

Michigan Township Focus

JULY 2015

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

Creating healthy communities



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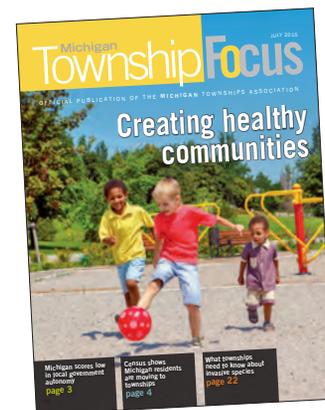
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MTA Official Publication of the Michigan Townships Association
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mission statement

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



featured articles

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Your township is uniquely able to shape your residents' environment and have a major impact on their lives. Local policies, physical infrastructure and programs can all help make the healthy choice the easy choice for township residents.

22 Invasive species: What townships need to know

Township officials may hear the term "invasive species," and wonder why they matter locally. The answer—like the subject of invasive species—is often wide-ranging and complex.



SPECIAL INSERT: MTA's Professional Development Retreats Registration Brochure

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Michigan scores low in local government autonomy

It was once conventional wisdom that Michigan's local governments enjoyed more "local control" or "home rule" compared to those in other states. It was likely urban myth, as a 1981 study by the now-defunct Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations ranked Michigan's local government autonomy a moderate 16th out of the 50 states.



But, a 2009 study¹ ranked Michigan's local governments 34th in overall autonomy, based on factors that include the importance of local governments in each state's economy and intergovernmental system, local government structural and functional responsibility, and revenue limitations and diversity.

Michigan is clustered with California, Kentucky, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin as giving its local governments moderate but below average structural and functional legal autonomy, which subjects its local governments to stricter fiscal limitations and extremely low authority to generate local revenues.

While Michigan's 34th local government autonomy ranking and 35th state per-capita income ranking isn't likely a direct cause-and-effect relationship, it is clear that state government's tight rein on local governments is no ticket to prosperity either.

In fact, the study concludes that Michigan and California impose tighter constraints than any other states on their local governments' revenue source diversity (i.e., local impact fees, and sales and income taxes) and limitations on their taxation authority (i.e., property tax growth restrictions, such as Proposal A, "Headlee" and Truth-in-Taxation) than locals in other states. This also contributes to these two states leading the nation in the number of local governments either in bankruptcy or under state financial oversight.

The current Michigan Legislature seems to be particularly focused on further reducing local government policy autonomy. Legislative bills regulating local government transparency, eliminating townships' role in setting speed limits, and pre-empting employer responsibility regulations and ride-share regulatory ordinances are some of the policy areas that legislators believe should be off-limits to local elected officials. Even a bill requiring tenants to pay for

bedbug eradication includes an explicit prohibition against contrary local ordinances, although given its pervasive regulatory nature, the legislation would arguably pre-empt local ordinances anyway.

Some employment regulations are arguably best regulated with a consistent statewide approach. However, the far-reaching scope of a recent attempt to pre-empt local employment regulations went well beyond what supporters represented as the bill's intent. The bill would have prohibited public safety regulations that townships have responsibly exercised for decades, such as the number of employees working out of a home occupation, prohibiting objectionable employee conduct in adult entertainment businesses, or requiring identification of employees who routinely visit homes. Most of our concerns initially fell on deaf ears in the House, with the Senate only willing to make limited changes, such as requiring employee background checks for door-to-door vendors, community benefits for tax abatements, and contracts between service companies and a local government. It took the governor and his office to get the Legislature to limit most of the legislation's impact to its primary objective—prohibiting local wage and fringe benefit regulations.

Local government autonomy allows local leaders to craft regulations best suited to their stakeholders' policy preferences, to experiment with various regulatory approaches, and to innovate, borrow and adapt approaches to public policy that fit local needs. In recent history, it has been Michigan's local governments that have responded most nimbly to changes in the public will, and polls tracking public trust of government are highest for government at the local level.

The roles and relationships of state and local governments are confusing and contradictory when decided on an ad-hoc basis. Local and state policy leaders need to create a consensus framework that strikes the appropriate balance between local autonomy for issues predominately impacting local communities and statewide regulatory uniformity when shown to be essential for a coherent business environment.

¹"Comparing Local Government Autonomy Across the States," published by Hal Wolman, et al. at the George Washington Institute of Public Policy at George Washington University.

CENSUS NUMBERS

Where are residents moving? Townships, of course!

For the third year in a row, Michigan's population grew, according to 2014 municipal estimates recently released by the U.S. Census Bureau. And those numbers also indicate that townships are Michigan's fastest-growing communities.

In terms of numbers, **Macomb Township** (Macomb Co.) was the biggest gainer in the state, adding an estimated 1,828 residents during the past year—an increase of 2.19 percent.

Macomb Township Supervisor **Janet Dunn** says that there is no shortage of reasons that her township has seen an increase in population, including top-notch local schools and affordable homes.

"We have consistently led the state of Michigan in new home building permits," Dunn noted. "In fact, Macomb County had 1,808 building permits last year, and Macomb Township had 455 of those permits."

The township boasts a lower tax rate than surrounding communities, as well as amazing parks and recreation opportunities. Conveniently located near I-94 and I-75, the township has four golf courses, a state-of-the-art ice arena, and Macomb County Community College is just a half-mile from its southern border. Farms and vegetable stands are sprinkled alongside subdivisions.

"We are in the center of everything here," Dunn said. "It just doesn't get better than what we have to offer."

By percentage, **Union Charter Township** (Isabella Co.) and **Lyon Charter Township** (Oakland Co.) had the greatest increase in population, with Union Charter Township increasing by 5.25 percent—676 new residents—last year, making it the state's 9th biggest population gainer. Lyon Charter Township increased by 765 people—4.65 percent—in 2014, the 8th most population growth of Michigan municipalities.

Among to Top 10 population gainers in the state, seven were townships. In addition to Macomb, Union Charter and Lyon Charter Townships, the townships gaining the most new residents were:

- **Pittsfield Charter Township** (Washtenaw Co.), with a gain of 879 residents, the third biggest gain in the state.
- **Meridian Charter Township** (Ingham Co.) had the fourth highest gain, with 865 new residents.
- **Georgetown Charter Township** (Ottawa Co.) welcomed 848 new residents, fifth highest in the state.
- **Shelby Charter Township** (Macomb Co.) gained 843 residents in 2014, meaning it gained the sixth most residents of any municipality in Michigan.

SURVEY SAYS

Few local leaders satisfied with public transit options

A minority of Michigan's local leaders say they're satisfied with public transit options in their communities, but a lack of funding and other issues present roadblocks to improvements, a University of Michigan survey found.

The Michigan Public Policy Survey, on which MTA is a partner, asked local leaders a range of questions about the state of public transit in communities across the state. It found that 34 percent are satisfied with transit options and 21 percent are dissatisfied.

The reasons for dissatisfaction include issues related to routes, frequency and coverage, along with a lack of connectivity with other communities.

Overall, 71 percent of Michigan's local leaders report there are transit options—public, private or both—available to residents in their communities. Dial-a-ride, bus and taxi services are the most common options available to residents.

Additional findings from the survey were:

- While more than 98 percent of larger Michigan jurisdictions (those with more than 10,000 residents) have at least some transit options available, so do 58 percent of the state's smallest jurisdictions (those with fewer than 1,500 residents).
- Public demand is reported to be a key factor encouraging the development of transit in 30 percent of communities statewide.
- The primary factors that are reportedly discouraging development of transit all relate to finances, including lack of local funding (46 percent), lack of state and federal funding (40 percent), and operation and maintenance costs (41 percent).
- Overall, 57 percent of Michigan local leaders say that a well-functioning transit system is either "somewhat" (38 percent) or "very" (19 percent) important to their communities' needs. Half of officials from the state's largest jurisdictions say transit is very important to the needs of their communities. In the state's smallest communities, a majority (51 percent) say transit is somewhat or very important.

The study involved surveys sent via mail and email to top elected and appointed officials in all counties, cities, villages and townships in Michigan. Township supervisors, clerks and managers are among those surveyed.



ACA COMPLIANCE

Penalties may be assessed for employer health care reimbursement

In September 2013, the IRS issued Notice 2013-54 that indicated that employers—including townships—cannot reimburse an individual employee’s insurance policy premium on a pre-tax basis, as it would be in violation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). In November 2014, the IRS expanded this notice to say that employers also could not reimburse individual premiums on a post-tax basis.

As of July 1, 2015, an employer that offers such an arrangement would be subject to a \$100 per day, per affected employee penalty (\$36,500 per year, per employee). There may be some transitional relief for small employers in paying the penalty, though there are no guarantees.

Visit MTA’s “Affordable Care Act” Web page on the members-only section of www.michigantownships.org, or call (517) 321-6467 for more information.

LOCAL UPDATES FROM ACROSS MICHIGAN

Township happenings

Eleven Upper Peninsula townships from two counties are part of the new Superior Trade Zone, the state’s newest Next Michigan Development Corporation. The trade zone is an interlocal partnership agreement among **Bark River, Chocolay Charter, Ely, Ford River, Forsyth, Garden, Ishpeming, Maple Ridge, Nahma, Richmond** and **Wells Townships**, Delta and Marquette Counties, as well as three cities. The zone aims to leverage and promote business development actions that focus on the assets and logistics infrastructure unique to the region, including land located near the Delta County Airport Industrial Park and the Tellkyte Industrial Park located at the former Air Force base in Marquette County.

Niles Charter Township (Berrien Co.) residents are enjoying 3.3 miles of new township trails, perfect for running, walking and biking. Township funding along with a state grant and other donations made the project possible.

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



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In memoriam

June Doster, Johnstown Township (Barry Co.) clerk for 52 years.

John Anderson, Manistee Township (Manistee Co.) supervisor for 32 years.

Joy Hutchinson, Manistee Township (Manistee Co.) clerk for three years.

Joyce Neubauer, Texas Charter Township (Kalamazoo Co.) treasurer for 37 years, also served as deputy clerk and deputy treasurer.



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MTA Board approves involvement in Legal Defense Fund cases

The MTA Board of Directors recently approved Legal Defense Fund (LDF) assistance, in the form of *amicus curiae* briefs, in the following cases:

Armada Township v. Ken Hampson and Jack Medley—Involving medical marijuana greenhouses built in violation of the township’s zoning and building ordinances.

Consumers Energy Rate Case, Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC)—Challenging rate increases using a method that puts an excessive cost burden on local governments operating water and sewer services.

DTE Energy Rate Case, MPSC—Involving a proposed rate increase for LED lighting.

FCC Notice of Proposed Rule-making—Ensuring that local obligations and rights to regulate and achieve reasonable revenues for use of rights-of-way remain intact or are properly addressed as the Federal Communications Commission seeks to address the convergence of technologies in the video/cable/Internet world by encouraging a shift toward Internet delivery of video.

Estate of Beals v. State of Michigan—Involving the proximate cause of death following a drowning incident at a state technical college.

Menard, Inc. v. City of Escanaba—Appealing a Michigan Tax Tribunal opinion allowing comparables consisting of dark, out-of-business stores with restrictive deeds sold for secondary uses, dramatically driving down valuations for “big box stores.”

Hartland Glen Dev, LLC v Hartland Twp.—Involving a property tax valuation wherein petitioner argued that the true cash value of the property must be reduced by the balance of any outstanding special assessments, and challenging supplemental and corrected special assessments levied against the same property.

mta events | july

14 Money Matters and Better Budgeting workshops, St. Ignace

15 Money Matters and Better Budgeting workshops, Cadillac

28 Money Matters and Better Budgeting workshops, Frankenmuth

29 Money Matters and Better Budgeting workshops, Kalamazoo

profile



Consumers Energy

Delivering on promises for Michigan

Consumers Energy is committed to serving Michigan, where the company’s roots trace to its 1886 founding in Jackson. Consumers Energy is determined to help the state succeed economically and environmentally, and appreciates the opportunity to work with townships across Michigan.



Each day, Consumers Energy safely delivers affordable, reliable electricity and natural gas to customers throughout Michigan’s Lower Peninsula. The company is committed to operating sustainably to help leave the state better than they found it. Here are just a few highlights:

- Consumers Energy energy efficiency programs have helped its customers save a collective \$855 million since 2009, and it is helping Michigan communities transition to more efficient street lighting.
- Consumers Energy donated \$10 million to Michigan nonprofits in 2014, and its employees are contributing their time, talents and resources to care for the communities it serves.
- The average cost of electricity and natural gas is about \$3 per day over the course of a year for Consumers Energy residential customers.
- There were 149,000 fewer customer interruptions in 2014 compared to 2013.
- Consumers Energy has significantly reduced emissions from its generating plants over the last 15 years, helping Michigan’s air to be the cleanest it has been in a generation.

To keep moving forward, the state needs a Michigan-first energy plan that creates a climate for Consumers Energy and other major energy providers to develop plans to meet the state’s energy needs. Those plans must provide certainty to build the next generation of clean power plants, as well as flexible and balanced clean energy policies and long-term reliability for customers.

Learn more at consumersenergy.com/accountability.

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Advertorial

Share your ideas with MTA

Is there a particular topic you'd like MTA to cover in an educational session or *Township Focus* magazine article? MTA wants to hear your ideas, including any "trouble spots" your township is facing, successes your community is experiencing, or topics or trends you are seeing impact township government. Suggestions could be incorporated into upcoming MTA workshops, Annual Conference educational sessions or *Focus* articles.

Contact MTA Knowledge Center Education Director Shelley Cardenas at (517) 321-6467 or shelley@michigantownships.org to share your ideas.

Interested in serving as a speaker or author? Consider sharing your experiences, best practices or practical solutions by presenting at a workshop or contributing to articles in the magazine. Download a speaker/author information form at www.michigantownships.org/submitproposal.asp.



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JULY

1 Taxes due and payable to those jurisdictions authorized to levy a summer tax. (MCL 211.44a(3) and (4))

3 Deadline for governmental agencies to exercise the right of refusal for 2015 tax foreclosure parcels. (MCL 211.78m(1))

6 Last day to register for Aug. 4 election. (MCL 168.497)

21 Partisan and non-partisan candidates for Nov. 3 election file nominating petitions and Affidavits of Identity by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.644e) Withdrawal deadline elapses at 4 p.m. on July 24.

Tuesday after the third Monday in July. July board of review (BOR) may be convened to correct a qualified error. (MCL 211.53b) The township board may authorize, by adoption of an ordinance or resolution, an alternative meeting date during the week of the third Monday in July. (MCL 211.53b(7)(b))

An owner of property that is a principal residence on May 1 may appeal to the July BOR in the year for which an exemption was claimed or in the immediate succeeding three years if the exemption was not on the tax roll. (MCL 211.7cc(19))

An owner of property that is qualified agricultural property on May 1 may appeal to the July BOR for the current year and the immediately preceding year if the exemption was not on the tax roll. (MCL 211.7ee(6))

July BOR may hear appeals for current year only for veterans and poverty exemptions, but not exemptions denied by the March BOR. (MCLs 211.7b and 211.7u)

By 24 Pre-election campaign statements filed (books closed July 19).

By 27 Township clerks forward names and addresses of candidates for Nov. 3 election without political party affiliation to county clerk. (MCL 168.321)

By 28 Notice of Aug. 4 election published. (MCL 168.653a)

Petitions to place county and local questions on the Nov. 3 election ballot filed with clerks by 4 p.m. (If governing law sets an earlier petition filing deadline, earlier deadline must be observed.) (MCL 168.646a)

By 30 Public accuracy test must be conducted for Aug. 4 election by local election commission. (R 168.778) Notice of test must be published at least 48 hours before test. (MCL 168.798)

By 31 Appeals of property classified as residential real, agricultural real, timber-cutover real or agricultural personal must be made by filing a written petition with the Michigan Tax Tribunal (MTT) on or before July 31 of the tax year involved. (MCL 205.735a(6))

On or before July 31. A protest of assessed valuation or taxable valuation, or the percentage of qualified agricultural property exemption subsequent to BOR action must be filed with the MTT, in writing.

Industrial Facilities Exemption Treasurers Report (Form 170) must be filed with the Assessment and Certification Division on or before July 31 of the tax year involved.

AUGUST

1 Electors who wish to receive an absentee voter ballot for Aug. 4 election by mail submit applications by 2 p.m. (MCL 168.759)

3 Electors qualified to obtain an absentee voter ballot for Aug. 4 election may vote in person in the clerk's office by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.761)

4 Emergency absentee voting for Aug. 4 election until 4 p.m. (MCL 168.759b)

Election.

5 Township clerk delivers result of Aug. 4 election to county clerk by 11 a.m. (MCL 168.809)

Candidates without political party affiliation who seek a partisan general office on the Nov. 3 ballot file qualifying petitions and Affidavits of Identity by 5 p.m. (MCL 168.590c) Withdrawal deadline elapses at 4 p.m. on Aug. 10.

By 10 Boards of county canvassers meet to canvass Aug. 4 election. (MCL 168.821)

11 Ballot wording of proposals qualified to appear on the Nov. 3 ballot certified to county and local clerks by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.646a)

By 13 Local clerk forwards names and addresses of candidates without political party affiliation who seek a partisan general office on the Nov. 3 ballot to county clerk. (MCL 168.321)

15 Each municipality shall report to the Department of Treasury the millage rate levied or to be levied that year for a millage described in Section 5(g) or (w) used to calculate an appropriation under Section 17(1)(a) or a distribution under Section 17(3)(a)(i). See MCL 123.1353(4) for the calculation for the 2015 report.

By 17 *By the third Monday in August.* Deadline for taxpayer to file appeal directly with the MTT if final equalization multiplier exceeds tentative multiplier and a taxpayer's assessment, as equalized, is in excess of 50 percent of true cash value. (MCL 205.737(7))



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Can you explain the Government Pension Offset provision that reduces Social Security benefits?

If your township uses the public retirement system exception provided by Internal Revenue Code Section 3121 to exclude your employment from Social Security coverage, and upon retirement you are eligible to receive a spouse's benefit due to his or her employment covered by Social Security, your spousal benefits will be reduced by the Government Pension Offset.

This reduction was enacted by Congress to put government workers on the same level as private sector employees, whose spousal Social Security benefits are "offset" by the spouse's benefits earned from his or her employment. When the Social Security system was created, spousal benefits were designed to provide non-working spouses with Social Security coverage. As more women entered the workforce and earned their own Social Security coverage, a calculation was made by Social Security Administration (SSA) to reduce the spousal benefit by the benefits earned directly by the spouse. The Government Pension Offset provision was put in place to keep government workers whose employment is not covered by Social Security taxes from receiving full spousal benefits without such an offset.



How is the offset calculated?

Your spousal benefits, if any, will be reduced by two-thirds of your township pension. If you receive a monthly pension benefit, your monthly Social Security benefit will be reduced by two-thirds of your monthly pension. If you receive a lump sum, your monthly Social Security benefit will still be reduced by an equivalent annuity amount calculated by the SSA (as if your lump sum had been paid monthly).



Does this apply to all township employees?

This does not affect employees whose employment was covered by Social Security either on their last day of employment and their last date of employment was prior to July 1, 2004, or during the last five years of employment and their last date of employment was July 1, 2004, or later. (Certain rules may apply to retirees whose last date of employment was between July 1, 2004, and March 2, 2009.)



If I also work in the private sector, can my private sector Social Security benefits be reduced as well?

Possibly. Assuming that your township employment was not covered by Social Security, there may be reduced benefits caused by the Windfall Elimination Provision. This provision was enacted by Congress to eliminate the increase in calculated benefits to employees who worked both in covered and non-covered (by Social Security) employment. The Social Security Act contains provisions to pay long-term lower-earning workers a higher benefit as a percentage to their earnings to provide a better monthly income to less advantaged Americans. Governmental employees were also receiving this bump in their benefits—because the non-covered employment and resulting pensions were not previously considered by the SSA.



What are the notification requirements for employees not covered by Social Security?

The Social Security Protection Act of 2004 includes a mandate that all state and local government entities hiring an individual, on or after Jan. 1, 2005, for a non-Social Security covered position must provide him or her with a written notice explaining the effect of non-Social Security covered work on any separate Social Security covered work by the individual—i.e., the benefit from the Social Security-covered work might be reduced. The SSA has a sample notice, as well as additional information on this requirement, at www.socialsecurity.gov/form1945/.

This affects all townships without 218 agreements, whose employees have pensions that are Social Security equivalent—and therefore do not pay Social Security, and those townships that have 218 agreements and have excluded classes of employees from Social Security coverage, and have a pension plan that meets the aforementioned requirements.

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.

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We just bought some land to expand our cemetery. What options do we have for developing it?

Whether a township is revitalizing an older traditional cemetery, maintaining a cemetery that has reached its burial capacity or developing a new, wide-open space, there are many cemetery options for a township today. Considering more service options and adapting to the changing needs and values of families can increase the lifespan of the cemetery and allow for new revenues to finance maintenance of the grounds.

Today, cemeteries are typically divided into two broad categories: traditional cemeteries, and memorial parks or gardens. A traditional cemetery—the type used for many generations—has upright monuments, usually made of stone. Memorial parks and gardens are a newer type of cemetery that have emerged due to public demand for alternative burial options, such as interment of cremains and green burials.

When you have a blank slate in a new cemetery or addition, you have the perfect opportunity to create a cemetery with a mix of traditional upright monument sections, garden sections, green burial sections, and even pet sections.

Cremains

According to the Cremation Association of North America (CANA), the cremation rate has risen over the last 30-plus years from under 10 percent to more than 40 percent. The National Funeral Directors Association expects that by 2025, 57 percent of all bodies will be cremated. The increased interest in cremation burial options is primarily due to the cost—cremation costs are substantially less than a funeral and full-body burials, or even green burial costs. Cremains (the ashes of those cremated) take up less space and can be combined in plots. Cremation has also been the main reason behind the growth of columbariums (a structure with niches for cremains). Townships may want to consider a columbarium as an option for cremains.

Green burials

Vaults are not required in Michigan cemeteries. A township could choose to allow “green burials” if it wanted. The term “green burial” is used to describe a number of different approaches to environmentally safe or natural burials. People usually use the term to refer to an organic burial that involves no embalming or uses organic, biodegradable materials, and that allows both the body and any casket or other casing for the body, such as a shroud, to biodegrade.

Pet cemeteries

Yes, it is legal to bury pets in public cemeteries. In fact, the market for memorialization of pets is one of the fastest-growing death care markets in the United States and Canada, according to CANA.



What steps should we follow to establish or expand a township cemetery?

There are no laws regarding the development of a new cemetery other than getting county health department approval per MCL 333.2458. Many of the existing cemetery laws pertain to private cemeteries and not publicly owned cemeteries. Public cemeteries are governed by local ordinance. To get county health department approval, you will need to contact the environmental department and ask for a vacant land survey. This survey will look at primarily groundwater concerns that may prohibit good drainage.

A well-planned cemetery will have a master plan. Most cemeteries are developed in phases and should be guided through a master plan or other planning process to ensure future needs are considered. This process will consider such items as location, dimensions, size and types of burial spaces, as well as roads, drainage, water supply, landscape schemes and other supporting facilities (i.e., office and maintenance center).

The master plan will include current and future needs, marketing plans, financial forecasting, and implementation, which generally will occur in phases. A few critical questions to ask when creating the master plan are:

- What services do we want to offer—green burial services, cremation services (columbarium, cremation gardens, scatter wall, etc.) other full-body burial options like a mausoleum?

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- What will the fee structure need to be to produce adequate and realistic funds for long-term perpetual care?
- How much do you want to invest in maintenance? For example, flat stone cemeteries require less maintenance than cemeteries with headstones and monuments.

A site and section plan will also need to be developed. The site plan will address traffic flow (roads), earthwork, water supply, landscape schemes, and other special features or facilities (gazebos for gathering, benches, maintenance barn, etc.). The section plan lays out the sections, plot divisions, dimensions, and numbering system.

Lastly, the local unit will need to adopt a cemetery ordinance to regulate the cemetery. The ordinance will state what is allowed and not allowed, procedures for specific services, how spaces are reclaimed if not used, and many other provisions.

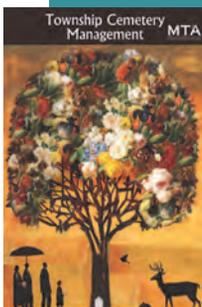
A professional planner can assist the township with creating an innovative, thriving and sustainable cemetery, including public spaces for grieving families. There are professional firms that assist with this planning, or local engineering companies can also provide guidance. A professional survey company can provide services for plotting a traditional cemetery.

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 or fax (517) 321-8908.

Learn more with MTA's Cemetery Management guide

From a review of statutes that govern township authority over cemeteries, to the financial aspects of this valuable service, MTA's *Township Cemetery Management* book serves as a guide to assist local units of government carry out this important function. From the content and procedures for adopting a township cemetery ordinance, to the role of the cemetery sexton, this publication will help township officials and employees explore the inner workings of township cemetery management. Numerous sample documents and detailed information can also be found in the appendices, and are included on a CD to customize for your township's use.

You may purchase the book at www.michigantownships.org/mta_store.asp or by calling (517) 321-6467. Member price is \$35; \$51 for non-members (plus shipping & handling).



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Bill bans local laws on wages, work rules

Legislation prohibiting townships and other local units of government from passing ordinances or policies regarding wages, benefits, training or work rules for employers within their jurisdiction has been signed into law by the governor. The bill, House Bill 4052, sponsored by Rep. Earl Poleski (R-Spring Arbor Twp.), was introduced to limit employer-employee regulation to state and federal law.

However, this legislation did not reach the governor's desk without going through a hard and difficult process.

In addition to pre-empting local control, earlier versions of the bill created numerous unintended consequences that extended far beyond the stated intentions of the bill for local governments. This would have placed several common and acceptable interactions between local governments and their resident businesses at risk. For example, the bill would have precluded a township from enforcing operating licenses or conditions of special use zoning permits approved. Other examples include zoning decisions limiting hours of operation (sand and gravel mining), noise abatement regulations, background checks for public safety purposes (door-to-door sales representatives), and even the ability to negotiate with a township's own vendors for services or developers for economic development.

MTA and other local government organizations strongly argued to narrow the focus of the legislation, and in the bill's final process, it was the governor and his office who stepped in to limit the effect. While MTA remained opposed, the administration's changes were welcomed by MTA and other local government organizations.

The new law prohibits local governments from adopting ordinances or policies requiring businesses to pay wages or provide benefits beyond those standards set by state or federal law. The law does not apply to local ordinances or resolutions adopted prior to Jan. 1, 2015.

Sunset extended for issuing municipal securities

Townships have another three years to pay for certain pension costs by issuing municipal securities. The sunset was extended under the recently enacted Public Act 46 of 2015, sponsored by Sen. Jack Brandenburg (R-Harrison Chtr. Twp.).

The law amends a provision allowing townships, counties, cities and villages to issue municipal securities for unfunded pension liabilities for a retirement program or the costs of the unfunded accrued health care liability. These entities were slated to have until Dec. 31, 2015, to issue a security. PA 46 extends that sunset to Dec. 31, 2018.

This law was supported by MTA for its potential to save townships money.

State budget finalized

Gov. Rick Snyder signed the Fiscal Year 2015-16 state budgets after they recently received final legislative approval. The budgets include a 3.1 percent increase in constitutional revenue sharing as well as continued funding of City, Village and Township Revenue Sharing for 124 townships at their current levels.

Also included is full funding of payments in lieu of taxes, \$9.2 million for the fire protection grant program and money for an additional 88 state troopers and 10 motor carrier officers.

Inside Lansing continues on page 13

Legislative lowdown

Here's a quick look at important bills that MTA is following as they move through the legislative process. For up-to-date information on this legislation, and more, look to our *Township Insights* e-newsletter, sent every Friday to all member officials with an email address on file in our database, as well as our in-depth legislative e-newsletter, *Township Voice*.

HBs 4271-4274 and HB 4385: Would eliminate the February regular election date. MTA supports.

HB 4522: Would allow certain Michigan legislative committees to subpoena any records or files of local units with a majority committee vote. MTA opposes.

HB 4553-4558: Would clarify and close loopholes in personal property tax reform.

HB 4516: Would allow disabled veterans who missed the filing period to retroactively receive a property tax exemption for 2013 and 2014. MTA opposes.

HBs 4637-4641: Would create a new act to regulate the operation of transportation network companies and their drivers (Uber and Lyft) and eliminates regulation by local governments. MTA opposes.

SB 6: Would expand current disabled veterans property tax exemption to include residential and agricultural real property. MTA opposes

SB 24: Would allow principal residence exemption to continue upon owner's death for up to two years under specific conditions.

SB 191: Would allow local units to recover certain costs for retail fraud or criminal contempt prosecution. MTA supports.



2015 Professional Development Retreats

Join us at Boyne Highlands Resort for two days of intensive learning, networking—and fun—in the splendor of northern Michigan.

Supervisors: Sept. 10 & 11

Clerks: Sept. 23 & 24

Trustees: Sept. 12 & 13

Treasurers: Sept. 29 & 30

Take advantage of early-bird rates.

Register by Sept. 1 to save \$50!



As a leader in your township, you are expected to have solutions for a wide variety of challenges. How do you ensure you're equipped to anticipate, and develop strategies to overcome, virtually any situation that arises in your community?

Join fellow officials from across the state this September at **Boyne Highlands Resort** for MTA's *Professional Development Retreats*. These events offer premier educational programming and excellent networking opportunities.

Practical techniques and valuable resources

The program is packed with informative sessions featuring topics tailored to the duties specific to your township board position. Take advantage of this learning opportunity and connect with others who can help make your role as a township official more fulfilling. It's an investment worth making.

All about the education

Each retreat offers a learning experience geared to your office on concepts, trends and pressing issues in township government. These informative educational sessions are designed for elected officials at every level, and will help you develop new skills while providing you with knowledge of the statutory duties and responsibilities required of elected officials.

Educational sessions for each retreat are being designed now, and additional topics will be added soon. Detailed descriptions will appear in the registration brochure being mailed to individual offices this month. Consult the brochure for your office to see the final lineup. Can't wait? Here's a preview:

Supervisors Retreat—Sept. 10 & 11

- Contemporary role of the township supervisor
- Township oversight—Who's minding the store?
- How to keep others from ruining your day
- Legendary leadership
- Local control, what's left?

Clerks Retreat—Sept. 23 & 24

- Aligning statutory roles and responsibilities with reality
- Cemetery management
- Elections tips and tricks
- FOIA fallout
- How to keep others from ruining your day
- Local control, what's left?
- Township websites: Under construction

Trustees Retreat—Sept. 12 & 13

- Aligning statutory roles and responsibilities with reality
- How to keep others from ruining your day
- Local control, what's left?
- Township websites: Under construction
- Township oversight—Who's minding the store?

Treasurers Retreat—Sept. 29 & 30

- Aligning statutory roles and responsibilities with reality
- Bankruptcy 101: What every treasurer must know
- How to keep others from ruining your day
- Local control, what's left?
- Trending tips for treasurers
- Top 5 investment vehicles for township funds
- What's in your audit?

Agenda

Day one:

9:30 a.m.
Registration check-in

10 a.m.
Class

11:15 a.m.
Break

11:30 a.m.
Class

12:30 p.m.
Networking luncheon

1:30 p.m.
Class

2:45 p.m.
Break

3:15 p.m.
Class

4:30 p.m.
Break

5 p.m.
Class

6:15 p.m.
Networking dinner

7:15 p.m.
Evening activity

Day two:

7:30 a.m.
Networking breakfast

8:30 a.m.
Class

9:45 a.m.
Break

10:15 a.m.
Class

11:30 a.m.
Networking luncheon

1 p.m.
Class

1:45 p.m.
Break

2 p.m.
Class

3:15 p.m.
Adjourn

Valuable networking

These events offer a unique opportunity for officials to gather for valuable education and networking. Your fellow officials know better than anyone the challenges you face!

Exceptional value

Officials are encouraged to register for the full program to get the most out of this educational experience. The full-program fee includes all meals and workshop materials. Bring your deputy and save \$50 off full-program rates! Managers or superintendents qualify for this discount with supervisors. Trustees may bring a fellow trustee from the same township. Single-day rates are also available.



Attendance at an MTA *Professional Development Retreat* is worth four (4) elective credits in the Township Governance Academy.

Evening activity

After a full day of intensive education, we know you'll be ready for some fresh air! Leave the meeting room behind and ride the chair lift to the top of the ski hill, enjoying spectacular views of northern Michigan color. Don't let the crisp fall breeze deter you—MTA has arranged for a bonfire and some local entertainment. Gather around the fire and get your s'more on with your fellow officials!



Cancellations & substitutions

Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office four weeks prior to the event will receive a full refund; two weeks prior will receive a half-refund; no refunds will be issued thereafter. You may substitute another individual from your township for your registration without incurring a charge. Please notify MTA of the change.



Registration Information

Register by Sept. 1 to take advantage of discounted registration fees!

A limited number of hotel rooms are available at discounted **MTA Retreat** rates.
Reservations must be made directly with the hotel.

Discounted lodging is limited—Reserve your hotel room today!

The main lodge at Boyne Highlands offers comfortable, well-appointed rooms with mini-fridges and coffeemakers. Throughout the resort, you can enjoy complimentary WiFi, a heated outdoor pool and hot tub, fitness center, business center, and multiple on-site restaurants.

Check-in: 5 p.m. Check-out: 1 p.m.

MTA Discounted Room Rates

\$89 Single- or double-occupancy
(rate does not include 7% resort fee and 5% local occupancy tax)

Two ways to make your hotel reservation:

- 1) **Call:** (800) 462-6963 and reference which “MTA Retreat” you wish to attend (i.e., supervisors, trustees, clerks, treasurers).
- 2) **Online reservations available at:**
www.michigantownships.org/members/retreats.asp

Discounted rates end two-weeks prior to each retreat’s start date!
A limited number of handicap accessible and pet-friendly rooms are available; please contact the resort directly for details.



Registration Form

Township _____ County _____

Daytime Telephone _____ Email Address _____

Name _____ Title _____

Name _____ Title _____



2nd registrant saves \$50!

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

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

Card # _____ Expires _____ / _____

Print Card Holder's Name _____ Signature _____

Which retreat do you wish to attend?

- Supervisors Clerks Treasurers Trustees

TAKE TWO: Bring your deputy and save \$50 off full-program rates!

(Trustees may bring a fellow trustee from the same township.)

Discount applies to second full program registrant who is attending the same retreat.

Full Program: Includes all meals, refreshments, classes, materials and evening activity. Housing is NOT included; see lodging details above to book your room.

- \$299/person \$349/person after Sept. 1

Single-Day Session: Check the day you wish to attend. Includes that day’s meals, refreshments, classes and materials. Day one includes evening activity.

- Day One ONLY \$189/person (\$219 after Sept. 1)
 Day Two ONLY \$149/person (\$169 after Sept. 1)

- BONUS: I saved \$50 on a second full-program registration!**

TOTAL: \$ _____ Non-members, call MTA for rates.



Send your completed registration form with payment to MTA, P.O. Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078; fax: (517) 321-8908. Or register online at www.michigantownships.org. Questions? Call (517) 321-6467.

Township authority over mobile home parks clarified

A new law provides townships with clearly defined authority to address ordinance violations in mobile home parks. Public Act 40 of 2015, sponsored by Rep. Andy Schor (D-Lansing), was recently signed into law and is effective Sept. 1, 2015.

Previously, there was no clear distinction in state law between state and local responsibilities in regulating mobile home parks. PA 40 was supported by MTA, as it was meant to clarify the roles and improve communication among agencies that oversee the parks.

The law requires the state Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) to inspect mobile home parks and submit a copy of inspection reports to each local unit in which a park is located. LARA must also notify local units if the mobile home park owner or operator had any violations, and the state Mobile Home Commission must let local units know about complaints, and new, amended or rescinded guidelines.

Additionally, local units are now allowed to bring action against a mobile home park to enforce regulations if a violation imminently threatens the health or safety of park residents or the public, and the owner or operator failed to comply. Local

health departments can also issue an order requiring a mobile home park to cease operations or prohibit people from being present there if imminent danger is present.

The maximum civil fine for park owners increased from \$10,000 to \$50,000, and owners of a distressed park are required to set aside money for future repairs. Both the state and local governmental entities exercising authority under the new law must make a publicly available list of its powers and duties under the act. Local governments are allowed to utilize a list prepared by a statewide association, so watch for additional information from MTA.

Stairlift bills become law

The installation of residential stairway and platform lifts was deregulated under Public Acts 34 and 35 of 2015, sponsored by Rep. Aric Nesbitt (R-Porter Twp.) and Rep. Al Pscholka (R-Lincoln Chtr. Twp.). Together, they changed the former requirement that all elevators, including residential chairlifts and platform lifts, must be installed, repaired, altered or maintained by a licensed elevator contractor. Residential stairway chairlifts and platform lifts can also be installed by someone certified by the manufacturer. Any permitting requirement established at the local level is maintained.

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For more information on how our Local Government Law team can assist your community, visit mmbjlaw.com.



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Creating healthy communities

Drive down Gale Road in **Davison Township** (Genesee Co.) and you'll see residents biking, jogging or pushing a stroller along a non-motorized trail. Others on the trail carry fresh tomatoes and blueberries home from the local farmers market. Nearby, dog owners chase their four-legged counterparts around the green space of the dog park.

And the latest addition to the township—a manmade lake—has provided township residents with yet another opportunity to get outdoors and get moving.

Davison Township has seen nothing short of a transformation since its first trail was built more than 10 years ago, Supervisor **Karen Miller** said. Today, it's easier than ever for citizens to get the exercise they need and improve their health. Residents have embraced the trails and parks with enthusiasm, and even elderly residents who don't walk the trails have told her how much they enjoy seeing families out and about.

"It's had a huge impact," Miller said. "People are looking for recreation. They're looking for the ability to walk to places and bike. I think that it's a wonderful addition to their lives."

As obesity takes its toll on public health, townships throughout Michigan are joining the movement of creating healthy communities. Residents who get involved aren't just slimming down. They're also preventing heart disease, cancer and a host of other chronic conditions.

Everything from public safety to the distance from neighborhoods to schools and workplaces can influence the overall health of residents. Improving health involves taking a hard look at your community and asking, how can we increase our residents' physical activity and access to healthy food?

The answer to this question might involve using zoning and financial incentives to increase the availability of healthy foods. It might include adding bike lanes and trails that connect township sites to residential areas. It might also include studying crosswalks, speed limits and other traffic safety issues to make sure people feel safe walking and riding bicycles. Your township could also collaborate with schools and other partners to target obesity with community programs.

A local government can't force anyone to eat healthy foods or exercise more. However, your township is uniquely able to shape your residents' environment and have a major impact on their lives. Local policies, physical infrastructure and programs can all help make the healthy choice the easy choice for township residents.



Michigan's obesity problem

Obesity is a medical condition that occurs when a person has too much body fat. Typically, it's diagnosed when a person has a body mass index of 30 or higher—determined by calculating a person's height and weight. It's not the same as needing to lose a few pounds, and it affects more than a person's appearance. Obesity can cause serious, chronic health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, all of which are costly to treat and decrease worker productivity.

Just 15 years ago, one in five Michigan adults were considered clinically obese. By 2013, that number had grown to one in three. The growing obesity rate has increased to the point that Michigan now has the 11th highest rate in the nation.

Our state isn't alone in its rising obesity problem. Since 1990, all 50 states have seen a substantial increase in obesity, with a sharper escalation in the last 10 years. The problem has become so severe that obesity is now considered a public health issue.

No research has found one particular factor that's caused people to eat more calories and reduce their physical activity. In many ways, obesity is due to personal choices, and only the individual can choose to make positive changes to address the issue. Several risk factors contribute to obesity, many of which have nothing to do with your township. However, there may be some risk factors within your township that you have the power to change.

Unless you're actively working to improve the health of residents, chances are your township has barriers that are preventing some residents from pursuing a healthy lifestyle. Townships can make a huge difference in the lives of residents by doing whatever they can to ensure that the community itself isn't contributing to residents' poor health.

Why should townships get involved?

Focusing on health is a way for your township to build goodwill with residents. Your efforts help to build a connection between your community members and their surroundings. Programs in **Meridian Charter Township** (Ingham Co.) have made major strides in building a sense of community and helping residents feel engaged in their township, Director of Parks and Recreation **LuAnn Maisner** said. The impact isn't just on residents' physical health—it's helping their mental health, too.

"The real value is the community engagement, something to make them feel like they're part of something and giving back," Maisner said. "Parks and recreation plays a primary role in the health of the community."

As men and women strive to improve their health, they're looking to live in places that make it easier, not harder, to reach their goals. Having a system of trails, thriving parks and plentiful healthy food attracts not only potential residents, but also businesses. Companies want to locate in places that offer their workers a high quality of life. Adding these amenities could even increase property values and draw tourists to the area.



Focusing on health is a way for your township to build goodwill with residents. Your efforts help to build a connection between your community members and their surroundings.

“In 2015, ‘clean, green, healthy and safe’ sell,” said Marci Kelly Scott, Michigan Fitness Foundation vice president of health programs and associate director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture North Central Nutrition Education Center of Excellence. “Local governments can draw in businesses and residents by promoting policies and actions that increase their ability to say they are clean, green, healthy and safe.”

Having a healthy community is also good for government’s bottom line. People who are obese typically have other serious medical conditions, and their medical expenses are higher than someone at a healthy weight. In a 2014 report, “Addressing Michigan’s Obesity Problem,” the Citizens Research Council (CRC) of Michigan reported that more than 10 percent of medical expenditures in our state may be attributable to obesity.

Though your township might not pay for these costs directly, you are still affected. The obesity rate is high among people insured through Medicaid, and the more Michigan spends on insurance, the less money is available for local governments. Obesity is also known to reduce worker productivity, which could hurt Michigan businesses’ ability to compete. And as obesity increases in your township, it might become more and more difficult to find workers physically capable of working as police or firefighters as well as other jobs requiring manual labor.

Start with a plan

Before you begin building infrastructure or launching initiatives, take inventory of how your township is doing. Do your residents have access to parks, green spaces, bike paths, trails or other outdoor opportunities for physical activity?

How heavily are these assets used? Are there grocery stores or farmers markets in your township? Or are the food options limited to convenience stores and fast food restaurants?

Examine the residential areas of your township—are they within walking distance of schools and businesses? Or do commutes and errands require a car trip? Does your township’s zoning and master plan help or hinder residents’ health?

Once you’ve taken inventory, ask questions—where is your township lacking? What barriers are keeping residents from being active? And what concrete actions can the township take to address these issues?

A step toward answering these questions could be forming a task force or committee to study your township and look for any potential obstacles to pursuing an active lifestyle. This group could include a variety of stakeholders—leaders from schools, businesses, the health department and community organizations such as the YMCA.

For Davison Township, the planning process involved a walkability study. The township held several public hearings, where residents were asked where they would most like to see trails. The township also sent out a survey in conjunction with the school district to get out more information.

The information helped the township decide to build new trails and extensions to make walkable paths to the nearby city of Davison as well as a local grocery store and farmers market. With the help of a grant, Miller plans to connect two major roads with a trail, making a loop around the township. The goal is to make the township more walkable, especially for residents living in the township’s multiple apartment complexes.

“We tried to prioritize what would make the greatest impact for the most residents,” Miller said. “And that’s where we started.”

New township programs, infrastructure and initiatives should be carefully planned so that they coordinate with one another and with existing assets of the township or surrounding area. In Meridian Charter Township, the bicycle/pedestrian pathway was so popular that residents have asked for the existing system to be expanded.

In 2014, Ingham County residents passed a millage to support the creation of a county-wide trail system. A consultant has been hired to inventory what is currently in place and identify any gaps in connectivity. The next step will be to work with local communities to fill those gaps, with the goal of creating a county-wide system for non-motorized transportation. Meridian Charter Township also has its own special millage for pathways, with more than 70 miles constructed, and plans to leverage its local funds with the county trail millage to create linkages to neighboring communities

Outdoor recreation

When people aren’t active, they often point to two factors—time and money. They’re too busy to spend an hour at

the gym, and they don't have the disposable income to pay for expensive memberships. But when townships build trails, parks, green spaces and even lakes, the old adage holds true—if you build it, they will come.

Maisner lives behind an elementary school that installed a trail loop around its playground a few years ago. Even now, she's amazed at how frequently it's used. Every day, she sees children walking, rollerblading and skateboarding as they talk to their friends. Students who might never have had an interest in running before are inspired to hit the trail.

Trails and parks make getting active as simple as lacing up your shoes and walking out the door, Maisner said.

"The convenience of pathways is really key to getting people out and moving," she said. "Time schedules are very busy. This provides them with a convenient way to exercise. And it's free."

Meridian Charter Township's trails and parks have been so successful that the township plans to try out a new trend in parks and recreation—outdoor exercise equipment. Bench presses, stair climbers, elliptical trainers and other machines are made from materials similar to children's playground equipment and require little to no maintenance. Some are geared toward seniors and are handicap accessible. Maisner plans to add equipment at one park within the next two years and, if it's popular, she'll add it at two others. Her hope is that all generations of township residents will have another free opportunity to get fit.

In addition to Davison Township's trails and parks, the recently added parks and recreation department is busy opening the township's first manmade lake. Called Lake Callis, it includes a sand beach, a splash pad and sand volleyball courts. This summer is the first time residents have been able to spend a day at the beach without driving out of the township. Weeks before the lake opened, Miller heard nothing but excitement from her residents, and she expected a busy summer of families spending their days at the lake instead of in front of the TV.

Providing outdoor recreation for residents has been a priority for more than a decade in Davison Township, Miller said.

"It's just such a stress reliever to be outside and get fresh air and walk, to be able to clear your mind and relieve stress," she said. "I think it helps everybody in their daily life. The whole township board feels that way. We all understand the importance of maintaining the nature we have, and being able to enjoy it and bring that to our residents."

Healthy design

In the past several decades, communities were built in a pattern called urban sprawl, where homes were set apart from workplaces and schools, and nearly every errand required a trip in the car. Healthy community design does the opposite. Workplaces, schools, libraries and churches

are within walking distance from one another, and there are sidewalks that go from houses to all of these places. Active transportation—meaning commuting by bicycle or walking instead of a car—is a feasible option, and physical activity becomes a routine part of residents' days.

Your township can begin to implement this principle by placing new amenities, such as parks and stores, closer to where people live. Instead of separating commercial, recreational and residential spaces, create mixed-use areas, allowing residents to easily walk or bike to these destinations. Build more density where it makes sense, rather than spreading out buildings. Add bicycle racks for easy parking. And make sure your sidewalks, bike paths and trails are safe and attractive so that residents are encouraged to get out and use them.

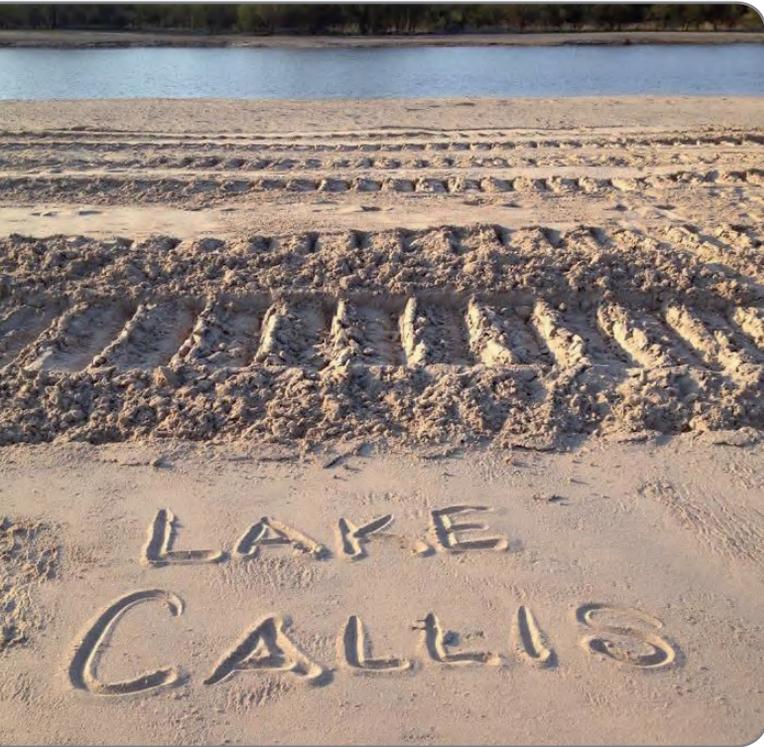
Davison Township is making its community more walkable by requiring that all new businesses install a sidewalk in front of their facility. If the sidewalk won't be connected to anything for some time, the money that would have been used for a sidewalk is held in escrow. Then, when enough businesses locate nearby, the township puts in the sidewalk itself.

Public safety is a huge factor in whether residents will get outside and get moving. This even goes beyond traffic safety such as crosswalks and speed limits. If a neighborhood has a high crime rate, children and adults won't feel safe and are less likely to spend time outdoors. By contrast, safe neighborhoods have higher rates of physical activity among adults and children.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) recommends that local governments take a "health in all policies and programs" approach when they make decisions, regardless of the topic.

"Decision-makers should think about the impact the policy or program will have on the health of its residents," MDHHS Building Healthy Communities Consultant Holly Nickel said. "Each policy or program can relate to health."





In addition to its trails and parks, Davison Township (Genesee Co.) also recently opened a manmade lake. Called Lake Callis, it includes a sand beach, a splash pad and sand volleyball courts.

Complete Streets

One way communities are striving for healthy design is through an initiative called Complete Streets. The term refers to streets specifically designed to accommodate all users safely. This means pedestrians, bicyclists and bus riders can safely move along and across streets just as well as vehicles. MDHHS is supporting local health departments in their efforts to help communities plan for and design active transportation and increase connectivity to essential community destinations.

Sarah Panken, Michigan Fitness Foundation director of active communities, said townships can work with their county road agency to implement Complete Street approaches to road design, development and maintenance. Together, they can help make the roads safer and more inviting for people to walk and ride bicycles.

Traffic safety is a big contributor to making your community more active. Making it safer to walk, jog or bike leads to a more active community and reduces the number of cars on the road. Roads need room for bicycles and pedestrians, with bike lanes, crosswalks and sidewalks. Your community could also consider working with the county or state police to slow down the speed limit in some areas.

Safe Routes to School

Townships can also help children become more active by providing them with a safe way to walk to school. Just a generation ago, nearly half of all children walked or biked to school, while only 12 percent were driven. Today, those numbers have nearly flipped—just 14 to 15 percent of children walk or bike to school, while 44 percent are driven. This change has heavily reduced children's activity levels, especially before school, when children could see benefits in academic achievement and behavior.

Safe Routes to School initiatives address this issue by identifying walking routes near schools that need improvement. Local governments partner with one another and their school district to provide resources, including plans or engineering for grants, or by making improvements themselves to sidewalks and crosswalks.

Good nutrition a must

Exercise alone is not enough to ward off obesity. If your residents are exercising but still don't eat nutritious food, they're unlikely to lose weight.

When it comes to healthy food, your township's primary concern is access. You can't make residents take in fewer

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calories, but you can provide them with an easy way to get affordable, fresh, nutritious food.

Many communities address this issue by supporting farmers markets at walkable sites. New markets might need the help of local funding to get off the ground, Scott said. However, once they're established, they can thrive without the need for any further assistance. MDHHS works with local health departments on redemption systems at farmers markets and produce stands, providing low-income residents with another incentive to take advantage of the healthy food.

Townships could also support community gardens, where residents can grow their own fresh vegetables and fruits.

"If local governments can provide land and water, community residents can do the rest," Scott said.

Local grocery stores are major assets since they offer fresh food all year long. The problem is some residents live in food deserts, classified as an urban area where the population lives more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store, or a rural area where stores are more than 10 miles away. Studies have shown that people who live closer to grocery stores tend to eat healthier diets than those who don't.

Townships could ward off food deserts by creating incentive programs and attracting supermarkets and grocery stores to these underserved neighborhoods. Scott suggests that townships don't just leave it there—help the stores market too. Public transportation could help make these stores even more accessible to your residents.

Set an example

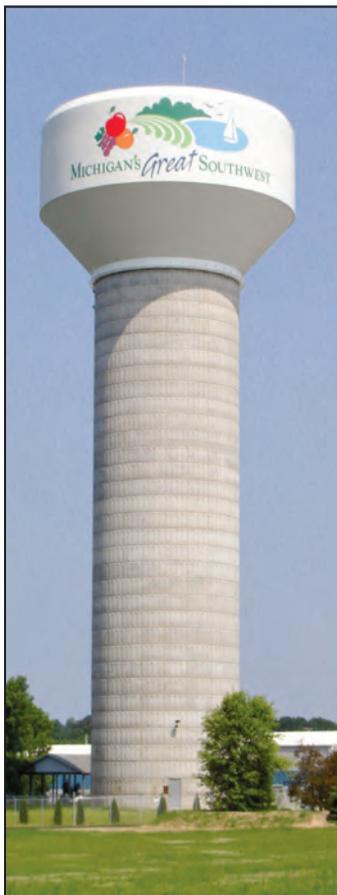
The township's role in creating a healthy community doesn't end with policies and projects. Your township can model a healthy lifestyle to residents.

If you have vending machines on public sites, stock them with healthy food instead of candy bars. Serve nutritious grains, meats, fruits and vegetables at public events instead of fattening fare. Challenge the community to a walk/bike-to-work day, and ask your township employees to participate. Panken also suggests launching a visible, community-wide campaign using local media outlets, encouraging residents to be active and eat healthy foods.

Different approaches will work for different townships, and only your board knows the unique needs of your community. Taking small steps now could make a huge difference for your residents, and your township's future.



Bethany Mauger, MTA Staff Writer



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Workshops tackle money matters, budgeting

In July, join financial experts David Williamson, CPA, author of *Township Focus*'s popular "Financial Forum" column, and Jim Beelen, MTA Member Information Services liaison, as they walk you through the minefield of financial challenges unique to townships.

Money Matters

9 a.m. to Noon

(includes continental breakfast)

Discover strategies to determine the most efficient use of your limited township resources. Gain insight on your monthly financial reports, including tips on how to read them and what they convey. Examine bidding requirements for public works projects and best practices for purchasing equipment and supplies. Explore strategies to improve internal controls and reduce audit costs by implementing key controls over cash. Get tips for implementing electronic payments, and learn more about monthly closing processes and preparing for an audit.



Better Budgeting

1 to 4 p.m. (includes lunch served at noon)

Gain a solid understanding of the budgeting process, from developing and adopting all the way through monitoring actual budget performance. Review the budgeting cycle and identify important elements of the public hearing. Explore areas that can create confusion and misunderstanding,

including the General Appropriations Act, along with using and amending the budget. Learn how to determine whether your budget is on target and what adjustments can be made to keep it in compliance.

Register for both classes and receive a discounted rate; single-session registration is also available. Dates and locations include:

July 14: Little Bear East Arena, St. Ignace

July 15: Evergreen Resort, Cadillac

July 28: Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth

July 29: Radisson Plaza, Kalamazoo

A registration form appeared in your June *Township Focus*. Download the registration brochure or register online at www.michigantownships.org.

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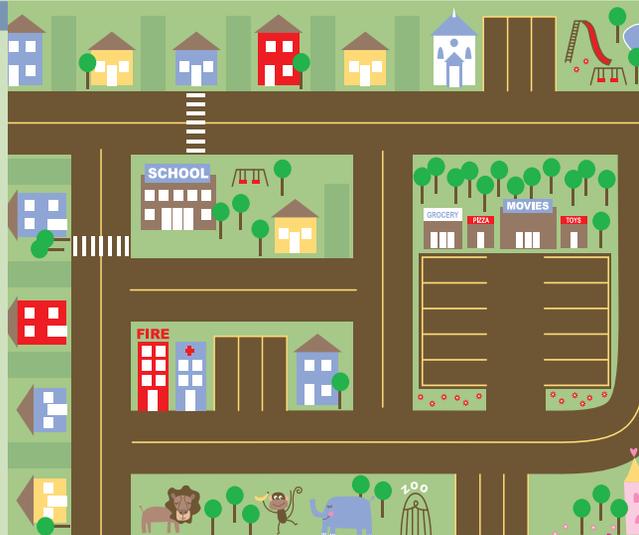
REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Hot Topics in Planning & Zoning

Join MTA for a how-to guide and real-life practical experiences at the summer's hottest workshop series, *Hot Topics in Planning & Zoning*. This program identifies emerging issues in planning and zoning, and is a must for planning commissioners, township board members and zoning administrators.

Time spent on topics will be tailored to the challenges specific to the area of the state in which the workshop is being held.

- Ensure your township's zoning ordinance is prepared to address the changes looming over Michigan's Medical Marihuana Act.
- Examine zoning and building code enforcement methods, techniques and strategies.
- Identify ordinance inequities impacting townships with wind farms and avoid the potential of turbulence blowing into your neighborhoods.
- Learn practical approaches to aspects of oil and gas or gravel extraction that townships can regulate or negotiate.
- Get an update on GAAMPS revisions and how they impact a township's ability to regulate agricultural uses in residential areas.



Registration and dinner begin at 4 p.m. The workshop is held from 5 to 8:30 p.m. Dates and locations are:

- Aug. 11: Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth**
- Aug. 12: Fetzer Center at WMU, Kalamazoo**
- Aug. 25: Evergreen Resort, Cadillac**
- Aug. 26: Garland Resort, Lewiston**

This course was designated by Michigan State University for Master Citizen Planner (MCP) program credit.



Discounted book package available: Participants can pre-purchase MTA's Planning & Zoning Book Package, which includes *The Township Guide to Planning & Zoning* and *Planning & Zoning Decision-making*. The *Township Guide to Planning & Zoning* provides a detailed look at the planning process, while *Planning & Zoning Decision-making* helps you reach defensible, effective decisions and build sound planning principles and procedures. Books will be distributed at check-in. A limited number of each publication will also be available to purchase on-site.

Cancellation, Substitution & Switching Policy: Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office by July 28 will receive a full refund. No refunds will be issued thereafter. You may switch workshop locations at no charge if you notify MTA of the change at least one week prior to the workshop; otherwise, a \$25/person fee will be assessed. You may substitute another individual from your township without incurring a charge; please notify MTA of the change.

Hot Topics in P&Z Registration Form

_____ Township	_____ County
_____ Name & Title	Purchase P&Z book package? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____ Name & Title	Purchase P&Z book package? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____ Name & Title	Purchase P&Z book package? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____ Name & Title	Purchase P&Z book package? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
_____ Telephone	_____ Email Address (where confirmation will be sent)

Which location will you attend?

- Aug. 11: Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth
- Aug. 12: Fetzer Center at WMU, Kalamazoo
- Aug. 25: Evergreen Resort, Cadillac
- Aug. 26: Garland Resort, Lewiston

REGULAR rate*: \$101 For paid registrations received **after** July 28.

DISCOUNTED rate*: \$81 For paid registrations received **by** July 28.

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

_____ (# of book packages) x (\$65.50/package*) = \$ _____

AMOUNT ENCLOSED = \$ _____

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

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

What townships need to know

Township officials may hear the term “invasive species,” and wonder why they matter locally. The answer—like the subject of invasive species—is often wide-ranging and complex.

What are invasive species, anyway?

First, officials need to know what invasive species are. They can be plants or animals, native to the region or from another country or continent. There are hundreds of invasive plants and animals in or approaching Michigan—the common thread that links them is that they spread quickly to crowd out native species in a given area and cause harm to the environment, economy, and human health.

Invasive species can be spread consciously or inadvertently through travel and trade, and in the time it takes for them to be noticed by a community, they can already have done widespread damage to land and waterways. Aquatic invasive species like zebra mussels or Eurasian water-milfoil can clog boat engines and water intakes for municipalities, or change the structure of the local food web so that the fish people once found abundant are now in decline.

Plants like invasive phragmites or Japanese knotweed are often found in roadside ditches and along shorelines where they block visibility and access. They can even grow through concrete surfaces like roads and house foundations, making them dangerous around buildings. Insects like the emerald ash borer can destroy tree species regionally in a very short time, changing forests forever.

Addressing the problem

Depending on the species you are fighting, removal techniques have a wide range of effectiveness and difficulty. Animals like invasive fish or feral swine move around and are hard to locate and catch, but trapping and hunting can be effective. Plant seeds can blow away in the wind or attach to clothing or animal fur. Many plants can grow a new plant from each segment of stem or root that gets broken off by digging or mowing, and these can spread wherever the equipment goes. While some plants can be pulled, others need to be treated with herbicide to fully kill their roots. Some respond to prescribed fire, while others can be controlled through changing water levels in a controlled wetland or planting a cover crop on bare ground.

Here are some tips for township officials on how to get started addressing invasive species.

1. Start with what you value. Does your township have a particular park or lake that people use frequently? Are there heavily used campgrounds or hiking trails? Are there rare plants or animals or beautiful views that draw visitors from out of the area? These are all unique places that should be first on your list to protect from invasive species.

2. Prioritize sites and species. Invasive species often spread from large source populations to smaller outlying sites. Given limited budgets and manpower, it's critical to prioritize what sites are most important to protect and what invasive species are most important to fight against. Ecologically, it makes the most sense to remove outlying populations first because they have the lowest impact on native species, then work on the larger sources to stop further spread.

3. Use technology to your advantage. Take some time to find out what invasive species may be nearby or already in your area. There are several websites that serve as go-to resources for people of all invasive species knowledge and activity levels. Start with www.michiganinvasives.org, www.michigan.gov/invasivespecies, and www.misin.msu.edu. Each of these have basic fact sheets, watch lists, people to contact for help and even interactive maps. Use the Midwest Invasive Species Information Network app to identify and map invasive species throughout the township and encourage parks staff and users to be on the lookout. These apps and websites provide up-to-date location information to get out to people who can help with planning removal projects.

4. Prevention is key. Once an invasive species occurs in high enough populations that people start to complain about it, it is often expensive and time-consuming to get rid of it. The best way to avoid having to spend a lot of money on invasive species removal is to spend a little time stopping them from coming in the first place. Posting signs about how invasive species are spread at sites like trailheads or boat launches can help ensure that visitors stop and check their clothing and equipment for seeds, plant parts and insects. Asking people to not transfer bait between water bodies can help stop the movement of invasive fish and mussels, while encouraging people not to feed invasive birds like starlings and mute swans can protect native birds. Check with your county road commission or the Michigan Department of Transportation to there are rules about not mowing known invasive species along roadways and ask contractors to clean their equipment before entering and after leaving sites. The more people who stop transporting invasive species, the better for the places you value.

5. Early detection and rapid response are important, too.

Awareness also serves to speed the response to invasive species that are already in the area. Using the available technology, train parks staff and interested volunteers to monitor invasive plants like garlic mustard that are easy to identify and can simply be pulled from the ground. USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services is available to remove invasive animals like mute swans and feral pigs at no cost to landowners. While many invasive plants have extensive root systems and need to be killed with herbicide, it can often be accomplished with minimally destructive methods like spot-spraying and hand-swiping, and can even be done by volunteers if a certified applicator mixes the chemicals and supervises the work. If you have invasive species in or near state waters like lakes or

rivers, you will need an Aquatic Nuisance Control permit from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, as well as written permission from the landowner to treat. Time of year for treatment also matters: if you're in a high-traffic bird migration route or have economically or culturally important events at a site, you should plan any treatment projects to avoid nesting times or coincide with crowds of people who will hear your message.

6. Don't give up. It is impossible for any one person to know all invasive species, or how to get rid of them. You can only do your best with the information you have, and being vigilant is half the battle. Many invasive species take years to remove; even if you remove the adult plants or animals, their seeds or larvae may be present for years, just waiting for the right opportunity to grow again. If you and your constituents are constantly watching and trying to keep up on them, they will eventually exhaust themselves and you will win.

7. Help is out there. You are not alone in the fight against invasive species. Every township, large or small, north or south is susceptible to invasive plants and animals. Each situation is unique, and different areas are at different points in their struggles. There are resources available to help identify and manage invasive species issues, and these resources are just as adaptable as the invasive species themselves!

Almost all of Michigan is covered by cooperative invasive species management areas (CISMAs) that assist counties, townships and individuals with invasive species problems. The Michigan Invasive Species Coalition's website (www.michiganinvasives.org) offers the latest treatments and contact information for regional coordinators who can help put you in touch with others who have seen success or who are facing similar problems.

Each year, federal and state grant programs are available to address invasive species, and these programs look favorably on local partnerships that can show adaptability and longevity. Many CISMAs are administering funding in the form of cost-shares and treatment programs that may be able to assist you or landowners within your township. By keeping in touch with your local CISMA, you'll gain access to current funding and be well-positioned to get your priority sites at the top of the list for the next round of applications.

Other places to look for support are county conservation districts, watershed groups, and nonprofits like Huron Pines and The Stewardship Network. These groups provide outreach materials, in-person site visits and presentations, assistance with volunteer days and cost-share for treatment.

As the Chinese proverb says, "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." The same applies to invasive species management—start learning today to protect your community for tomorrow.



Jennifer Muladore, Ecologist,
Huron Pines, Gaylord

For more information, visit www.huronpines.org
or email jennifer@huronpines.org.

aroundthestate

townships in the spotlight



Zeeland Charter Township



Zeeland Charter Township (Ottawa Co.) was settled in 1847 by a group of 457 settlers seeking religious and political freedom. Despite many hardships, the colony survived due to the strong faith and dedicated efforts of those who settled in this wilderness. Named after the Netherlands' Province of Zeeland, the township has since grown to a community of over 10,000. Present-day residents commonly refer to the township as The Promised Land.

The active community in Zeeland Charter Township is excited about an additional mixed use trail that will be completed by the end of the summer. This two-mile path will extend through the Upper Macatawa Natural Area to connect with an existing path. After the extension is completed, the township will have approximately 20 miles of connected trails.

There are also two popular parks in the township. The Drenthe Community Grove is 20 acres filled with a playground, two tennis courts, ball field, basketball court,

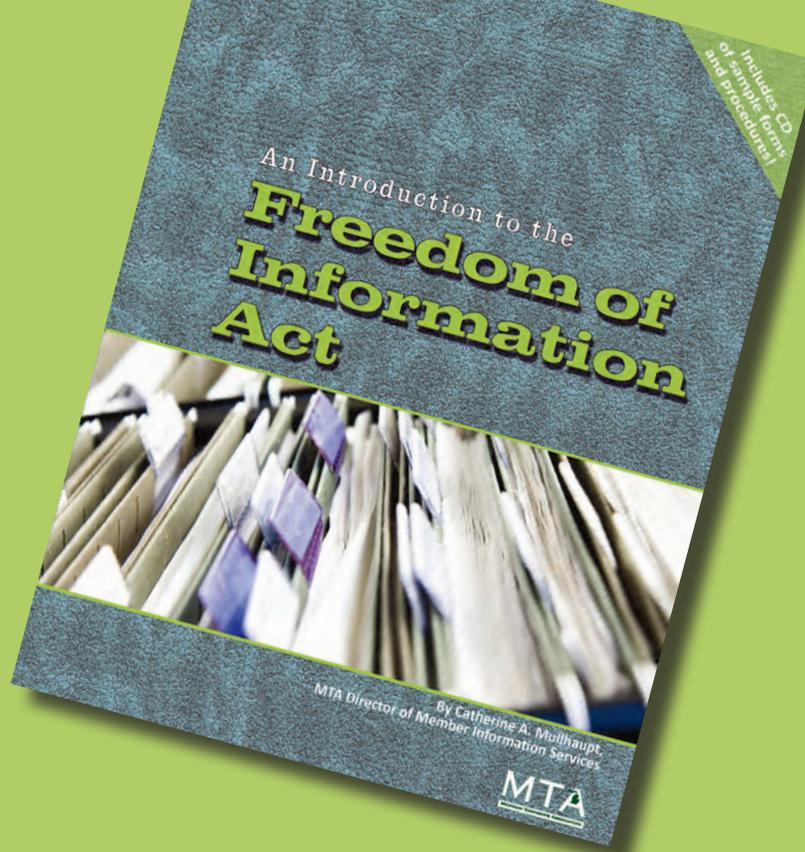
beach volleyball court, picnic areas and an all-season building, the Dozeman Center. Hosted at The Grove for all community members is the Annual Drenthe Grove Chicken BBQ, which includes fire department demonstrations, Critter Barn Petting Zoo, hay rides and an antique tractor display. VanZoeren Woods is 34 acres of paradise for anyone who loves the outdoors. It is the perfect place to get out and enjoy the fresh air in wooded and wildflower-filled trails. The township plans to create additional trails through the area in the future.

The township is also planning for the safety and future growth in their community with a recently opened public safety building. The building houses the township fire department and the assigned Ottawa County sheriff's deputy. The new facilities are equipped with a large parking areas for emergency vehicles, training area for firefighters and quarters for the deputy. The facility was designed with the possibility of a full-time fire department, if needed, in the future.



Let MTA help ensure your township is ready for FOIA changes that take effect July 1.

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Sweeping changes to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) go in to effect July 1—including that all townships adopt written FOIA procedures and guidelines. Is your township prepared for these changes?

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