also takes the new board member around the township offices to visit employees one on one, and the supervisor, clerk and treasurer meet with the new official to discuss board procedures and protocols. Another of my MTA Board colleagues shared that his township reaches out to candidates before they are even elected to invite them to attend board meetings—allowing them to become familiar with issues and discussions they may soon be tackling on the other side of the board table. They are also invited to budget workshops to increase awareness of financial aspects in the township, and meet with a local economic development organization to learn more about regional approaches and efforts.

Mentoring also includes making sure newcomers are aware of the resources available to them—including their peers in the township and the surrounding communities. This really is neighbors helping neighbors. It's listening, encouraging and explaining, and making sure they feel comfortable to speak and act in making decisions for the township. It helps to set the tone for their time in public service—one of positivity and effective leadership.

The township board needs to ensure new leaders get the education they need to get up to speed. Turn to MTA's member programs and services—workshops, webinars and Annual Conference, publications and this magazine, as well as the Member Information Services staff and website. Equipping new leaders with the support, information and guidance they need can make their service more rewarding and positive—ultimately benefitting the community as a whole.

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allied service provider index



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What you need to know about the Open Meetings Act

The Open Meetings Act (OMA) is arguably the statute that most impacts a township board as a whole. Every board member is subject to the OMA every time the board meets—and before and after it meets. All other statutory township boards and commissions are also subject to the OMA. Learn more about the OMA's requirements for meeting notice, conduct, decision-making, minutes—and more.

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What is the FDTA and how could it affect Michigan's townships?

New digital financial reporting requirements may soon impact how some Michigan townships report their financial data to the municipal bond market. Michigan townships can try out a new online tool to get hands-on experience with digital data standards for local government financial data.



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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!
2025 Township
Vendor Directory



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SAFE AND SOUND

Townships named among state's, nation's 'safest communities'



An Upper Peninsula township topped a recent listing of Michigan's safest communities.

Kinross Charter Township

(Chippewa Co.) is the #1 safest place in the state, according to Safewise.com's 2025 "Safest Cities" report. This is the first year the township has been included in the listing.

For 11 years, Safewise.com has released a "Safest Cities" report, using self-reported data submitted to the FBI to calculate the violent crime rate and the property crime rate per 1,000 residents. Some 183 Michigan communities met the criteria for ranking for the 2025 report, which used FBI data released in October 2024, for crimes reported in 2023. During that time period, Kinross Charter Township, which has a population of just over 6,400 residents, had no violent crime and just five property crimes.

Nine townships rounded out the top 10 of the safest communities in Michigan. They are: **Hamburg Township** (Livingston Co.), **Raisin Charter Township** (Lenawee Co.), **Brandon Charter Township** (Oakland Co.), **Spring Arbor Township** (Jackson Co.), **Adrian Charter Township** (Lenawee Co.), **Argentine Township** (Genesee Co.), **Oakland Township** (Oakland Co.) and **Lyon Charter Township** (Oakland Co.). Townships comprised 80% of the top 20 safest communities in the state, with seven townships landing rankings beyond the top 10.

Two townships also made Safewise's 2025 list of Top 100 "Safest Cities" in the country: Spring Arbor Township came in at #70, while Hamburg Township ranked #96. Among other interesting findings noted in the report were:

- Adrian Charter Township was the only Michigan community on the list to report zero burglaries.
- Raisin Charter Township jumped up 27 spots from the previous year, to land at the #3 safest community in the state.

"The sense of neighborhood and community involvement is a thread weaving its way through Michigan's safest cities," Safewise security analyst John Roskelley said. "These are values that start in childhood, so it's no coincidence the safest cities are also those with some of the best schools and school districts."

Safewise.com identifies the median community population for all municipalities in the state that reported to the FBI, and reports on those with populations above the median. Additional ranking factors include unique safety initiatives and security programs implemented within the past few years.

UP TO THE CHALLENGE

Townships recognized for sustainability accomplishments



Ten townships were among the record-high 68 Michigan communities celebrated by the Michigan Green Communities Challenge for their environmental efforts that help improve the quality of life for their residents. The recognized townships, counties, cities and villages—which collectively represent 5.7 million Michiganders—logged actions taken in 2024 related to community leadership in various areas, including energy efficiency, climate resilience, recycling, environmental stewardship, and more.

Communities are awarded seals of achievement at four levels, from bronze to platinum. This year, townships were recognized in the gold and silver tiers. Gold-level townships include **Canton Charter Township** (Wayne Co.), **Delhi Charter Township** (Ingham Co.), **Meridian Charter Township** (Ingham Co.), **Orion Charter Township** (Oakland Co.), **Pittsfield Charter Township** (Washtenaw Co.), **Scio Township** (Washtenaw Co.) and **West Bloomfield Charter Township** (Oakland Co.). At the silver level are **Buena Vista Charter Township** (Genesee Co.), **Lyndon Township** (Genesee Co.), **Saugatuck Township** (Allegan Co.) and **Sheridan Township** (Calhoun Co.).

In Saugatuck Township, a new lakeside overlay district sets development standards that curb erosion, protect dune and bluff stability, and preserve the Lake Michigan shoreline. On the Kalamazoo River Greenway, a 10-acre former field is being restored to native prairie, with plans for shoreline stabilization and invasive-species control at the township's River Bluff Park. The township also developed a non-motorized infrastructure master plan and finished design work for a three-mile extension of the Blue Star Trail, bringing safe, low-carbon travel options closer to reality.

"The Michigan Green Communities network challenges us to turn shared ideas into on-the-ground results," said Saugatuck Township Manager **Daniel DeFranco**. "By conserving rare river and dune ecosystems and expanding clean-mobility choices, we're honoring community values and empowering residents to be everyday stewards."

Michigan Green Communities, in which MTA is a partner, is a sustainability networking, benchmarking and technical assistance program that guides and supports local government in creating a more environmentally and economically sustainable future for the state of Michigan. The program is free and open to all local governments in Michigan. Learn more at migreencommunities.com.



DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

Michigan ranked #3 in nation for November '24 election voter participation

A state report examining county-level voter turnout from the November 2024 election shows that more than 5.7 million votes were cast in the presidential election. The report further shared that Michigan was third in the nation for voter turnout, with 74.6% of eligible voters casting a ballot. Michigan was one of only five states with higher voter turnout in 2024 than in 2020.

The Michigan Department of State 2024 election turnout report shows statewide total turnout of 5,706,503, breaking Michigan's previous record turnout in the 2020 presidential election (5,579,317). Voters cast over 60% of ballots early or by mail, with over 1.2 million Michigan voters in the 2024 general election casting a ballot at their in-person early voting site and over 2.2 million voting by mail.

More than 820,000 voters were first-time voters in Michigan, making up 14.5% of total turnout. Over 71,000 eligible, but previously inactive, voters also cast a ballot; 35.4% of these voters had not cast a ballot since before 2020. According to the report, the counties with the highest turnout of active registered voters in 2024 were: Leelanau (89.0%), Livingston (86.4%), Keweenaw (85.2%), Clinton (84.7%), and Grand Traverse (83.6%).

More than half of voters in 58 of 83 Michigan counties cast ballots early or by mail. Leelanau County had the highest percentage of votes by mail (50.5%) and Kalkaska County had the highest percentage of votes cast at an early voting site (37.6%).

A recent poll of Michigan voters from the Democracy Defense project showed that 88% say they trust that their local elections are run fairly and their votes are counted accurately. We thank all township clerks and election workers for their dedication and incredibly hard work in helping to educate voters and in safeguarding local democracy for Michigan communities.

LOCAL UPDATES FROM ACROSS MICHIGAN

Township happenings

A federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant has helped the **Argentine Township** Fire & Rescue Department (Genesee Co.) purchase a new tanker to replace the township's current tanker from 1981, improving emergency response and public safety. Fire Chief **Jeremy Kurtz** said, "Our rural jurisdiction has no municipal water source, so we rely on bringing water with us to fires and drafting it from rivers, ponds, lakes and other bodies of water. This new tanker will greatly increase our water resource capabilities to protect our residents and community, as well as neighboring communities."

Cannon Township (Kent Co.) Trustee **Jessica Gutowski-Slaydon** is a 2025 Michigan Political Leadership Program (MPLP) fellow. Gutowski-Slaydon is one of 24 individuals from across the state to take part in the program. Managed by Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, MPLP—one of just a few bipartisan leadership programs in the nation—incorporates practical politics, public policy analysis and process, personal leadership development and effective governance.



Tell us what's happening in YOUR township! We LOVE hearing your township's story—and want to share your news with our readers. Email your updates, events, stories, accomplishments, activities—whatever is going on in your community!—to jenn@michigantownships.org (pictures are encouraged, too!). Hosting a community event? Celebrating residents achievements? Restoring an old building? We want to hear it ALL! We may share it in *Township Happenings*, profile your township in *Around the State* (turn to page 32), include details in a larger article or post on MTA's social media channels. Send us your township's updates and help inspire communities across the state.



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Two northern Michigan lawmakers joined the MTA Board of Directors at its June meeting for a discussion on key legislative issues in Lansing. Sen. John Damoose (R-Harbor Springs) and Rep. Parker Fairbairn (R-Harbor Springs) tackled topics ranging from the state budget—with Fairbairn telling MTA leadership that “good conversations are happening in Lansing”—to road funding. “The overall narrative I am hearing is that we need to think beyond state roads to local roads,” Damoose said. The lawmakers also touched on local control concerns, including possible legislation to preempt local zoning over certain housing issues, as shared in the July issue of *Township Focus*. “We have all kinds of issues that are local control issues—such as short-term rentals, renewable energy,” Damoose told the local leaders. “How can we think that Lansing has all the answers? I am 1,000% with you.” Added Fairbairn, “It is not the state’s job to dictate what all townships have to do. I’m of the principle that the townships really do know best.”

The legislators also shared insights on how local officials can establish connections with their state elected leaders. “When campaigning, I called every township and school board official, so they would all have my cell phone number,” Fairbairn said. “You have to make sure they have open access. Get their cell phone [number] and let them know you want regular communication.” Noted Damoose, “We want to do a good job for our region and state, and the only way that we know how to do that is by hearing from our constituents. It’s literally our job. You help me as much as I help you. Work with our staff, send letters, emails, schedule a meeting.”

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Mika Meyers PLC is proud to support the continuing education of its township clients, their elected officials and MTA members through its involvement as an Allied Service Provider. For more information on the firm, visit mikameyers.com

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mta events | august

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| 18 | <i>Making Meetings More Effective</i> and <i>Fundamentals of Assessment & Taxation</i> workshops, Bellaire |
| 19 | <i>Managing Your Township Team</i> workshop, Bellaire |



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Please join MTA in welcoming **VC3** to our Allied Service Provider program at the Keystone Club level. Based in **Bath Charter Township** (Clinton Co.), VC3 specializes in cybersecurity and automation to help their clients manage, protect and accelerate their township's technology. For more on VC3 and other Allied Service Providers, check out the Allied Service Provider Directory on michigantownships.org (under "Vendor Directories").



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AUGUST

1 By Aug. 1. Deadline for township or local authority to file Form 5608, *Portion of 2024 Essential Services Millage Rate Dedicated for the Cost of Essential Services*. (MCL 123.1353(7))

By Aug. 1. Deadline for a municipality to file Form 5613, *Millage Rate Correction for the 2025 Personal Property Tax Reimbursement Calculations*. (MCL 123.1358(4))

Until 4 p.m. Deadline for applicant to cure signature deficiency on application to receive an absent voter (AV) ballot by first-class mail for Aug. 5 election. (MCL 168.761)

Clerks must send an AV ballot via first-class mail before 5 p.m. for Aug. 5 election. (MCL 168.761)

Electors who have lost their AV ballot or not yet received their ballot in the mail have until 5 p.m. to submit a written request to spoil their AV ballot and receive a new AV ballot by mail for Aug. 5 election. (MCL 168.765b(5))

2 Eligible township that establishes Election Day vote center must post notice of establishment and location of vote center on website and in clerk's office. (MCL 168.523b)

4 All townships may begin processing and tabulating AV ballots for Aug. 5 election. (MCL 168.765a)

Electors who have lost their AV ballot or not yet received their ballot in the mail have until 4 p.m. to submit a written request to spoil their AV ballot and receive a new AV ballot in clerk's office for Aug. 5 election. (MCL 168.765b(7))

Registered voters may apply for AV ballot in person at the clerk's office for Aug. 5 election until 4 p.m. (MCL 168.759)

5 Election Day registrants may obtain and vote an AV ballot in person in clerk's office or vote in person in the proper precinct for Aug. 5 election. (MCL 168.761(7))

Election Day. (MCL 168.641)

Deadline for emergency absentee voting for Aug. 5 election (begins Friday, Aug. 1). (MCL 168.759b)

6 Local board of election commissioners that establishes an Election Day vote center for Nov. 4 election must inform applicable county clerk that vote center will be established in township. (MCL 168.523b)

Clerk must deliver results of Aug. 5 election to county clerk by 11 a.m. (MCL 168.809)

7 Boards of county canvassers meet to canvass the Aug. 5 election by 9 a.m. (MCL 168.821)

8 By 5 p.m. Voter must cure the signature on AV ballot return envelope, allowing an otherwise valid ballot for Aug. 5 election to be accepted for tabulation. (MCL 168.766)

11 Deadline for a ballot submitted by a military or overseas voter (MOVE) and postmarked on or before Election Day to be deemed timely received and counted. (MCL 168.759a)

Deadline for local clerk to deliver ballots with a signature that was cured after Election Day and by 5 p.m. the third day after Election Day to the county clerk. (MCL 168.766)

12 Deadline for clerk to deliver MOVE ballots received within six days of Election Day to the county clerk. (MCL 168.759a)

Ballot wording of proposals qualified to appear on Nov. 4 ballot certified to local or county clerks by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.646a) Local clerks receiving ballot wording must forward to county clerk within two days. (MCL 168.646a)

15 Deadline to certify 2025 essential services assessment statement and electronically submit essential



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services assessment in full to the state Department of Treasury without late payment penalty. (MCL 211.1057(3))

21 Beginning of period for regular inspection of AV drop boxes to ensure compliance with requirements for Nov. 4 election. (MCL 168.761d)

SEPTEMBER

4 Deadline for candidates or ballot questions appearing on the August ballot to submit post-election campaign finance statement. (MCL 169.233)

5 Local clerk in a combined absent voter counting board (AVCB) agreement must inform applicable county clerk that an Election Day AVCB has been authorized by local board of election commissioners. (MCL 168.764d)

Beginning of the period during which township board or board of county election commissioners may not establish, move or abolish a polling place, early voting site or central polling place for Nov. 4 election, unless damaged or destroyed. (MCL 168.662)

15 Last day for qualified taxpayers to file intent for 2025 summer tax deferral. (MCL 211.51(7))

Deadline to amend a previously certified 2025 essential services assessment statement. (MCL 211.2057(4))

Summer taxes due. (MCL 211.107)

16 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))

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

Deadline for county clerks to deliver AV ballots for Nov. 4 election to local clerks. (MCL 168.714)

Beginning of period during which clerk must make reasonable effort to verify or reject AV ballot application or AV ballot return envelope for Nov. 4 election by the end of the business day after the application or envelope is received. (MCL 168.766b)

25 AV ballots for Nov. 4 election must be available for issuance to voters. (Mich. Const., Art. 2, Sec. 4)

Beginning of period secure drop boxes must be accessible 24 hours each day (until 8 p.m. on Election Day). (Mich. Const., Art. 2, Sec. 4)

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 1963 Constitution and MCL 211.24e, Truth in Taxation, on STC Form L-4029 on or before Sept. 30. (MCL 211.36)

**Early voting is optional for 2025 elections. For August and November election early voting dates, visit www.michigan.gov/elections.*



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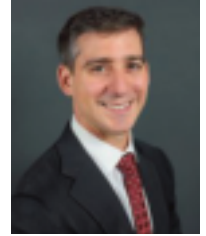
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What is a municipal civil infraction?

A municipal civil infraction is a non-criminal penalty for violating township ordinances. It can be used as an alternative to a criminal misdemeanor charge, but must be spelled out in the township's ordinances. Civil infractions are processed through the county's district court, and the township may ask the court to order the violator to bring their property into compliance with the ordinance requirements. This is a cost-effective prosecution technique that allows townships to enforce their ordinances and compel compliance.



How do I know whether my ordinances designate a violation as a municipal civil infraction?

The easiest way is to look for the penalty/violation provision of the ordinance you are trying to enforce. There are two types of ordinances: a non-zoning regulatory ordinance, also known as a "police power ordinance," and a zoning ordinance, which regulates land uses. Each police power ordinance will include a penalty provision within the ordinance itself. You could therefore have some police power ordinances that are misdemeanors and some that are municipal civil infractions.

The township's zoning ordinance will include a single penalty and enforcement section that applies to the entire zoning ordinance. It is good practice to review all of your ordinances to determine whether the penalty provisions designate a violation as a "misdemeanor," which is criminal, or a "civil infraction." Generally speaking, most townships choose to designate a violation of their ordinances as a municipal civil infraction. If one of your ordinances currently designates a violation as a misdemeanor, the township board could consider an amendment to that ordinance to designate a violation as a municipal civil infraction. You should talk to your township attorney to discuss whether such an amendment is right for your specific ordinance, and to understand the procedure for amending an ordinance.



What is the role of the ordinance enforcement officer?

The ordinance enforcement officer investigates complaints, discusses potential violations with the property owner or occupant, tries to resolve an infraction informally, and if necessary, issues citations and goes to court

to enforce ordinances. Court is a matter of last resort, and most ordinance enforcement officers work with violators the best they can to achieve compliance without court intervention.

An ordinance enforcement officer documents all cases by taking date- and time-stamped photographs, and keeping written notes and copies of any correspondence mailed to a violator. It is good to have this documentation in case the violation needs to go to court. Judges like to see pictures of violations, and as the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." Everyone knows blight when they see it. Everyone recognizes junk cars or dangerous buildings when they are presented with pictures showing dismantled vehicles or semi-collapsed structures. This type of documentation makes the township's case strong should we need to proceed to court. The stronger the case file, the more likely the township will receive a positive outcome at a court hearing. The strength of the case file is all the work of the ordinance enforcement officer.



I suspect a violation, but I can't see it. What do I do?

Townships often receive complaints about a property's condition or use where the ordinance officer is unable to see the violation from the road right-of-way. The ordinance officer should never enter a property without authorization. There are two ways to get onto a property to inspect and photograph violations: 1) obtain the consent of the property owner or occupant; or 2) obtain an administrative search warrant.

Consent is just that: the property owner or occupant authorizes the ordinance enforcement officer to enter their property, inspect and take pictures. You may be surprised at how often you can obtain consent to enter a property. The ordinance enforcement officer should carefully document



how the consent was obtained. You should work with your township attorney to prepare a consent and waiver form, so that the consent is documented in writing. Written authorization removes any potential claims of trespass and reassures the court that the township obtained consent before entering the property.

An administrative search warrant is similar to a search warrant that you may be familiar with from law enforcement. However, an administrative search warrant is almost never used to seize property: only to inspect and take photographs. You should work closely with your township attorney in preparing and obtaining an administrative search warrant. A search warrant is a very complicated legal document that must be approved by a court. An administrative search warrant may be used where blight is located in a rear yard or can't be seen clearly through trees; or where there are potential violations of the building code of a structure and your inspector needs to enter the structure to determine the extent of the suspected violations.



The township issued a municipal civil infraction and we are in district court. What happens next?

Each county and district court operates differently. Some courts start with an “informal hearing,” which is a hearing between the violator, the ordinance enforcement officer, and the magistrate, where no attorneys are present. After listening to the parties and considering the evidence (such as photographs), the magistrate will rule on whether the defendant violated a township ordinance. A defendant may appeal a magistrate's finding and demand a formal hearing before a district court judge.

Other courts don't hold informal hearings, and the citation proceeds directly to district court, where it is set for either a pretrial conference or a formal hearing. A pretrial conference is an opportunity for the violator/defendant to meet with the township attorney (and typically the ordinance enforcement officer) to negotiate a settlement. Most cases can be resolved at the pretrial conference. Those that can't be resolved will go to a formal hearing, which is essentially a mini trial before the district court judge. After the pretrial or formal hearing, the township attorney will typically ask the judge to sign a compliance order, which requires the defendant to take certain actions.



What is a compliance order?

A compliance order is prepared by the township attorney before the case is heard before a magistrate or a district court judge.

The township attorney reviews the citation that was issued

and the ordinance the defendant is accused of violating, then works with the ordinance enforcement officer to draft a compliance order that achieves the compliance the township is requesting. For example, a compliance order for a blight violation may require that the defendant remove all trash, junk and inoperable vehicles from their property within a specified number of days. If ordered by the judge and the defendant fails or refuses to do so, the order may allow the township to enter the property and effectuate the cleanup itself, and charge the costs to the property as a tax.



How do we determine which cases to enforce?

The township board should establish its priorities for enforcement, including which areas of the township are most important to address. If possible, the board should set aside a budget for ordinance enforcement and remediation, which sets clear goals for cleaning up property or razing dangerous buildings. Obtaining township-wide compliance with all ordinances will not happen overnight. Although it may be a daunting task, working at it over time will create real results for your community.

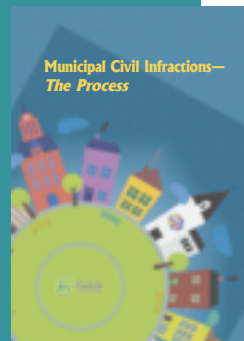
While ordinance enforcement is not a “money maker” for the township, the township and its residents will appreciate the aesthetic improvements. Good luck!

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.

Learn more with MTA's *Municipal Civil Infractions: The Process*

Get more information with MTA's publication, *Municipal Civil Infractions: The Process*. Developed to help alleviate the confusion that often surrounds the civil infraction process, this reference supplies information regarding the adoption of a municipal civil infraction procedures ordinance and the issuing of tickets and handling of court proceedings. You'll also learn more about penalties, negotiating cases, enforcement considerations, and more. Appendices include sample municipal civil infractions procedures and penalty provisions ordinances, and a look at civil infraction case law in Michigan.

Order your copy today! Member price is \$37, \$52 for non-members, and includes shipping and handling. Order via the Store at michigantownships.org (member login is required), submit a completed publication order form, or contact (517) 321-6467, ext. 231 or tonia@michigantownships.org.



Legislative lowdown

A look at critical bills MTA is following as they move through the legislative process. Watch for updates in *Township Insights*, MTA's weekly e-newsletter emailed each Friday to all individuals from MTA-member townships with an email in our database.

SBs 6 & 7: Employment practices—Provides employer requirements for payment of wages and fringe benefits, and provides penalties for violations. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 16: Farmland—Allows relinquishment of portion of farmland from agreement or easement to make boundaries more regular. *MTA neutral.*

SB 23 & HB 4081: Land division—Authorizes counties and municipalities to increase the number of parcels resulting from division (four splits to 10 splits). *MTA monitoring.*

SB 46: Water supply—Regulates mobile home park water delivery systems. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 80 & HB 4084: Transportation—Provides criteria and funding, including grants or loans to local road authorities, for noise abatement measures. *MTA supports.*

SB 81 & HB 4070: Indigent Defense Commission—Expands Michigan Indigent Defense Commission Act to include youth. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 82: Public records—Creates new act to allow judges to request a public body not publicly post or release certain information concerning the judge or judge's family members. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 86: Social services boards—Allows elected officials to serve on a county social services board. *MTA neutral.*

SB 110: Property tax exemptions—Provides for a homestead property tax exemption for the surviving spouse of an emergency first responder killed in the line of duty. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 120: Elections—Modifies process for voting without identification for election purposes to include proof of

identity and proof of state residency. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 129: Open Meetings Act—Provides for remote meeting participation of certain non-elected public body members with disabilities. *MTA neutral.*

SB 145: Employment—Prohibits an employer from seeking or asking about certain information about a job applicant's compensation history and credit history. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 161: Workers' compensation—Extends the presumption of causation of heart and respiratory diseases to certain members of police, fire and public safety departments. *MTA opposes.*

SB 192: Property taxes—Provides for the freeze of taxable value for primary residences of certain senior citizens. *MTA opposes.*

SB 195 & HB 4299: Preemption—Repeals law that preempts local regulation of plastic bags and other containers. *MTA supports.*

SB 240 & HB 4699: Term of office—Modifies term of office start date for township officials to Dec. 1. *MTA neutral.*

SB 246 & HB 4393: Landfills—Increases disposal fees and limits certain disposal wells and certain naturally occurring radioactive material (TENORM) disposal. *MTA supports.*

SB 247 & HB 4389: Hazardous waste—Provides for injection well disposal fee. *MTA supports.*

SBs 248-256: Water utilities—Creates water rate affordability program and shutoff protections. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 271: Open Meetings Act—Revises provisions of Open Meetings Act relating to virtual attendance and participation of members of public bodies at public meetings. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 278: Housing—Modifies and expands the Housing and Community Development Fund to make financing available to middle-income households. *MTA supports.*

SBs 280-281: Recreation Passport—Makes state Recreation Passport fee

mandatory for all vehicles and modifies park passes for Recreation Passport and nonresident motor vehicle. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 285: Marriage—Modifies persons authorized to solemnize marriage to include township supervisors. *MTA supports.*

SB 288: Open Meetings Act—Modifies grounds for going into closed session when a public body consults with its attorney. *MTA supports.*

SB 292: Property taxes—Provides property tax exemption for principal residence of individuals 70 years of age and older. *MTA opposes.*

SB 319: Collective bargaining—Requires minimum staffing levels within a bargaining unit to be a mandatory subject of collective bargaining. *MTA opposes.*

SBs 416-417: Bottle deposit law—Provides for a referendum to expand the bottle deposit law, earmarks funds and provides for the revenue distribution. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 423: Property taxes—Modifies sunset on certain delinquent tax payment reduction and foreclosure avoidance programs. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 427: Open Meetings Act—Modifies remedies for civil actions against a public body, including court costs and attorney fees. *MTA opposes.*

SB 441: Stormwater utilities—Creates a new act that provides for municipal stormwater utilities. *MTA supports.*

SB 442: Property taxes—Modifies property tax exemption for certain nonprofit housing property. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4006: Local preemption—Prohibits exclusion of commercial wedding or similar events in agricultural zones. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4014: Property tax assessments—Exempts transfer of ownership of certain real property to certain individuals from uncapping of taxable value upon transfer. *MTA neutral.*

HBs 4027-4028: Zoning preemption—Eliminates zoning exemptions for large-scale renewable energy facilities and repeals PA 233 of 2023. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4049-4050: Chickens—Allows and requires Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices be developed for rearing of egg-laying chickens in residential areas. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 4079-4080: Special assessments—Reinstates and expands special assessment deferment program, and modifies the income eligibility cap. *MTA supports.*

HB 4118: Drains—Provides special assessments for levy against state Department of Natural Resources lands. *MTA supports.*

HB 4137: Speed limits—Modifies determination in accordance with traffic engineering practices. *MTA supports.*

HB 4185: Road funding—Redirects sales tax revenue collected at the pump and earmarks funds for constitutional revenue sharing. *MTA supports.*

HB 4230: Road funding—Creates Neighborhood Road Fund and provides for the distribution of the fund, and provides funding for bridges and specific township roads without a match. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4311-4312: Revenue Sharing Trust Fund—Establishes a “Revenue Sharing Trust Fund” and dedicates a portion of general sales tax revenue to the fund for the purpose of distributing to townships, cities, villages and counties. *MTA supports.*

HB 4328: Appropriations—Provides supplemental appropriations for emergency response funding. *MTA supports.*

HB 4338: Local government—Creates Sanctuary Policy Prohibition Act. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4342: Revenue sharing—Provides for withholding of revenue sharing payments to townships, cities and villages for enactment and enforcement of certain sanctuary policies. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4392: Appropriations—Provides for appropriations from the Natural Resources Trust Fund. *MTA supports.*

HB 4411: Environmental protection cleanup—Provides cost recovery for removal of damaged vehicle and debris. *MTA supports.*

HB 4433: Labor—Protects adverse employment action for emergency responder when absence from work due to respond to an emergency. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 4443-4444: Property tax exemption—Exempts disabled veterans from property tax and creates specific tax exemption based on percentage of disability without local reimbursement. *MTA opposes.*

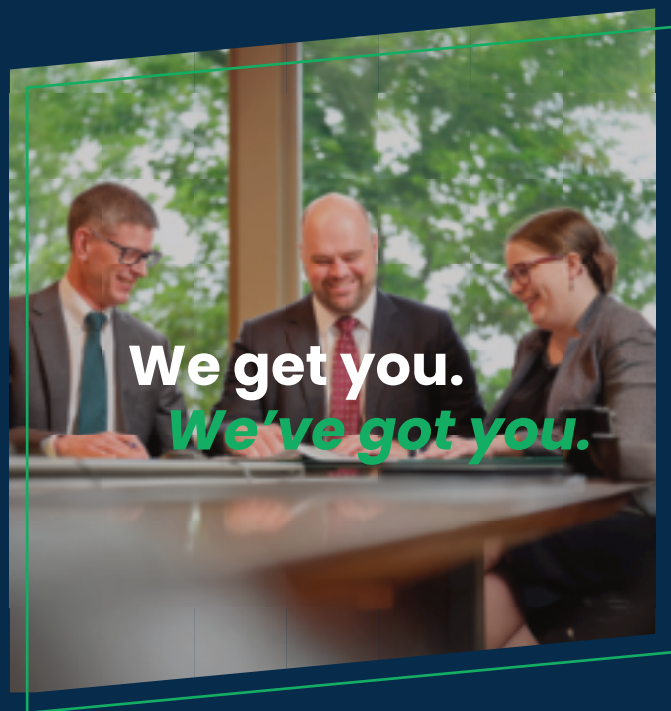
HB 4583: Property tax/elections—Limits all millage elections to November ballot. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4731: Fireworks—Allows local ordinances regarding fireworks in certain circumstances. *MTA supports.*



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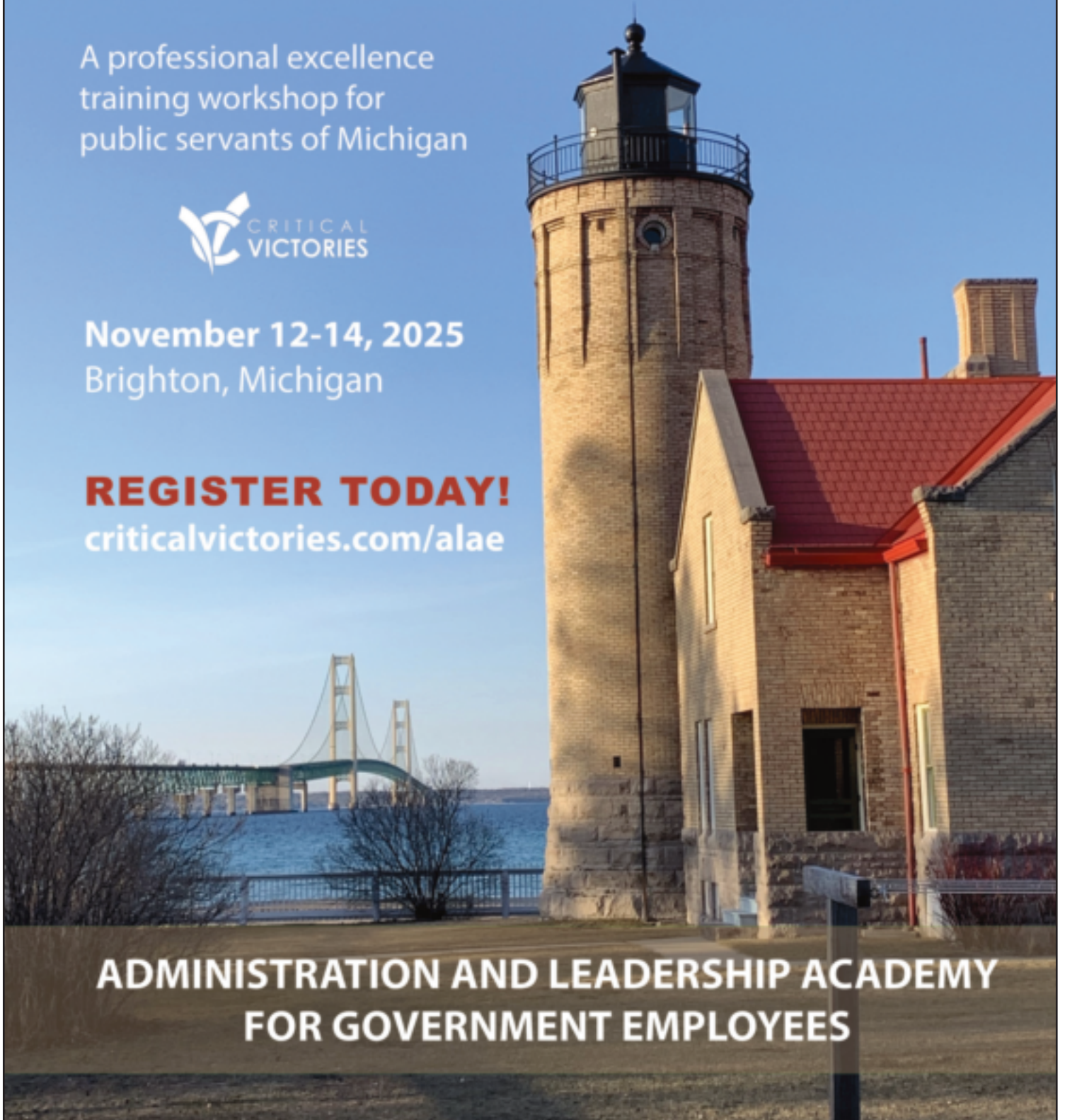
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Companies that are part of MTA's Allied Service Provider program are listed in **green**. We thank these companies for their participation in the program, and their dedication to serving township government.



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2960 Lucerne Dr. SE, Ste. 100
Grand Rapids, MI 49546-7174
(616) 977-1000 | fveng.com



Gourdie Fraser, Inc.

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Traverse City, MI 49684-2297
231-946-5874 | gfa.tc



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Grand Rapids, MI 49525-9756
616-364-8491 | preinnewhof.com



Spalding, DeDecker & Associates

905 South Blvd. E
Rochester Hills, MI 48307-5358
248-844-5400 | sda-eng.com



Testing Engineers & Consultants, Inc.

1343 Rochester Rd.
Troy, MI 48083-6015
248-588-6200 | testingengineers.com



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906-228-5125 | trimediaee.com



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231-728-2211 | pattenmonument.com



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517-755-7502 | stantec.com



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800-748-0554 | Acrisure.com/GreatLakes



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5700 W. Mount Hope Hwy.
Lansing, MI 48917-8590
517-214-7837 | davidchapmanagency.com



Decker Agency, LLC

2255 W. Centre Ave.
Portage, MI 49024-4819
269-327-2700 | DKRagency.com



Hartleb Agency, An EMC Insurance Company

5840 King Hwy.
Kalamazoo, MI 49048-5930
269-385-5911 | hartlebagency.com



Michigan Municipal Risk Management Authority

14001 Merriman Rd.
Livonia, MI 48154-4262
731-513-0300 | mmrma.org



Michigan Township Participating Plan

1441 W. Long Lake Rd., Ste. 150
Troy, MI 48098-4403
248-318-0596 | theparplan.com



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PO Box 46907
Mount Clemens, MI 48046-6907
586-463-4573 | nickelsaph.com



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Lansing, MI 48906-6200
517-999-3266 | acd.net



Black Rock Technologies

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Ann Arbor, MI 48103-9140
731-338-8658 | black-rock.tech



CIMS Cemetery Software

855 Community Dr.
Sauk City, WI 53583-1380
608-643-4100 | cims cemeterysoftware.com



Hi-Tech System Service, Inc.

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Casco, MI 48064-1528
810-326-9000 | hitech.net



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Saline, MI 48176-1525
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269-382-4500 | michigantownshiaw.com



Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes PLC

4151 Okemos Rd.
Okemos, MI 48864-6202
517-381-0100 | fsbrlaw.com



Foster Swift Collins & Smith, PC

313 S. Washington Sq.
Lansing, MI 48933-2114
517-371-8100 | fosterswift.com



Mika Meyers PLC

900 Monroe Ave. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-1423
616-632-8000 | mikameyers.com



Miller Canfield

150 W. Jefferson Ave., Ste. 2500
Detroit, MI 48226-4415
313-963-6420 | millercanfield.com



Rosati Schultz Joppich Amtsbuechler, PC

27555 Executive Dr., Ste. 250
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3550
248-489-4100 | rsjalaw.com



Planning & Zoning Consultants

Carlisle Wortman Associates

117 N. First St., Ste. 70
Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1354
731-662-2200 | cwaplan.com



McKenna

235 E. Main St., Ste. 105
Northville, MI 48167-2494
248-596-0920 | mcka.com



Recreation Equipment Supplier

Great Lakes Recreation

39 Veterans Dr., Ste. 310
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Kids Gotta Play

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New Hudson, MI 48165-8522
248-486-5300 | kidsgottaplay.com



Polly Products

12 Charlotte St.
Mulliken, MI 48861-9701
517-649-2284 | pollyproducts.com



Sinclair Recreation

176 E. Lakewood Blvd., Ste. 40
Holland, MI 49424-2020
616-392-7441 | sinclair-rec.com



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Allen, TX 75013-0001
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engineering sciences, inc.

Utility Provider

Consumers Energy

1 Energy Plaza Dr.
Jackson, MI 49201-2357
517-788-1215 | consumersenergy.com



DTE Energy

1 Energy Plaza
Detroit, MI 48226-1221
800-477-4747 | dteenergy.com



ITC Holdings Corp.

27175 Energy Way
Novi, MI 48377-3639
877-482-4829 | itc-holdings.com



Mead & Hunt, Inc.

6301 M-68 Hwy., Ste. B
Indian River, MI 49749-9366
231-333-6874 | meadhunt.com



Web Design

AccuNet Website Services

2414 S. Hickory Ridge Rd.
Milford, MI 48380-1924
248-684-8715 | civicclarity.com



Shumaker Technology Group

3721 W. Michigan Ave., Ste. 103
Lansing, MI 48917-3600
517-325-3121 | stgmunicipal.com



Beyond the Township 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 at michigantownships.org/vendor-directories. Companies can be added throughout the year, so check back often!
- Ask for peer recommendations on MTA's *Community Connection* via michigantownships.org. Use your email address on file with MTA to log in and ask questions in the "All Members" community and receive feedback from your fellow township officials.
- Meet some of the vendors listed in this directory, as well as others, at our *Professional Development Retreats* held this fall in Frankenmuth or at MTA's 2026 Educational Conference & Expo in April at the Grand Traverse Resort in **Acme Township**. These events are great ways to connect with numerous vendors in a short period of time.





Who is authorized to sign checks and payments?

Both the treasurer (or deputy treasurer) and the clerk (or deputy clerk) have authorization to sign checks and payments. The state *Accounting Procedures Manual* states that, “Dual signatures are required for all checking accounts (except the separate tax collection checking account). The dual signatures **MUST** be the clerk (or deputy clerk) and the treasurer (or deputy treasurer).” According to the MCL 41.75, “The township board shall approve claims against the township and authorize payment of allowed claims. Accounts approved by the township board shall be filed and preserved by the township clerk. The payments authorized shall be paid by the treasurer, on the order of the township board, signed by the township clerk.”

The *Accounting Procedures Manual* also states that, “It is never acceptable to sign blank checks.”



What is the process for accounts payable?

The process for accounts payable for the township is as follows: The clerk receives the bills and prepares the accounts payable list, which is then brought to the township board for approval. Once the bills have been approved, the clerk will attach a signed voucher, which includes the check, to the invoices and pass them along to the treasurer to be signed and disbursed.

Documentation/review required—All bills must be documented by the clerk using proper accounting methods according to the Uniform Budgeting and Accounting Act. Per MCL 141.421, “The state treasurer shall prescribe uniform charts of accounts for all local units of similar size, function, or service designed to fulfill the requirements of good accounting practices relating to general government.” In addition to abiding by proper accounting procedures, it is important that each check or payment be presented with proper documentation.

Bank reconciliation—According to the *Accounting Procedures Manual*, “Bank accounts must be promptly reconciled (within the month following the bank statement date) by an individual not involved in the receipt/bank deposit process. In small units of government when segregation of duties is not possible, a second official must review the reconciliation.”

Controls—As previously mentioned, documentation for each check or payment is imperative. Without it, the township is not able to prove the validity of the payment. There are some situations where original documentation cannot be obtained.

One of the controls that a township has in place regarding bill payment is having both the clerk and the treasurer review and sign the payment before it is disbursed. Although both the clerk and the treasurer review the payment, it is important that once the payment has passed the clerk, it should never revert back to the clerk. This control is in place so that there can be no alteration of the payment after it has been approved by the township board.



How should we handle unexpected bills and payments between board meetings?

According to the *Accounting Procedures Manual*, “The legislative body may establish a formal policy to authorize limited payments prior to approval to avoid finance or late charges as well as to pay appropriated amounts and payroll (including related payroll taxes and withholdings).” Without such a policy, no claims should be paid prior to board authorization at a board meeting. These disbursements still must be approved by the township board after payment is made.

For a sample policy, visit MTA’s “Post-Auditing Township Bills” webpage on michigantownships.org (click on “Answer Center” under the “Member” tab, and look in the “Index of Topics;” login is required).



What about bill payments via credit card?

Per MCL 129.243, an officer or employee, often the clerk, is responsible for “issuance, accounting, monitoring, retrieval and generally for overseeing compliance with the township’s credit card policy.” The township may state in its credit card policy a threshold below which the user(s) of the card may use it without prior board approval, as long as all the expenses are for goods or services for the township, such as fueling township vehicles, meals, tools, etc. All receipts must be kept as supporting documentation, in addition to invoices and/or narrative descriptions for the expenditures, and submitted to the clerk as soon as possible. The clerk must review each credit card statement to ensure that each transaction meets the policy’s requirements. Once the transactions have been reviewed, the board may then approve the credit card payment.

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.

What you need to know about the Open Meetings Act

The Open Meetings Act (OMA) is arguably the statute that most impacts a township board as a whole. Every board member is subject to the OMA every time the board meets—and before and after it meets. All other statutory township boards and commissions are subject to the OMA.

The OMA is the law that requires notice to be given before a meeting is held and requires minutes to be prepared as a record of actions taken at a meeting. It's the law that requires each meeting to include a public comment period and that mandates when minutes of a meeting must be available to the public.

Perhaps most importantly, the OMA is the source of the requirement that all decisions and votes of a public body must be made in public.

As comprehensive as it is, the Open Meetings Act, Public Act 267 of 1976, MCL 15.261, *et seq.*, is surprisingly short. It is available for free on the Michigan Legislature's website, legislature.mi.gov. So there's no excuse—every board and commission member should be familiar with the OMA and comfortable with how it works in practice.

This article will discuss the OMA's requirements for meeting notice, meeting conduct, decision-making and minutes. But first, a little background may be useful.

Why are township meetings 'open'?

It's a good question. Undeniably, the requirements for notifying and including the public in meetings of a public body may, at times, make it more difficult for a public body to make decisions or accomplish its business. But in the wrong hands,

efficiency can become expediency—and that's what prompted the Michigan Legislature to adopt the OMA in 1976 in the wake of the Watergate scandal. Today, all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the federal government each have some form of "open meetings" or "sunshine" law.

It's important to note that there is no constitutional or First Amendment right to open meetings. The public's right to attend and participate in meetings of a public body is statutory, as defined by Michigan's Legislature. It is not an absolute right; it is limited to the OMA's provisions that allow a person: 1) to attend and record or telecast a meeting, and 2) to speak during a public comment period under rules established by the public body.

The public does not have a statutorily protected right to speak outside of a public comment period or to participate in the public body's decision-making process. That is because a public meeting is the only place a public body like a township board may lawfully make decisions and do its business. The public has many other opportunities to interact or do business with a township outside of a board meeting. But the board is restricted to acting only in an open meeting. With that in mind, the OMA also allows a public body to adopt rules to minimize disruption of its ability to do business.



Nothing, however, prevents a public body from allowing a greater degree of openness. An individual township board can choose to give more notice and allow for more public involvement in its meetings. The spirit of the OMA emphasizes transparency in government.

There are times when the public interest in effective administration and decision-making outweighs the public interest in open meetings. The OMA includes very limited options for addressing certain types of issues in “closed session.” But all decisions of a public body must still be made in public.

Start with the OMA’s definitions

To determine if the OMA applies in a particular situation, you have to know whether 1) a public body 2) is meeting to 3) deliberate toward or make a decision—as each of those elements is defined by the OMA:

Public body: MCL 15.262(a) defines a “public body” as “any state or local legislative or governing body, including a board, commission, committee, subcommittee, authority or council, that is empowered by state constitution, statute, charter, ordinance, resolution or rule to exercise governmental or proprietary authority or perform a governmental or proprietary function” Any committee, subcommittee or other body that meets the definition of “public body” will be subject to the OMA.

Meeting: MCL 15. 262(b) defines a “meeting” as “the convening of a public body at which a quorum is present for the purpose of *deliberating toward* or *rendering a decision* on a public policy”

Decision: MCL 15.262(d) defines a “decision” as “a determination, action, vote or disposition upon a motion, proposal, recommendation, resolution, order, ordinance, bill or measure on which a vote by members of a public body is required and by which *a public body effectuates or formulates public policy.*” [*Emphasis added.*]

What is a township public body?

Statutory bodies—All township bodies created or authorized by state law are subject to the OMA, including the township board, annual meeting of the electors, planning commission, zoning board of appeals, board of review, construction board of appeals, election commission, elected park commission, elected library board, police or fire administrative board (single or joint), building authority, civil service commission, police or fire civil service commission, downtown development authority board, economic development corporation board, emergency services authority, historic commission, housing commission, and officials compensation commission. That list is not exhaustive; to be prudent, assume that any body authorized or required by state law must comply with the OMA.



An individual township board can choose to give more notice and allow for more public involvement in its meetings. The spirit of the OMA emphasizes transparency in government.

In most cases, the enabling statute will state that the body is subject to the OMA.

Advisory committees—Any committee established by the township board or other public body is potentially subject to the OMA, unless it is “purely advisory,” meaning it makes no final decisions. A township board may appoint advisory committees to collect information, make recommendations and participate in township programs. Purely advisory committees that do not include a quorum of the township board or other public body are not subject to the OMA.

Many court cases and attorney general opinions have addressed the intricacies of what constitutes a public body, and it is beyond the scope of this article to give a definitive description. Suffice to say, the fact that a public body calls a committee “advisory” does not automatically release the committee from OMA compliance. A township “advisory committee” may be subject to the OMA if it falls under the OMA’s definition of a quorum of a public body deliberating toward or rendering a decision at a meeting in practice.

Subcommittees of less than a quorum—Although the OMA defines a meeting as “the convening of a public body at which a quorum is present,” if a public body **delegates** a governmental function or proprietary authority to a subcommittee that is less than a quorum of the body (gives them the decision-making authority), that subcommittee is still conducting a governmental function, and if the process is not conducted at an open meeting, it may be an OMA violation. Avoid using subcommittees to circumvent the OMA.

Not all requests for recommendations from a subcommittee are a delegation of a governmental function or proprietary authority, but when in doubt, consult the township’s attorney.

A prudent approach is for any township body or committee to fully comply with the OMA. The township board may charge a subcommittee or advisory committee with OMA compliance.

In the long run, this approach may be good for public relations and may help the township avoid even the appearance of attempting to circumvent the OMA.

Individuals—By law, an individual official is not a public body subject to the OMA. “[I]t would be awkward, to say the least, to apply the OMA to an individual. Perhaps the strongest common-sense basis for concluding that an individual was not contemplated by the Legislature as a ‘public body’ is to consider how odd a concept it would be to require an individual to ‘deliberate’ in an open meeting. Thus, we conclude that an individual executive acting in his executive capacity is not a public body for the purposes of the OMA.” (*Herald Co. v. City of Bay City*, 463 Mich. 111 (2000))

When an individual’s office/position is charged with a governmental function or proprietary authority by statute, the individual is not required to comply with the OMA while making their individual decisions or directions.

It’s a rare occurrence, but technically if a township board or other public body delegates its final decisions for a governmental or proprietary authority to an individual, that individual is still exercising governmental authority, and the process must be conducted at an open meeting. (*Booth Newspapers, Inc. v. Univ. of Michigan Bd. of Regents*, 444 Mich. 211 (1993))

If in doubt, a board should work with its legal counsel for guidance on when decisions must be made in compliance with the OMA.

What types of meetings are lawful?

There are only two types of meetings of a public body: regular and special meetings.

Regular meetings—Under the OMA, a regular meeting of a public body is a meeting that is on the schedule of meetings adopted by the body and posted within 10 days after the first meeting of the public body’s year (fiscal or calendar year).

Special meetings—A special meeting is simply a meeting that is not in the schedule of regular meetings. Special meetings are just that—special. Frequent use of special meetings, with their short notice periods, can be perceived by the public as an attempt to circumvent their attendance at meetings. Major or potentially sensitive business items are probably best discussed at a regularly scheduled meeting if there is no emergency or other pressing deadline.

Is it a meeting?

“Work sessions”—Some public bodies designate certain meetings as “work sessions,” meaning that the body does not intend to vote on any business at that meeting. But there is no such designation in the OMA or township law, and calling a

meeting a “work session” does not remove the meeting from OMA requirements. Remember, the OMA definition of meeting includes “deliberating toward” a decision. A “work session” must be an agenda item at either a regular or special meeting.

And any stated restriction on voting is only self-imposed. If a quorum is present at a work session, nothing will prevent the body from voting, so the OMA should be followed.

Public hearings—A public hearing is always an agenda item at a regular or special open meeting; it never “stands alone.” Even if the meeting is held only to conduct the public hearing, it is still a meeting of the public body conducting the hearing and the OMA applies.

“Closed meetings”—Occasionally, someone will refer to a “closed meeting.” There is no such thing, although a public body may hold a “closed session” during an open meeting, if one of the OMA’s permissible reasons applies. All meetings of a public body must be open meetings. (See page 28 for more on holding a closed session.)

Remote participation

While temporary changes were made to the OMA allowing remote meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, those allowances have expired. There are currently only two options for a member of a township public body to participate remotely in any way in a meeting of their public body:

1) For members absent due to military participation (MCL 15.263a(1)(c))

The OMA requires all public bodies to establish procedures to accommodate the absence of any member of the public body due to military duty. A township must adopt procedures by which:

- The absent member may participate in, and vote on, business before the public body, including, if feasible, procedures that ensure two-way communication, and
- The public is provided notice of the absence of the member and information about how to contact that member sufficiently in advance of a meeting of the public body to provide input on any business that will come before the public body. (MCL 15.263)

2) To accommodate members with a federal Americans with Disabilities Act-qualified disability

Per Attorney General Opinion 7318 of 2022, the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 USC 12131, *et seq.*) and the Rehabilitation Act (MCL 395.81, *et seq.*) require state and local boards and commissions to provide reasonable accommodations—which could include an option to participate virtually—to qualified individuals with a disability who request an accommodation in order to fully participate as a board or commission member or as a member of the general public in public meetings.

What notice does the OMA require?

A public meeting notice must include the name of the public body to which the notice applies, its telephone number if one exists, and its address, and must list the dates, times and

locations of the regular meetings. The notice must be posted at the public body’s principal office and any other locations it considers appropriate. The internet, social media or public access television may be used for posting public notice in addition to, **but not instead of**, the notice posted at the principal office. (MCL 15.264)

If a township does not have a hall or “principal office,” the required public notice for a township public body must be posted in the office of the county clerk. (MCL 15.264)

Regular meeting notice—The schedule of a public body’s regular meetings must be posted at the township’s principal office within 10 days after the first meeting of the public body in each calendar or fiscal year. (MCL 15.265) A public body is not required to establish a regular schedule; some bodies, such as the zoning board of appeals, may meet only as needed, although they could also schedule regular meetings. (Attorney General Opinion 5183 of 1977)

If a public body changes its schedule of regular meetings, it must post the new schedule within three days after the meeting at which the change is made (and at least 18 hours prior to any rescheduled meeting). A public body may change its schedule to move one meeting date or to reschedule its remaining meetings for the year to a new day each month. (MCL 15.265)

Special meeting notice—The OMA requires that the public be notified of any special meeting of a township public body by notice posted at the township’s principal office at least 18 hours prior to the meeting time. The notice must state the date, time, place and purpose of the meeting. The notice must be accessible by the public for the full length of time, so it cannot be posted in a hallway or other area of a building where the notice is not visible to the public even when the building is closed. (MCL 15.265)

If the township “directly or indirectly maintains an official internet presence [website] that includes monthly or more frequent updates of public meeting agendas or minutes,” then special meeting notices must also be posted on a portion of the website that is fully accessible to the public. “The public notice on the website shall be included on either the homepage or on a separate webpage dedicated to public notices for nonregularly scheduled public meetings and accessible via a prominent and conspicuous link on the website’s homepage that clearly describes its purpose for public notification of those nonregularly scheduled public meetings.” (MCL 15.265)

Subscriptions to public notices—The OMA requires a public body to send public notice of meetings to: 1) a newspaper published in Michigan, or a radio or television station in Michigan at the same time the notice is posted, at no charge, upon written request; and 2) by first-class mail to anyone other than the media who submits a written request and pays a yearly fee of no more than the reasonable estimated cost for printing and postage of those notices. (MCL 15.266)

Additional notice requirements

Other statutes mandate additional notice requirements. The following is not an exhaustive list, and township

cover story

officials should routinely consult the statutes that authorize a particular action by a public body to determine if any additional notice is required.

Americans with Disabilities Act—The federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that a public meeting notice must state that if a person with disabilities notifies the clerk within a designated number of days prior to the meeting, accommodations will be furnished to enable meaningful attendance. The township board may establish the number of days it will require for ADA notification. MTA recommends using the following language on all public meeting notices:

"This notice is posted in compliance with Public Act 267 of 1976, as amended, the Open Meetings Act, MCL 41.72a, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The _____ Township Board will provide necessary reasonable aids and services, such as signers for the hearing-impaired and audiotapes of printed materials being considered at the meeting, to individuals with disabilities at the meeting upon ____ days' notice to the _____ Township Board by writing or calling: (list the name, title, address and telephone number of the contact person)."

Public hearings—Public hearings are an element of an open meeting; they never stand alone. A public hearing is a legally required comment period on a specific action being considered by the public body. Additional notice is usually required to notify affected persons, properties or entities of the action being considered, and encourage public awareness and input. Notice of the public hearing may be required by law to be published in a newspaper or mailed to specific persons, businesses or entities. In many cases, the statute that requires the public hearing will state when the notice must be printed or sent.

For example, the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MCL 125.3101, *et seq.*) requires all **zoning application/hearing notices** to be published once in a newspaper of general circulation at least 15 days before the date of the meeting. If the application involves 10 or fewer adjacent properties, or the request is for a zoning board of appeals interpretation of the zoning ordinance or an appeal of an administrative decision regarding a specific parcel, the notice must also be sent by mail or personal delivery to the applicant or property owner, and the occupants and assessed owners of property within 300 feet. (MCL 125.3103)

Another example is the requirement to publish the notice of a township board **budget public hearing** in a newspaper of general circulation. Under the Budget Hearings of Local Governments Act, the notice must include the time and place of the hearing, and state the place where a copy of the budget is available for public inspection. The notice must also include the following statement printed in 11-point boldfaced type: **"The property tax millage rate proposed to be levied to support the proposed budget will be a subject of this hearing."** (MCL 141.412) A general law township must publish the notice at least six days prior to the day of

the meeting at which the budget public hearing will be held. The Charter Township Act adds the stricter requirement for a charter township to publish the notice at least seven days prior to the date of the meeting. (MCL 42.26)

Township public bodies should consult the statutes for the requirements for the type of public hearing to be held or, when in doubt, call MTA Member Information Services at (517) 321-6467 (press 1) for the correct time frame.

How may the public participate in a meeting?

Attending—Any person may attend the open sessions of a public meeting. A public body cannot put conditions on attendance, such as requiring a person to identify him or herself. A person may be excluded from a specific open meeting only for a breach of the peace actually committed at that meeting. (MCL 15.263 and Attorney General Opinion 5183 of 1977)

Recording—MCL 15.263 states, "The right of a person to attend a meeting of a public body includes the right to tape-record, to videotape, to broadcast live on radio and to telecast live on television the proceedings of a public body at a public meeting. The exercise of this right shall not be dependent upon the prior approval of the public body. However, a public body may establish reasonable rules and regulations in order to minimize the possibility of disrupting the meeting."

"Reasonable rules and regulations" may include directing that recording equipment be located in a particular part of the meeting room, to minimize risks of tripping over cords and blocking the view of the audience. But nowadays, smartphones and other devices mean that you may not know that people are recording. A person recording the open session of a public meeting does not have to tell anyone that he or she is recording the meeting or get permission to do so.

A public meeting is a public forum, with little or no expectation of privacy (except for closed sessions), so public bodies should just assume that everyone in the room during open session is recording. Those recordings may be posted on the internet or social media—even "live" as the meeting is happening—or otherwise distributed or broadcast by private individuals.

Public comment—The public has a right "to address a meeting of a public body under rules established and recorded by the public body." (MCL 15.263) The public must have at least one opportunity to speak publicly at an open meeting, and this has come to be known as the "public comment period."

There are numerous court decisions and attorney general opinions on public comment, but, as people who've heard the author speak on the subject know, a simple rule of thumb is to assume that if little green men from Mars appear speaking in Martian, and they want to speak during the public comment period, they get the same time to speak as anyone else would!

A public body may adopt rules for the public comment period. According to Attorney General Opinion 5183 of 1977, “the rules regulating the right of public address may include such controls as the length of time any one person may be permitted to address the body, the portion of the agenda set aside for public comment, and a requirement that persons wishing to address the public body identify themselves and make it known ahead of time that they wish to address the body in order to facilitate the planning of time allotments to various portions of the agenda.”

Attorney General Opinion 5183 stresses, however, that “these rules must be reasonable, flexible and designed to encourage public expression and not discourage or prohibit it.”

A public body may limit the amount of time it will allow each individual speaker to address the meeting. Note that this is not the length of the public comment period itself; it is the length of time an individual speaker gets to speak. If 100 people want to speak, they each must be given the opportunity to speak. For that reason, consider choosing a limit such as two or three minutes. Few people need more time than that to make their point. Any time limit rules should be imposed consistently.

Consider allowing a group of individuals who wish to present a specific point of view to designate a spokesperson who may have additional time to adequately represent the group’s views. This is only an option, however; a public body cannot require a group to use a spokesperson.

A person’s right to speak during a public comment period implicates the First Amendment right to free speech, particularly on matters of public concern. Restrictions on the public comment period should be limited to content-neutral “time, place and manner” restrictions that serve a significant government interest and allow ample alternative channels of communication. Avoid attempting to regulate what a person is saying (the content of the speech).

For example, Attorney General Opinion 5332 of 1978 states that a public body may adopt a rule that “prohibits a person from using the board’s and the public’s time to make a personal attack upon an individual” if the content of the speaker’s attack “refers to conduct of the person being attacked that is totally unrelated to the manner in which he or she performs his or her duties” (is not a matter of public concern). The opinion goes on to state that, if the speaker’s attack “is intended to refer to the manner in which an employee of the board or board member carries out his or her duties, the rule would be invalid ...” Commenting on how officials perform their duties is political free speech.

What about remote participation for the public?

There is no obligation under the OMA for the township to provide the public the right to attend or view the meeting remotely. A township board may *choose* to allow remote viewing of the board meeting, but this is an option—not a requirement. The board can also choose to allow the public to participate with public comment remotely. This option, however, cannot replace the right of the public to attend the board meeting physically and to provide public comment during the appropriate time provided by the board.



There are numerous court decisions and attorney general opinions on public comment, but a simple rule of thumb is, if little green men from Mars appear speaking in Martian, and they want to speak during the public comment period, they get the same time to speak as anyone else would!

How must decisions of a public body be made?

The OMA states, “All decisions of a public body shall be made at a meeting open to the public.” (MCL 15.263) A public body may never vote or make a final decision in closed session.

Attorney General Opinion 5262 states that the Legislature clearly intended a vote to be open to the public: “The Open Meetings Act prohibits a voting procedure at a public meeting which prevents citizens from knowing how members of a public body have voted.”

This means that any vote must be made by an “all in favor” voice-vote, a roll call vote, a show of hands or other method that allows the public to know how the official is voting. (*Esperance v. Chesterfield Township of Macomb County*, 89 Mich. App. 456, 1979) Township public bodies cannot vote by paper ballot or other secret ballot.

Public bodies should never vote or decide an issue outside of an open meeting. Several court decisions and attorney general opinions have addressed whether a public body can “poll” its members outside of a public meeting. According to MTA Legal Counsel, it is possible for one board member to lawfully “poll” other **individual** board members by phone or email to ask how they stand on a particular issue—as long as the contacts do not include any discussion of the issue and do not eliminate full public discussion and deliberation of the issue prior to the body taking action on it. The polling cannot rise to the level of reaching a consensus or an agreement about an issue. But because there is a fine line between “polling” and unlawful “round-the-horn” or “round-robin” voting outside of an open meeting, especially when several board members engage in “polling,” MTA recommends that township public bodies avoid attempting to “poll” their members. Note that these cautions apply to face-to-face conversations, as well as phone calls, video calls, emails, texts or other communications—and even when the interaction of the quorum is limited.

What should be included in meeting minutes?

Minutes are a record of actions taken by a public body. They are not meant to be a word-for-word recital of the meeting or a medium for expressing individual positions.

For many reasons, the official responsible for drafting a public body's minutes and the public body should work together to adopt a policy or consensus on what will or will not be included in the minutes, such as avoiding personal statements or verbatim deliberations or comments (except as appropriate for public hearings).

One of the most important reasons is that, when a public body makes corrections to its minutes, text that is "removed" never actually goes away. (See *"Approving/amending minutes" at right.*)

A public body must keep minutes of each of its meetings showing the date, time, place, members present, members absent, documenting that public comment was held, any decisions made at a meeting open to the public, and the purpose(s) for which a closed session is held. The minutes must include the roll call for any roll call votes taken at the meeting. (MCL 15.269)

According to MTA Legal Counsel, "[Meeting] minutes must, at a minimum, indicate the body which is meeting (e.g. township board, zoning board of appeals, planning commission, etc.); the date, time and location of the meeting; motions and resolutions made, supported and results of the motion; and any action taken by the body which is not specifically indicated in motions or resolutions.

"Although the minutes do not have to include a verbatim recitation of all statements made at the meeting, a record of the topics or issues addressed during a meeting and any motions made (whether carried or not) provides a complete description of the proceedings of the meeting. We also note that if the township board has adopted a policy of following the provisions of *Robert's Rules of Order*, it requires the recordation of all motions (whether passed or not) in the meeting minutes.

"Finally, we note that an accurate record of all motions offered, and their disposition, can avoid future disagreements or questions concerning those motions."

Those are the basic requirements. Information over and above the requirements of the OMA and other statutes may be added at the discretion of the public body when it approves the minutes at the next meeting. Note that the township clerk is responsible for seeing that the township board meeting minutes are prepared. (MCL 41.66)

Public bodies may want to consider adopting a policy of writing motions down before voting on them. This ensures that the members all know what the motion says when they are voting, and it gives the clerk/secretary an accurate record of the motion for the minutes. The extra time taken to clarify the motion can save hours of discussion on confusing votes later.

The meeting moderator (supervisor for township board meetings) should make a habit of reading the motion out loud prior to taking the vote and declaring the outcome. This will assist the members of the body in voting and the clerk/secretary in maintaining an accurate record.

Recording a public hearing in the meeting minutes

According to MTA Legal Counsel, "When a public body conducts a public hearing (always an agenda item within a public meeting), the minutes should include the comments and arguments of those promoting or opposing a particular matter which is the subject of the public hearing and the fact that an opportunity to be heard was given to those present."

One example of this is a hearing held to confirm a special assessment roll. MCL 41.726 requires a person objecting to the roll to file his or her objection in writing with the township clerk, but it is also important for the township to record in the minutes who appeared to protest so the township can demonstrate at any State Tax Commission proceedings that it provided the person an opportunity to be heard. Another example is noting in the March board of review meeting minutes when a taxpayer has appeared to appeal his or her assessment.

When must minutes be available to the public?

There are actually two sets of minutes for any public meetings, and they should be identified as the draft (or "proposed" or "tentative") minutes and the approved minutes.

Draft minutes—Draft minutes must be available for public inspection within eight business days after the meeting. They can be available sooner, just no later than eight business days. (MCL 15.269)

A public body may want to establish a policy that members of the body receive the draft minutes as soon as they are available. This gives them time to review the minutes so they are prepared to approve them at the next meeting.

Approving/amending minutes—A public body may **only** ever make any corrections in the minutes at the next meeting after the meeting to which the minutes refer. After that, the minutes cannot be changed. (MCL 15.269) Changes should be limited to correcting typos or clarifying ambiguities; they should not "change history." If a board thinks better of a motion approved at the last meeting, the minutes are not the way to fix the problem. The minutes will show that motion. The board may be able to reconsider or repeal that motion at a subsequent meeting, but should consult with its attorney for specific guidance on whether and how to do so.

If corrections are made, the corrected minutes must show **both** the original text of the draft minutes submitted for approval and the final, corrected text. (MCL 15.269)

This can be accomplished by drawing a line through text to be omitted and hand-writing the corrected or new text

above the text, or by using a computer's "strikethrough" option for omitted text and ALL CAPS option for corrected or new text.

Approved minutes—Approved minutes must be available for public inspection within five business days after the meeting at which the minutes were approved. (MCL 15.269)

Minutes inspection and retention—Minutes are public records open to public inspection, and a public body must make the minutes available at the address designated on its public meeting notices. (MCL 15.269)

The approved minutes of a public meeting must be retained permanently. Draft minutes are kept until the minutes are approved. Handwritten notes or recordings of a meeting made for the purpose of creating the minutes must be retained until the day after the meeting at which the minutes are approved, when the notes or recordings may be destroyed (unless they are subject to a Freedom of Information Act request, a discovery request or a court order). (General Record Retention Schedule 25—Township Clerks)

What happens if a public body violates the OMA?

There are three distinct types of legal relief available for violations of the OMA (*Leemreis v. Sherman Township*, 273 Mich. App. 691, 2007). Each one has different requirements:

1) Invalidation of decision—A decision made by a public body may be invalidated if the public body has not complied with the OMA. The attorney general, county prosecuting attorney or any person may commence a civil action in the circuit court to challenge the validity of a decision of a public body. (MCL 15.270)

Specifically, a decision may be invalidated if:

- The public body has not complied with MCL 15.263(1), (2) or (3), or has failed to give proper notice, which has interfered with substantial compliance with MCL 15.263(1), (2) or (3), and
- The circuit court finds that that noncompliance or failure has impaired the right of the public under the OMA. (MCL 15.270)

In plain English, if a public body deliberates toward or makes a decision outside of an open meeting, gives improper notice, or interferes with a person's right to attend or record a meeting at which the public body deliberates toward or makes a decision, a circuit court judge has discretion to invalidate that decision.

An action to invalidate a public body's decision must be commenced within 60 days after the approved minutes are made available to the public or within 30 days after the approved minutes are available to the public if the decision involves approving a contract, receiving or accepting bids, making assessments, issuing bonds or other indebtedness, or submitting a borrowing proposal to the electors. (MCL 15.270)

In the statutory equivalent of a "do-over," the OMA allows a public body to reenact the disputed decision—when an action to invalidate the decision has been initiated in court. A reenacted decision is effective from the date of reenactment. (MCL 15.270)

When in doubt whether a decision was made in compliance with the OMA, or when an action has been initiated to invalidate a decision, a public body should consult its legal counsel to determine if reenactment is appropriate.

2) Civil action for injunctive relief—If a public body is or has been violating any aspect of the OMA, the attorney general, county prosecuting attorney or a person may commence a civil action in circuit court to compel the public body to comply or to enjoin further noncompliance. (MCL 15.271)

For example, if a public body is not giving proper meeting notice or making minutes available in time, the court can compel (require with a writ of mandamus) the public body to start sending proper notice or make minutes available. Or, for example, if a public body is meeting outside of a public meeting, the court can enjoin (prevent) the public body from continuing to do so by issuing a preliminary injunction or a temporary restraining order.

In addition, a person who commences such a civil action may be awarded court costs and actual attorney fees for the action, if they succeed in specifically obtaining injunctive relief. (MCL 15.271, and *Speicher v. Columbia Township*, 197 Mich. App. 125, 2014)

3) Penalties for intentional violations

Criminal liability—A public official who is a member of a public body, who intentionally violates the OMA, is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000. A second offense will result in a fine of not more than \$2,000, or imprisonment for not more than one year, or both. (MCL 15.272)

Personal civil liability—A public official who is a member of a public body, who intentionally violates the OMA, is personally liable in a civil action for actual and exemplary damages of not more than \$500, plus court costs and actual attorney fees for a person or group of persons bringing the action. (MCL 15.273)

"Court of public opinion"—Even the appearance of attempts to circumvent the OMA can sour the public's perception of a public body. Even if no action is ever taken in court, ultimately the voters may still have their say.

Putting the OMA into practice

Townships are the government most accountable and responsive to the public. The ability of the public to observe and participate in meetings of township bodies is the essence of township government and one of the strongest arguments for retaining this truly grassroots form of representation. The Open Meetings Act is a statutory expression of what townships stand for, and township officials can—and do—put it into practice every day.



Catherine Mullhaupt,
MTA Staff Attorney

MTA offers additional OMA and meetings resources in the Answer Center on michigantownships.org, workshops (including our Aug. 18 event; see page 30) and webinars, and our publications, including Introduction to Township Board Meetings. Visit our website or call (517) 321-6467 for more information.



Closed sessions

A closed session may be called during an open meeting, but only if all the criteria of one of the following “permissible purposes” are met. (MCL 15.268) Note that there are no lawful “closed meetings” for a public body subject to the Open Meetings Act (OMA). A closed session is **always** an agenda item at an open meeting.

A public body may only receive information or deliberate during a closed session; decisions cannot be made in closed session.

Permissible reasons to meet in closed session

A **simple majority vote** of a township public body’s members present and voting is required to call a closed session for the following reasons:

- To consider the dismissal, suspension or disciplining of, hear complaints or charges brought against, or consider a periodic personnel evaluation of, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent, if the named person requests a closed hearing. A person requesting a closed hearing may rescind the request at any time, in which case the matter at issue shall be considered after the rescission only in open sessions.
- For strategy and negotiation sessions connected with the negotiation of a collective bargaining agreement if either negotiating party requests a closed hearing.

A **two-thirds roll call vote** of the members elected or appointed and serving on a township public body is required to call a closed session for the following reasons:

- To consider the purchase or lease of real property up to the time an option to purchase or lease that real property is obtained.
- To consult with its attorney regarding trial or settlement strategy in connection with specific pending litigation, but only if an open meeting would have a detrimental financial effect on the litigating or settlement position of the public body.
- To review and consider the contents of an application for employment or appointment to a public office if the candidate requests that the application remain confidential.

However, except as otherwise provided in this subdivision, all interviews by a public body for employment or appointment to a public office shall be held in an open meeting pursuant to the OMA.

- To consider material exempt from discussion or disclosure by state or federal statute. For example, to discuss the township attorney’s **written** opinion.

Minutes of a closed session

A separate set of minutes must be kept for a closed session. The minutes must record the purpose for the closed session and the vote taken to enter into closed session, including the roll call of a two-thirds roll call vote when required to enter closed session. (MCL 15.267) The purpose given in the minutes for entering closed session should identify the specific OMA permissible purpose and address each element of the permissible purpose.

The minutes would also include the usual information required for minutes, such as the time the closed session is entered, who is present, and the time the closed session ended and the body returned to open session, except that no decisions may be made and there is no public comment period in closed session.

Note that the minutes of the open meeting at which the closed session is held must also indicate the time a closed session is entered, who is present, the purpose for the closed session, the vote taken to enter into closed session and the time the closed session ended.

The minutes of a closed session are not available to the public, and may only be disclosed under court order. (MCL 15.267)

The public body must still approve the closed session minutes at its next regular meeting. A member of the public body who was not present at the closed session may see the minutes for the purpose of approving them, but a public official who disseminates closed session minutes to the public risks criminal prosecution and civil penalties. (Attorney General Opinion 7061 of 2000)

Once the minutes of a closed session are approved, they are sealed and retained for one year and one day after the meeting at which the minutes were approved, at which point they may be destroyed. (MCL 15.267) If a recording is kept of a closed session, that recording is sealed, retained and destroyed along with the closed session minutes. (*Kitchen v. Ferndale City Council*, 253 Mich. App. 115, 2002)

What is the FDTA and how could it affect Michigan's townships?

New digital financial reporting requirements may soon impact how some Michigan townships report their financial data to the municipal bond market. The federal Financial Data Transparency Act (FDTA) of 2022 requires the creation of digital data standards for financial information reported to the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board (MSRB), as well as other federal regulators.

According to the MSRB's Electronic Municipal Market Access system, there are 489 municipal bond issuers associated with Michigan townships. They include many townships themselves, as well as other entities like water systems, building authorities and economic development corporations. Any municipal entity with outstanding debt will be affected by the FDTA.

While the FDTA does not change what information is publicly reported or who has to report it, it does change the format the data must be provided in. Currently, important information, like annual financial statements, is provided in PDF, making it time-consuming and cumbersome to review the data. The FDTA requires the development of data standards so that the information can be transmitted digitally, making it significantly more user-friendly. Businesses have been using digital data standards to report their data to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) since 2009. The SEC is expected to finalize rules for the FDTA in 2027.

Digital reporting has the potential to significantly reduce information-related inefficiencies in the municipal bond market, ultimately saving taxpayers money. It may also have much broader benefits associated with public transparency and new abilities to analyze and benchmark finances across many governments.

However, many local governments are concerned about the up-front costs of converting their data, as well as the technical skills necessary for adopting a new reporting format. The University of Michigan Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) has partnered with XBRL US, a nonprofit standards setter, and DAC Bond, a municipal bond compliance company, to produce a free



open-source tool that can convert financial data from Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports (ACFRs) using a simple Excel template.

Michigan townships can try out the online tool to get hands-on experience with digital data standards for local government financial data. Importantly, however, the tool is for education and demonstration purposes only and cannot currently be used for any official reporting. The source code is freely available so that anyone can update it with new capabilities or features as rules are finalized. Along with trying out this free and interactive tool, users can also access examples of ACFRs that have already been converted to gain further familiarity with this new version of reporting.

More information about the FDTA, digital data standards and the Excel conversion tool are available from a recorded webinar on CLOSUP's website, closup.umich.edu/.

upcoming MTA workshops

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Relevant to the entire township board ... no matter your level of experience

MTA can help your board structure more effective meetings, understand the elements of assessment and taxation, and hone techniques for managing your township team. Join us at **Shanty Creek Resort in Bellaire this August** for one (or all!) of the courses described below:

Making Meetings More Effective—Aug. 18, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

(Includes continental breakfast served 8:30 a.m.)

Learn strategies for structuring your meetings to achieve more in less time, with fewer headaches. Uncover techniques for tackling differences around the board table while staying focused on results. Explore practical ways for your board to define and implement its own “rules of engagement” so your meetings will be orderly and productive. *TGA course B-105; 4 credits*

Fundamentals of Assessment & Taxation—Aug. 18, 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. *(Lunch served at 12:30 p.m.)*

Property taxation and assessment administration are two cornerstones of township operations. From assessment and board of review meetings, all the way to tax collection—it’s essential that board members have an understanding of how the process works. Learn more about the Headlee Amendment and Proposal A, as well as truth-in-taxation, assessing and equalization. Review a variety of revenue sources coming into the township, including millages, administrative fees and special assessments. *TGA course F-105; 4 credits*

Managing Your Township Team—Aug. 19, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. *(Includes continental breakfast & lunch)*

Township board members, deputies, election workers, assessors and firefighters are employees for at least some employment purposes, and so are volunteers. Townships, large and small, need to be prepared to address human resource issues like hiring, firing, discipline, compensation, even recruiting and managing volunteers. Preparing and implementing appropriate policies can improve morale around your township hall, help you retain quality people and avoid employment (even volunteer!) related risks. Get the tools you need to better manage your township team. *TGA course F-104; 6 credits*

Excellence in Governance: All are welcome to attend these courses, which are part of MTA’s Township Governance Academy (TGA) curriculum. You don’t have to be enrolled in TGA to attend. If you enroll within six months of class, credit will be applied retroactively. **What’s TGA?** These confidence-building courses enhance your leadership skills and motivate you to take on the challenges unique to those serving as a local leader. Regardless of your position in the township or amount of experience, TGA will move you to a higher level of performance and make your service to your community more effective—and more rewarding. Learn more about TGA at bit.ly/MTA-TGA



Summer Academy Registration Form — — — — —

Township _____ County _____

Name _____ Title _____

Email _____

Which class(es) will you attend: ☐ Meetings ☐ Taxation ☐ Teamwork

Payment Options

☐ Invoice my township (members only)

☐ Check enclosed (payable to MTA)

☐ Charge to: (circle one) MasterCard VISA

Card # _____ Expiration Date _____

Print Card Holder’s Name _____ CSV (3-digit code) _____

Signature _____

Early-bird Rate*
Ends August 4

Late Rate*
Begins August 5

Individual course rates

Effective Meetings	\$100/attendee	\$150/attendee
Assessment & Taxation	\$100/attendee	\$150/attendee
Managing Your Team	\$125/attendee	\$175/attendee

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

Package discounts Apply only if same registrant attends multiple courses

Save \$50 when registering for **two courses**

Save \$75 when registering for **all three courses**

Payment worksheet

\$ _____ (Rate*) **Effective Meetings**
\$ _____ (Rate*) **Assessment & Taxation**
\$ _____ (Rate*) **Managing Your Team**
\$ - _____ **Subtract package discount (if applicable)**
\$ _____ **Total amount due**

Need lodging? Call (866) 695-5010 and reference this MTA event.



Send completed registration form to MTA, P.O. Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078, fax to (517) 321-8908 or email rebecca@michigantownships.org. You can also register online at bit.ly/twptraining. Need event registration assistance? Call (517) 321-6467, ext. 226. For other event-related questions, call (517) 321-6467, ext. 234.

upcoming MTA workshop

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Emerging Issues in Emergency Services

Providing emergency and fire protection services for your community may be one of the more complex (and critical!) services your township provides. This insightful event is designed to help you stay on top of the hot issues facing your fire department and emergency services personnel. Township board members, fire officials and anyone serving on your emergency services team are welcome to attend for insights, updates and a better understanding of current challenges.

Held at the Bavarian Inn Lodge in **Frankenmuth on Sept. 10 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.**, this event includes continental breakfast and lunch, and brings the heat with updates and insights from the state's leading experts. You'll hear directly from the state fire marshal and the director of the Division of EMS and Systems of Care in Michigan's Bureau of Emergency Preparedness, EMS, and Systems of Care.

Because when the pressure's on, preparation makes all the difference—and it all starts here. Discussion includes:

- An update from Bureau of Fire Services, led by State Fire Marshal Thomas Hughes, Jr.
- Insights from the Bureau of Emergency Preparedness, led by the Division Director of EMS and Systems of Care Emily Berquist
- Fire and life safety in Michigan's cannabis industry
- Fire station alerting systems—considerations and risk assessment
- What you need to know about the federal Assistance to Firefighters and Fire Prevention & Safety Grant programs
- And more!

Whether you're making decisions at the board level, serving on the front lines or just passionate about public safety, this event is sure to spark ideas, fuel better decision-making, provide valuable connections and help your township stay safe and responsive.



Emerging Issues in EMS Registration Form — — — — —

Township _____ County _____

Name _____ Title _____

Email _____

Name _____ Title _____

Email _____

Early-bird Rate*: Ends Aug. 27

☐ \$125/person

Late Rate*: Begins Aug. 28

☐ \$175/person

_____ (# registrants) x \$ _____ (Rate) = \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE = \$ _____

**Rate applies to MTA members; non-members, call MTA for rates.*

Payment Options

☐ Invoice my township (members only)

☐ Check enclosed (payable to MTA)

☐ Charge to: (circle one) MasterCard VISA

Card # _____ Expiration Date _____

Print Card Holder's Name _____ CSV (3-digit code) _____

Signature _____

*Confirmations will be sent via email to individual registrants.
To add or update an email, contact MTA at (517) 321-6467, ext. 231
or email database@michigantownships.org*



Send completed registration form to MTA, P.O. Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078, fax to (517) 321-8908 or email rebecca@michigantownships.org. You can also register online at bit.ly/twptraining. Need event registration assistance? Call (517) 321-6467, ext. 226. For other event-related questions, call (517) 321-6467, ext. 234.

aroundthe**state**

townships in the spotlight



Billings Township

Billings Township (Gladwin Co.) is approximately 22 square miles, slightly smaller than a standard township, and home to more than 2,900 residents. In 1861, the first settlers to the area were Marvel Secord and his family, who canoed up the Tittabawassee River through the future site of Billings Township north to the mouth of the Sugar River, just a few miles from where the City of Gladwin exists today. The township has developed as a residential, agricultural and recreational community, and township leaders work hard to create a tight-knit community atmosphere and quality of life for residents. State forest land occupies a portion of the eastern half of the township, providing opportunities for hiking, hunting and snowmobiling.



Wixom Lake, named after Frank Wixom who was instrumental in building the Edenville Dam, was once the biggest source of recreation and activity in the township, until 2020 when the lake was destroyed when the dam collapsed. The township has worked diligently to recover and make improvements since the catastrophe, including renovations to its township park, adding community events and expanding opportunities for residents of all ages. In addition to constructing a large pavilion, the township also upgraded the playground and added a half-court basketball

court and a corn hole set to Community Park. This year marks the third year that the township has hosted free Music in the Park gatherings, held every other Wednesday. These summertime events draw hundreds of residents, with lawn chairs and blankets filling the grass, to enjoy free music and visit with neighbors. Last year, the township added a new feature to the Wednesday evening gatherings: a local food truck.

Every other week from June to August, the township holds a Monday Morning in the Park program, where area children can enjoy storytime, games and a short, hands-on educational program. The community events aren't limited to just the summer months. The township hosts an Easter egg hunt, a fun day that also includes games and prize giveaways. The most popular township event is the Halloween trunk and treat. Nearly 500 kids and their families enjoy candy, haunted hay rides and other fun surprises.

A small but active park committee as well as volunteers dedicate a great deal of time and effort to coordinate and host these events for the community. With careful attention to its goals and vision, Billings Township is working to protect its unique rural, recreational character of the community while also building a future that incorporates the best characteristics of the 21st century, respects its heritage, and protects its natural environment.



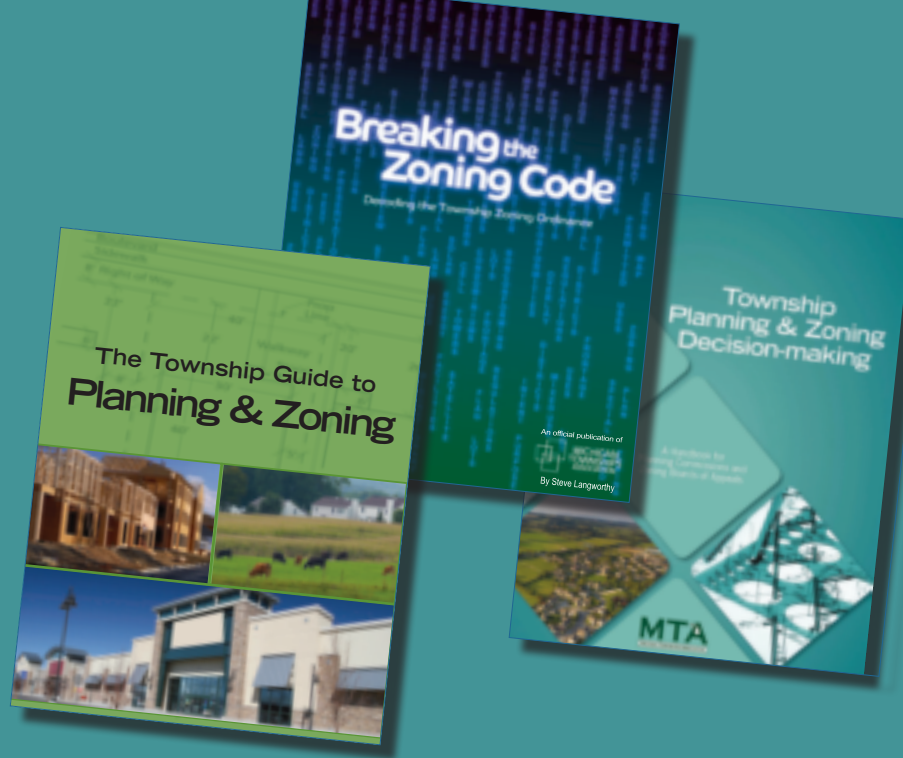
MTA's Principles of Planning & Zoning book package has the information you need to help guide your township's land use future!

MTA's library of publications includes three planning and zoning resources written specifically for Michigan townships. Authored by planning and land use expert Steve Langworthy, *The Township Guide to Planning & Zoning*, *Planning & Zoning Decision-making* and our newest release, *Breaking the Zoning Code—Decoding the Township Zoning Ordinance* offer insights, background, best practices, considerations and requirements as townships plan for their community's land use needs and future.

Essential resources for every member of your township planning and zoning team, our **Principles of Planning & Zoning book package** gives you the information and guidance you need—at a **discounted price!** Purchase all three books* for \$120 (*pricing includes shipping & handling*).

Order yours today!

*Package includes 2019 editions of *The Township Guide to Planning & Zoning* and *Planning & Zoning Decision-making*, and the 2024 edition of *Breaking the Zoning Code*. No substitutions.



ORDER FORM (please print neatly)

Name _____

Position _____

Township _____

County _____

Phone _____

SHIPPING ADDRESS:

Street _____

City _____, MI Zip _____

Principles of Planning & Zoning three-book package

Quantity _____ x \$120 member price = \$ _____

Quantity _____ x \$168 non-member price = \$ _____

Add 6% tax if not tax-exempt + \$ _____

Total \$

CHOOSE PAYMENT TYPE

☐ Check enclosed (payable to MTA) ☐ Invoice the township

☐ MasterCard or Visa # _____

CSV (three-digit code): _____ Exp. date _____

Authorizing Signature

MTA members can order on MTA's online store at michigantownships.org (member login is required), by faxing completed form to (517) 321-8908, mailing to MTA, P.O. Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078, or emailing tonia@michigantownships.org

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- ❖ Effective strategies
- ❖ Practical techniques
- ❖ Valuable resources

Join us:

Clerks' Retreat—Sept. 29-30

Treasurers' Retreat—Oct. 1-2

Supervisors Retreat—Oct. 14-15

Trustees' Retreat—Oct. 27-28

Planning & Zoning Team Retreat—Oct. 29-30



Connect with your fellow officials this fall for two days of learning and networking—specific to your township role

Township leaders have unique roles and responsibilities that differ from those in the private sector. MTA understands townships and we tailor your *Professional Development Retreat* experience to address the challenges (and opportunities!) facing each elected position, as well as those impacting your planning and zoning team.

Each two-day event offers invaluable insights into key topics affecting your role in the township. You'll have the chance to network with your peers, exchange experiences, tackle shared challenges, and gain practical solutions from those who can relate like no one else can.

Join MTA, your colleagues and other municipal experts at the **Bavarian Inn Lodge in Frankenmuth** this fall. You'll walk away with fresh perspectives, expert guidance and meaningful connections to enhance your service to your community and residents.

Thank you to our retreat sponsors!



Registration is now open! Visit bit.ly/mtaretreats for details, downloadable forms, session descriptions and links to online registration.

Save \$60 off full-program rates by registering your deputy, a fellow trustee or planning commission member! Discount applies to second registrant who is attending the same retreat.

