

Michigan Township Focus

JULY 2018

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

Coordinating emergency shelters during times of crisis



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Give me shelter: Coordinating emergency shelters during times of crisis

When chaos strikes, townships have an opportunity to be a force of stability and safety for their residents. Having a plan in place for an emergency shelter assures your residents that if the worst should happen, their township is ready and able to help.

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Talking township issues with Michigan's 2018 gubernatorial candidates

To give our members insights into how the 2018 Michigan gubernatorial candidates feel on a variety of township-related issues, MTA asked the candidates questions on issues of importance to local government.

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Northern Michigan township comes together, sees opportunities during tough times

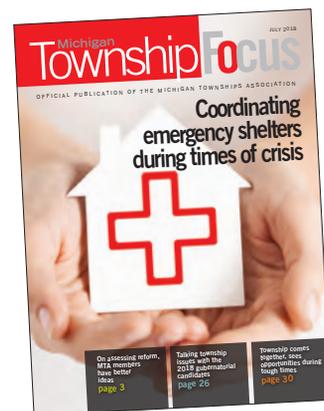
Banks Township (Antrim Co.) was hit hard during a recent economic downturn. But the township and its residents came together and took steps to keep the community moving forward—and improving.



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Printer Foresight Group, Lansing

mission statement

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

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Michigan Township Focus, Issue 6 July 2018 (ISSN 2330-9652), is published monthly, except for a combined April/May issue. MTA membership provides a subscription to township board members, the manager/superintendent, planning commission chairperson and township attorney. Member counties also receive subscriptions for elected officials, the equalization director and road commission chairperson. Annual membership dues include \$33 for a one-year subscription to *Michigan Township Focus*. Additional member subscriptions are available for \$33 per year. Subscription rate for residents and firms in member townships is \$44 per year (schools and libraries may subscribe for \$33 a year).

Michigan Township Focus is a publication of the Michigan Townships Association, 512 Westshire Dr., Lansing, MI 48917-9757. Phone: (517) 321-6467; fax: (517) 321-8908; Web: www.michigantownships.org. Periodicals postage paid at Lansing, MI. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: *Michigan Township Focus*, P.O. Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078.

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On assessing reform, MTA members have better ideas

The Michigan Department of Treasury proposal to require many Michigan townships, cities and villages to relinquish in-house assessing operations reignited in many township officials a passionate defense of local control.

One hundred and forty-five township officials from throughout Michigan provided written comment to MTA on Treasury's proposal, with many coming from rural northern



Michigan. Officials from some large townships, several counties and even one of Michigan's largest cities also expressed opposition to the Treasury proposal. The overall verdict was almost universally negative. (See members' comments on the "Legislative Action Center" page of the members side of www.michigantownships.org).

Stemming from an overarching concern that assessing has become too complicated for smaller entities that do not employ Michigan advanced assessing officers (3) or Michigan master assessing officers (4), Treasury is seeking legislation to also prohibit entities collecting less than \$12 million in total tax revenue and with fewer than 5,000 parcels from performing their own assessing.

While agreeing that Michigan taxpayers deserve a uniform and accurate property assessment system, many MTA members see a state government power grab. Township officials overwhelmingly support rigorous performance standards related to assessment valuation methodology but reject as a valid "minimum quality standard" what most see as an arbitrary threshold number of parcels and taxation revenue. Smaller entities, many argued, can meet performance standards with an affordable Michigan certified assessing officer. "Problem entities" exist, many conceded, and those should be dealt with swiftly and effectively.

There was considerable support, although not universal, for board of review training, but most panned regional boards as unfeasible. While a few agreed that elected officials acting as assessors of record for their jurisdictions is a conflict of interest, many more argued that elected officials bring to their assessing positions high performance, exceptional local knowledge and a strong community-service ethic.

Cost was another concern raised by many respondents, including some county officials, citing generous employee compensation packages of counties and special districts and expectations that all assessors would be full-time. Many were skeptical that a labor scarcity of level three and four assessors could meet the proposal's five-year phase-in.

Most respondents articulated the benefits of township-level assessing to taxpayers, businesses and other residents

who call the township not knowing who to talk to but find the local assessor eager to answer their valuation, structure age, easements, ownership history and comparable sales data questions; explain tax impacts of potential property improvements, assessment uncapping, millages and ballot proposals; or provide documentation of the taxable status of mobile homes and other dwellings on leased-held lands. Quality township assessing, they argued, is trusted by taxpayers because it is transparent, accessible and service-oriented, and is empathetic to taxpayers experiencing unique local circumstances negatively impacting property valuations. More than a few respondents felt that some county boards that are indifferent to poor equalization will likely deliver equally poor assessing services.

Many assessors expressed great pride in the accuracy and thoroughness of their assessing records, attested to by passing Audit of Minimum Assessing Requirements (AMAR) reviews, and they questioned why state government sought to eliminate their high-scoring township assessing offices. Treasury's proposal, they pointed out, overlooks the connectivity of assessment administration to other township government functions. Distancing assessing from related township operations will compromise the efficiency and effectiveness of not only assessing but also zoning, construction code enforcement and tax collections. Shared databases are used by multiple departments to notify property owners of pending zoning actions, administer permits and compliance monitoring. Assessors also rely on other township departments for notification of improvements impacting valuations. Treasurers and assessors work together on tax warrants, balancing the tax receipts journal, and administering special assessments, and provide checks and balances to detect errors before they reach the taxpayer. And assessors play an integral role in local government economic development efforts by providing information to potential businesses and Realtors in coordination with township supervisors, managers and planners.

The Treasury proposal, township officials fear, will fall far short of the standard of service people have come to expect from their townships and impose crippling financial burdens on local governments. Most did not outright reject Treasury's objectives, but offered meaningful modifications that would keep assessing accountable to township boards. They also believe it fails to solve a core source of what currently ails assessment administration—a badly disconnected and unnecessarily adversarial relationship between the state and local assessing entities that is in dire need of a reboot to better serve the people of Michigan.

news¬es

a compendium of noteworthy items

ENHANCE, DON'T ERODE

Assessing reform bills await action

MTA strongly believes that a reform of Michigan's assessing system should enhance—not erode—assessor accountability and local control. Last month, we shared this message with lawmakers in a House committee hearing. Now, township officials have the opportunity to also take this message to their lawmakers during the summer recess.

As discussed in “Local View” on page 3, state Treasurer Nick Khouri proposed a major overhaul of the state's assessing system in May. The rationale for the reform is that property taxes are difficult and complicated to administer, and while most jurisdictions do a good job, the

system is failing in terms of consistency and transparency.

Treasury's proposal to impose comprehensive quality standards is reflected in two bills—House Bill 6049, sponsored by Rep. James Lower (R-Cedar Lake), and Senate Bill 1025, sponsored by Sen. Jim Stamas (R-Midland Chtr. Twp.). Under the bills, new quality standards would be phased in for all tax-assessing entities over five years. Some local units would be able to meet these standards on their own, while others would need to form a joint entity or even contract assessment administration with their county.

HB 6049 was the subject of a House Tax Policy Committee hearing in early June, where MTA testified in opposition to the introduced bill, outlining our concerns. SB 1025 was referred to the Senate Finance Committee, where it awaits a hearing. MTA has also shared a response and alternatives to the proposal with Treasury, committee members and other lawmakers, and we will continue to do so. MTA appreciates and thanks all the members who provided written comments and insights in early May and has shared them with the state treasurer.

While it is expected a workgroup will be convened for further discussions, both bills are on hold for the summer, until legislative session resumes this fall.

As lawmakers return to their home communities for the break, MTA encourages members to talk with them on the reform proposal:

- Forcing reforms on assessing entities that are performing well and providing quality assessing will not improve assessing administration.
- The “minimum quality standard” of parcels and

revenue thresholds are arbitrary thresholds and will not provide quality.

- The proposed reforms will increase the cost of assessing to smaller entities that can least afford it and the costs will be extended to taxpayers and provide no improved benefit above current services provided in many cases.
- By requiring smaller entities to financially support the salaries of higher level assessors who will be shared with larger entities, the smaller entities will be forced to subsidize assessing costs of the larger entities who need higher level assessors.
- Reorganization of assessing offices should be confined to entities that are not meeting reasonable performance standards—those entities should be dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- The state needs to do a much better job providing financial and technical support to local assessment administration.

Your voice matters in this critical issue. We will continue to update you with the latest news.



CHART OF ACCOUNTS DELAY

Implementation delayed for new Uniform Chart of Accounts

In 2017, the Michigan Department of Treasury Local Audit and Finance Division issued a new Uniform Chart of Accounts (COA) for all local units of governments. Last month, Treasury announced that the updated COA will not be implemented until 2019.

The department decided to delay its timeline for local units of government after receiving feedback from local officials, though early implementation is still encouraged. The department will also develop training and informational materials to assist with the transition.

Watch MTA publications for continued updates as they become available.

Township named 'best place to live' in Michigan, 5th overall in U.S.

One mid-Michigan township once again topped a list of "Best Places to Live in Michigan"—and was also named the fifth best place to live in the entire nation, according to neighborhood analyzing website Niche.com's 2018 ranking.

Meridian Charter Township (Ingham Co.) also took top honors as the No. 1 place to live in Michigan on Niche's 2017 listing.

Each community on the list was chosen based on an in-depth assessment of U.S. Census data and expert insights. Everything from school quality and crime rates to housing trends and access to amenities was considered, with certain livability aspects being given more weight.

Known for its top-notch schools, Meridian Charter Township, which includes the communities of Okemos and Haslett, is touted by Niche as having a "wonderful small town feel with big town amenities."

The township's overall "Niche grade" was an A+. It received A+ grades for public schools, housing and being good for families, an A for diversity, and an A- for jobs, outdoor activities and commute. Health & fitness and nightlife earned the township a B+, and, perhaps not surprisingly given the Great Lakes State's climate, weather received a C+.

Residents were enthusiastic in their reviews of the community. "Great small town to grow up in!" one resident noted on the site. "Very friendly and helpful people everywhere!"

Chimed in another resident, "I grew up in Okemos and returned after college. It is a large community, but small at the same time. I feel like everyone knows everyone, which is nice. Overall, it was a great experience growing up here. Being near [Michigan State University's] campus helps offer many job opportunities for young adults."

Bloomfield Charter Township (Oakland Co.) came in sixth on the Niche listing, while **Northville Charter Township** (Wayne Co.), **Pittsfield Charter Township** (Washtenaw Co.) and **Lodi Township** (Washtenaw Co.) hit the top 20, coming in at Nos. 15, 16 and 18, respectively.

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MORE TIME

Deadline extended for medical marijuana license applicants

Medical marijuana shops operating without a license can continue to do business with local approval after Gov. Rick Snyder and the state Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) extended the June 15 deadline.

Because of the influx of applications, LARA has yet to finish taking action on licensing requests. Now, the Bureau of Medical Marijuana Regulation and the Medical Marijuana Licensing Board will have

until Sept. 15 to process license applications. Continuing to operate will not affect the shop's eligibility for licensure.

Visit MTA's "Medical Marijuana" Web page on the members-only side of www.michigantownships.org for additional information and resources (access via the "Index of Topics" under the "Answer Center" tab after logging in).





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LOCAL UPDATES FROM ACROSS MICHIGAN

Township happenings

A new Amazon.com, Inc. facility is set to be built by summer 2019 in **Gaines Township** (Kent Co.). Amazon plans to invest \$150 million into the more than one-million-square-foot facility, which is projected to employ roughly 1,000 people. The fulfillment center is the fourth in Michigan, and the site was selected over locations in Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. According to the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Amazon's decision to bring another facility to Michigan strengthens the state's status as a hub for transportation and logistics.

Grand Blanc Charter Township (Genesee Co.), which was incorporated April 1, 1833, recently celebrated its 185th anniversary with cupcakes to acknowledge this special occasion.

Long Lake Township (Grand Traverse Co.) received a Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund grant to upgrade trails in the Timbers Recreation Area in 2019. More than 3,0 linear feet of trails will become universally accessible to historic barns, Long Lake, and a new overlook and fishing platform on Fern Lake. Trail improvements will create broader usage and provide safe access to fragile habitats.



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NATaT fly-in brings MTA members to Washington, D.C.

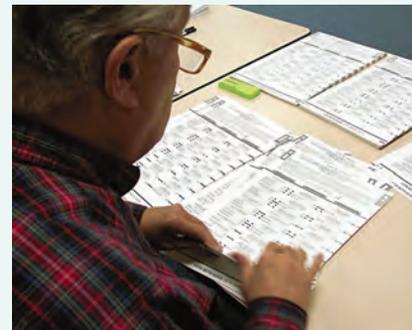
Township officials and MTA staff took the township agenda straight to Capitol Hill in May. The National Association of Towns and Townships' (NATaT) annual Washington, D.C., fly-in brought MTA President **Ken Gauthier**, **Sanborn Township** (Alpena Co.) supervisor; MTA Board members **Mindy Cole-Crocker**, **Buchanan Township** (Berrien Co.) supervisor and MTA District 22 director, and **Don Rogers**, **Coldwater Township** (Branch Co.) supervisor and MTA District 23 director; as well as **Brownstown Charter Township** (Wayne Co.) Supervisor **Andrew Linko**, to the nation's capital.

Along with MTA Executive Director Larry Merrill and MTA Director of Government Relations Judy Allen, officials attended a White House briefing and visited U.S. Reps. Debbie Dingell and Tim Walberg, as well as multiple congressional staffers. The group advocated for programs to expand broadband to under-served areas, tax-exempt status of municipal bonds and federal tax breaks for first responders, and argued against federal preemption of township authority over public rights-of-way. These meetings not only reminded members of Congress that local government matters, it also helped to build relationships that are critical to grassroots advocacy.

New MTA 'Election Worker Pay' resource toolkit available

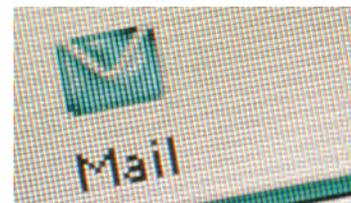
MTA has answers to your questions on how election workers are paid. A new document on our website covers whether an election worker's wages must be reported to the Internal Revenue Service, if they're paid through payroll and who receives a 1099.

After logging in to the members-only side of MTA's website, www.michigantownships.org, access under the "Index of Topics" via the "Answer Center" tab.



Check your inbox!

To get the most of your MTA membership, all officials must ensure that we have your correct email address on file. If we don't have your email, you are missing out on:



- Valuable legislative updates and information in our weekly newsletter, *Township Insights*, and our in-depth monthly legislative newsletter, *Township Voice*.
- Notices about educational seminars and other opportunities for today's township officials.
- Access to the members-only portion of MTA's website, www.michigantownships.org, which features hundreds of pages of resources, samples and information, along with our social networking site, *Community Connection*. (Your username is your email address on file with MTA.)
- Targeted email alerts for your position or township, as well as legislative action alerts.

If you are not receiving emails from MTA, be sure to check your spam or junk mail filter, and add @michigantownships.org to your "safe senders" list, as well as @in.constantcontact.com and @in.confirmedcc.com.

To provide your email address, or ensure we have the correct email address, call (517) 321-6467 or email elsa@michigantownships.org.

In memoriam

Robert Jones, former MTA District 11 director and past **Salem Township** (Allegan Co.) supervisor/assessor, as well as zoning administrator and board of review member. Jones had also served as assessor for **Heath** and **Overisel Townships** (Allegan Co.).

classified

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The Sparta Fire Board (**Sparta Township** in Kent County) is seeking qualified applicants to interview for part-time fire chief. The application deadline is Aug. 1, 2018. For interview consideration, applicants should submit a resumé to **Dale Bergman**, Sparta Township supervisor/fire board chair, at supervisor@spartatownship.org. For additional details, including a statement of responsibilities, qualifications and required skills, view the part-time fire chief ad at www.michigantownships.org/classifieds.asp.

Want to place a classified in Township Focus or on www.michigantownships.org? Visit www.michigantownships.org/classifieds.asp for more information, email ashley@michigantownships.org, or call (517) 321-6467.

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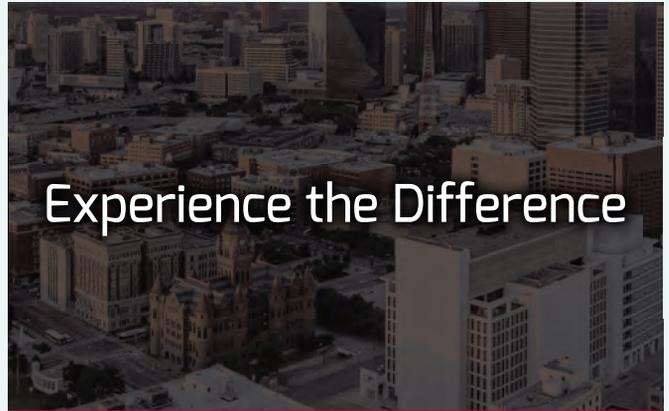
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Got township questions? MTA's got answers!

Member township officials and employees may contact MTA Member Information Services staff with questions Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Inquiries can be submitted via phone at (517) 321-6467, fax at (517) 321-8908, or email to:

- MTA Director of Member Information Services
Michael Selden: michael@michigantownships.org
- MTA Staff Attorney Catherine Mullhaupt:
catherine@michigantownships.org
- MTA Member Information Services Liaison
Cindy Dodge: cindy@michigantownships.org



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JULY

By 2 Notice of close of registration for Aug. 7 primary published. (MCL 168.498)

2 *July 1 is a Sunday.* Taxes due and payable in 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 2017 tax foreclosure parcels. (MCL 211.78m)

9 Last day to register for Aug. 7 primary. (MCL 168.497)

17 *Tuesday after the third Monday in July.* The July board of review 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(9)(b))

An owner who owned and occupied a principal residence on May 1 for taxes levied before Jan. 1, 2013, for which the exemption was not on the tax roll may file an appeal with the July board of review in the year for which the exemption was claimed or the immediately succeeding three years. For taxes levied after Dec. 31, 2012, an owner who owned and occupied a principal residence on June 1 or Nov. 1 for which the exemption was not on the tax roll may file an appeal with the July board of review in the year for which the exemption

was claimed or the immediately succeeding three years. (MCL 211.7cc(19))

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

July board of review may hear appeals for current year only for poverty exemptions, but not poverty exemptions denied by the March board of review. (MCL 211.7u, STC Bulletin No. 5 of 2012)

19 Candidates without political party affiliation file qualifying petitions and affidavit of identity for the Nov. 6 general election by 4 p.m. Withdrawal deadline elapses at 4 p.m. on July 23. (MCL 168.590c)

By 24 Village candidates who wish to seek office at the Nov. 6 general election file an affidavit of identity and a nonpartisan nominating petition with the township clerk by 4 p.m. Withdrawal deadline elapses at 4 p.m. on July 27. (MCL 168.381)

By 26 Challenges against qualifying petitions filed by candidates for the Nov. 6 general election without political party affiliation submitted to filing official. (MCL 168.552)

Township clerks forward names and addresses of candidates without political party affiliation to county clerk. (MCL 168.349)

By 27 Write-in candidates other than those

who seek precinct delegate position file declaration of intent forms by 4 p.m. for Aug. 7 primary. (MCL 168.737a)

Pre-primary campaign statements for Aug. 7 primary due. Books closed July 22.

By 28 County clerks deliver remainder of ballots and election supplies for Aug. 7 primary to township clerks. (MCL 168.714)

By 31 Notice of Aug. 7 primary published. (MCL 168.653a)

Petitions to place county and local questions on the Nov. 6 general election ballot filed with county and local clerks. (MCL 168.646a)

Industrial Facilities Exemption Treasurer's Report (Form 170) must be filed with the state Department of Treasury Property Services Division on or before July 31 of the tax year involved.

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))

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



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AUGUST

By 2 Public accuracy test must be conducted for Aug. 7 primary. (R 168.778). Notice of test must be published at least 48 hours before test. (MCL 168.798)

By 3 Write-in candidates who seek precinct delegate positions file Declaration of Intent forms with the township clerk for the Aug. 7 primary by 4 p.m. (As an alternative, candidates for precinct delegate may file form with appropriate precinct board on Election Day before the close of the polls.) (MCL 168.737a)

4 Electors who wish to receive an absentee voter ballot for Aug. 7 primary by mail must submit applications by 2 p.m. (MCL 168.759)

6 Electors qualified to obtain an absentee voter ballot for Aug. 7 primary may vote in person in the clerk's office until 4 p.m. (MCL 168.761)

7 Emergency absentee voting for Aug. 7 primary election until 4 p.m. (MCL 168.759b)

Primary election.

8 Boards of county canvassers meet to canvass Aug. 7 primary election at 1 p.m. (MCL 168.821)

By 14 County clerks notify precinct delegates elected at Aug. 7 primary; certify delegate names and addresses to chairpersons of county committees. (MCL 168.608)

14 Ballot wording of county and local proposals qualified to appear on Nov. 6 general election ballot certified to county and local clerks by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.646a)

20 *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 2015.737(7))

By 21 Boards of county canvassers complete canvass of Aug. 7 primary; county clerks forward results to Secretary of State within 24 hours.

By 27 Board of state canvassers meet to canvass Aug. 7 primary. (MCL 168.581)



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We tabled a motion a while ago. How do we bring it back up?

That may depend on the form of parliamentary procedure that the board has adopted, but it will also depend on just what the board intended when it tabled the motion.

First, when we talk about parliamentary procedure, most of the rules originated with *Robert's Rules of Order*, which is the "gold standard" of meeting rules and procedure. Note that *Robert's* is not law, and Michigan law regarding townships and public bodies "trumps" *Robert's*, but *Robert's* is still the most commonly used and comprehensive form of procedure used to help board members make decisions efficiently, effectively and fairly.

However, the official version of *Robert's* is almost 700 pages long, most of which deals with large assemblies, not boards or committees like a township board. The downside to using the full version of *Robert's* is that it can be intimidating and complicated to use, especially if you haven't had some training in using it. I personally recommend using some of the "simplified" versions of *Robert's*, such as the official *Robert's Rules of Order in Brief*, or the independent *Robert's Rules in Plain English*, by Doris Zimmerman. They are inexpensive pocketbooks that each board member could have and refer to at meetings. They are short and to the point, with easily understood, real-life examples. When questions arise, flip to that page and get the answer without delay.

Second, the motion to table is probably the most misunderstood—and possibly the most commonly misused—motion. In a nutshell, a motion to table means to temporarily postpone action on the motion. Supposedly, the motion "to table" originated with the English Parliament, where pending matters were filed in colored leather boxes on large tables in the center of the hall. If the king or queen suddenly arrived, the box for the matter at hand was literally put on the table until the monarch left the hall and business resumed. Today, a motion to table is in order (according to *Robert's*) either because the discussion of the motion is being interrupted, by a guest speaker, for example, or because the board needs more information or some other action and it must postpone acting on the motion until a specified time or event. It is improper, however, to use a motion to table to kill the motion.

So, if the board intended that the motion to table would kill the motion being considered, then the motion was improper. I would guess that the board could raise the matter again if a board member makes a motion and gets a second, but that could depend on the actual subject of the motion. If there is any question, the township board should consult with its local legal counsel for specific guidance.

If the board intended to put the matter off to a future meeting, then that is a proper motion to table, but the motion to table should have stated when the matter would come back to the board, like: "Tabled until the September board meeting, when the manager will provide a report of the statistics on how many people use the transfer station," or "Tabled until the October board meeting, when the supervisor will provide the board with the state's projections for bimonthly revenue sharing," for example. If done properly, then it will automatically be on the agenda for the stated meeting.



May I ask other board members what they think about a matter coming to the board for a vote?

According to MTA Legal Counsel, the two main cases on this issue are *St. Aubin v Ishpeming City Council*, 197 Mich. App. 100 (1992) and *Booth v U of M Board of Regents*, 444 Mich. 211 (1993). In the *St. Aubin* case, the court held that the Open Meetings Act (OMA) is not violated where a member of a public body conducts an informal telephone poll of the other members to determine how they would vote on a particular issue.

However, in the *Booth* case, telephone calls were made that went "round-the-horn" to find out what all the members of the board of regents were thinking. After gaining input from these "telephone polls," decisions were made to narrow the list of candidates for president. There were also closed meetings and, although no voting took place, the members did reach a "consensus." The court concluded, in looking at several examples of the procedure that the board of regents used, that the OMA was violated.

The court noted that one of the reasons for the OMA was to prevent public bodies from agreeing privately on an action



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to be taken and then convening for one or two minutes to formally vote on a “privately arranged agreement.” The court concluded in the *Booth* case that, “even members of the committee acknowledge that its ‘round-the-horn’ decisions and conferences achieved the same effect as if the entire board had met publicly”

The OMA states that “decision” means 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.

The *Booth* court particularly examined whether a decision can be limited to that part of the statute that states “on which a vote by members of a public body is required.” The university argued that the “polling” was not a vote. The court rejected this argument because, even though technically a decision wasn’t reached through telephone polling, a decision was still made. The court also noted that the statute says, “and by which a public body effectuates or formulates public policy” and did not find any distinction between a committee’s “consensus” and a determination or action as it relates to the definition of “decision.”

According to MTA Legal Counsel, “An individual board member may call and ‘poll’ other individual board members to find out how they individually stand on a particular issue—provided that this does not include any discussion of the

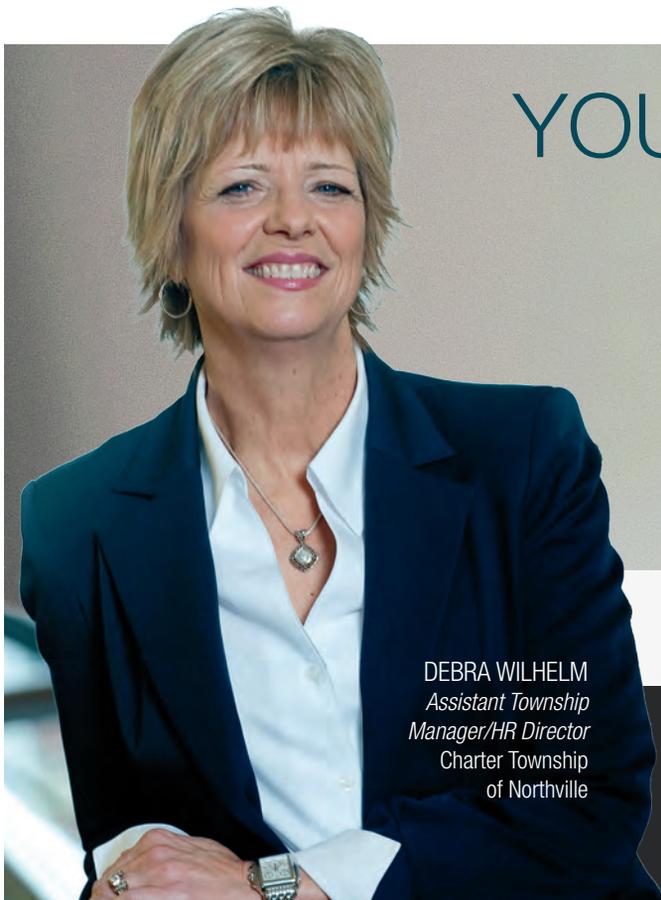
issue and does not eliminate later full public discussion and deliberation on an issue. The polling cannot rise to the level of reaching a consensus or an agreement about a certain issue.

“If all the single board member does is ‘poll’ the other members without disclosing to the others what his ‘poll’ has discovered as to the other members’ thoughts, and the discussion and decision-making is later fully made at an open meeting, then it will possibly have met the test pursuant to the *St. Aubin* decision.

“As a result, because there is such a fine line between ‘polling’ and ‘round-the-horn’ telephone calls or discussions, we would be reluctant to advise townships to engage in this type of activity. The temptation to substitute this ‘polling’ for full public deliberations in reaching a decision is too great, which would then constitute a clear violation of the OMA. Furthermore, where several board members engage in ‘polling’ on a given issue, it would be our opinion that a court would consider such polling a ‘round-the-horn’ violation of the OMA.”

Note that these cautions apply to face-to-face conversations, as well as phone calls, emails, texts or other communications.

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.



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New laws award Trust Fund grants, amend how projects are funded

Nearly \$8 million in Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) grant funding will go to 30 townships to buy new land and improve parks under a newly signed law.

Public Act 165 of 2018, sponsored by Sen. Darwin Booher (R-Osceola Twp.), sets aside nearly \$50 million for more than 120 acquisition and development projects throughout the state. These grants, funded by revenue from leasing state-owned land for extracting nonrenewable resources, are awarded each year by the Trust Fund Board. Eight townships will receive a combined \$3.17 million for acquisition projects, while 22 townships will receive a combined \$4.89 million for development projects.

Another law, PA 166 of 2018, will change how the Trust Fund Board itself funds acquisition and development projects. This law creates an advisory board that would recommend to the Trust Fund Board the amount of money that should be spent on acquisition grants, development grants and fund administration, and how much should be saved to mitigate future market fluctuations each year. However, the Trust Fund Board still has the final say on grant amounts. Both bills were effective June 4, 2018.

New lead and copper rules adopted

Michigan's public water systems are now under new lead and copper rules that the state Department of Environmental Quality will begin implementing on Jan. 1, 2019.

The new rules became final in June when the DEQ submitted draft rules to the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, which allowed the draft rules to become final. Among the changes is the requirement that all public water utilities replace their lead service lines over the next 20 years—coming at a staggering cost to local units. Because this requirement includes private lead service lines, MTA raised concerns that the new rules conflict with the Headlee amendment, the 1998 Michigan Supreme Court decision in *Bolt v. City of Lansing* and current state law.

The new rules, proposed in response to the Flint water crisis, are an effort to decrease the amount of lead in drinking water. Under the new rules, the former requirement of 15 parts per billion (ppb) of lead was reduced to 12 ppb. Water suppliers must also conduct a complete system materials inventory by Jan. 1, 2025.

Bills give certain townships a say in state land purchases

Townships with large amounts of state-owned land will soon have a greater say in future land purchases within their jurisdictions.

After months of negotiations and discussions, the Legislature gave its stamp of approval to a three-bill package—House Bill 4475, sponsored by Rep. Gary Howell (R-North Branch), and Senate Bills 302, sponsored by Sen. Tom Casperson (R-Wells Twp.), and 303, sponsored by Sen. Darwin Booher (R-Osceola Twp.). Once enacted, the bills will eliminate the existing cap on state land that may be purchased north of the Mason-Arenac county lines. No further land purchases could be made in that area unless full payments in lieu of taxes (PILT) are made or specific local approval is obtained.

Under the negotiated changes, the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) could only continue to buy land when it hasn't made full PILT payments if certain conditions are met, including that full payments are made later that fiscal year. Another condition gives local units the authority to approve additional land purchases in their jurisdiction. Townships would have this authority if the land is located solely within their jurisdiction. If the land is spread among multiple local units, the county would have approval authority.

State land purchases could also be denied in counties in which at least 40 percent of the land is state, federal or commercial forest land. However, only land purchases of more than 80 acres would be eligible for the denial process, and certain purchases, such as trails on a rail right-of-way, would be exempt. MTA appreciates the sponsors working with the Association to provide townships with a stronger voice in state land purchases.

Technical PPT changes made

A bill awaiting signature by Gov. Rick Snyder makes several changes to local personal property tax (PPT) reimbursement.

House Bill 5086, sponsored by Rep. David Maturen (R-Brady Twp.), was supported by MTA as it corrects technical issues dealing with millages that were combined or replaced since 2012—but not increased. It also improves payment stability and predictability by eliminating the recalculation of the prior year's payment. In addition, the measure sets a specific date for determining taxable values and creates a process for correcting errors in the same year they took place.

Local units that accidentally received an overpayment could repay the amount over a three-year period rather than in one year.

Asset management bills to become law

A recommendation that Michigan take an asset management approach to its infrastructure is becoming a reality under three bills on their way to becoming law.

The Legislature gave final passage to three bills—House Bills 5335, sponsored Rep. Rob VerHeulen (R-Walker),

5406, sponsored by Rep. Roger Victory (R-Georgetown Chtr. Twp.), and 5408, sponsored by Rep. Triston Cole (R-Kearney Twp.). Together, the bills awaiting signature by Gov. Rick Snyder create interrelated councils to coordinate planning for water, transportation and communications infrastructure at the local, regional and state level. While MTA originally opposed HBs 5406 and 5408, we were able to obtain several clarifying and local government amendments that shifted our position to neutral.

HB 5335 creates a new Michigan Infrastructure Council to develop a multi-year program, budget and funding recommendations for asset management. With MTA's amendments, the other bills include specific local government representation on the Water Asset Management Commission and the Transportation Asset Management Commission, as well as limited reporting requirements, and clarification in the notification process for noncompliance and the ability to cure any noncompliance issues.

Governmental immunity retained in bills extending statute of limitations for abuse victims

Townships and their officials will retain the current governmental immunity standards under a package of bills providing sexual abuse victims with more time to seek an indictment or lawsuit against their perpetrator.

A package of legislation, introduced in response to the sexual abuse conviction of former Michigan State University gymnastics physician Larry Nassar, originally included a bill eliminating governmental immunity from lawsuits stemming from sexual abuse cases. However, this bill was not included in the final package.

Two other bills included in the package—now PA 182 of 2018, sponsored by Sen. Margaret O'Brien (R-Portage), and PA 183 of 2018, sponsored by Sen. David Knezek (D-Dearborn Heights)—address the period of time for criminal and civil actions. Under PA 182, a victim of criminal sexual conduct younger than 18 years old can now seek an indictment within 15 years after the offense is committed or the alleged victim's 28th birthday—rather than the previous deadline of 10 years or by their 21st birthday. PA 183 addresses civil suits, allowing anyone who is not a minor to have 10 years to file a suit, while minors would have until they're 28 years old or three years after they discover or should have discovered their injury and the relationship between the injury and the criminal sexual content, whichever is later. PA 183 became effective June 12, 2018, and PA 182 will take effect Sept. 10, 2018.

Bills create environmental science boards

Three public boards will have oversight over the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) under bills awaiting signature by Gov. Rick Snyder.

Three bills received final passage—Senate Bills 652, sponsored by Sen. Tom Casperson (R-Wells Twp.); 653,

sponsored by Sen. Darwin Booher (R-Osceola Twp.); and 654, sponsored by Sen. David Robertson (R-Grand Blanc Chtr. Twp.). When enacted, SB 652 will create the Environmental Rules Review Committee, which will include local government representation and oversee all rulemaking of the DEQ. Additionally, SBs 653-654 will establish a permit appeal panel to hear from those appealing the DEQ's decision to deny a permit, and an Environmental Science Board to advise the governor and state offices on issues affecting environmental protection or natural resources management.

MTA did not take a position on these bills but monitored them for potential impacts to local governments.

Ballot instructions changed under bill

Ballot voting instructions will be updated to reflect recent changes under Public Act 190 of 2016.

The new law, sponsored by Sen. David Robertson (R-Grand Blanc Chtr. Twp.), changes voting instructions on ballots to state that there may be multiple party sections, as the Libertarian party reached the vote threshold in 2016 needed to be included in the next statewide primary.

It also changes the instruction for the type of mark that must be filled in—a necessary change given new voting machines. Additionally, it extends the time period by which a public official must be notified when a recall petition has been initiated against him or her, from 24 hours to three business days.

New law amends eligibility for State Real Estate Transfer Tax exemption

Legislation to remedy an eligibility requirement for an exemption from the State Real Estate Transfer Tax in situations where an individual purchased land, built a home and then sold the home is now law. Public Act 172 of 2018, sponsored by Rep. David Maturen (R-Brady Twp.), resolves this situation.

The state equalized value (SEV) at the time of purchase in this type of situation is most likely lower than the SEV at the time of the sale of both the land and home. However, the State Real Estate Transfer Tax exemption eligibility is calculated by comparing the SEV of the property when it was originally purchased to the SEV at the time of the current sale.

The new law remedies this by changing a criterion for eligibility, allowing a property to qualify if the current SEV is less than or equal to the SEV on the first tax day after the issuance of a certificate of occupancy or the date of acquisition of the property by the seller, whichever comes later. The change is retroactive for sales, exchanges and transfers beginning four years prior to the bill's effective date of June 11, 2018.

Legislative lowdown

A quick look at critical bills that MTA is following as they move through the legislative process. For a complete list, head to MTA's "Legislative Action Center" on the members portion of www.michigantownships.org, or look to our weekly and monthly newsletters sent to all MTA member officials.

SB 45: Disabled veterans' property tax exemption—Expands disabled veterans' property tax exemption to include residential real property or agricultural real property owned by a disabled veteran, decreasing local revenue. *MTA opposes.*

SB 157 & HB 5723: Water works projects—Preempts local ordinances restricting or prohibiting the evaluation, comparison or use of certain pipe and piping materials. *MTA opposes.*

SBs 305-310: Tax increment financing—Modifies capture of library mills to allow libraries to opt out of tax capture and redefines "obligation" to exempt library millages automatically. *MTA opposes.*

SB 329 & HB 4503: Land use/zoning preemption—Limits local zoning regulation of vacation rentals and short-term rentals. *MTA opposes.*

SB 578: Deed restrictions—Excludes private deed restrictions from being considered by Michigan Tax Tribunal when highest and best use of property considered subject to an assessment dispute. *MTA supports.*

SB 637: Small cell—Creates Small Wireless Communications Facilities Deployment Act that would standardize permits, fees, right-of-way use and other regulation of wireless service providers when utilizing the public right-of-way. *MTA neutral.*

SB 723 & HB 4362: Disabled veterans' property tax exemption—Requires reimbursement to local taxing units for property tax revenue loss incurred due to disabled veterans' property tax exemptions. *MTA supports.*

SB 741: Local preemption—Prohibits local regulation of dogs based upon breed or perceived breed. *MTA opposes.*

SB 927: Personal property tax exemption—Provides exemption for

qualified heavy equipment from property taxes. *MTA opposes.*

SB 1031: Personal property tax exemption—Provides exemption for qualified utility personal property installed after Dec. 31, 2017. *MTA opposes.*

SB 1035: Property tax exemption—Provides exemption for sportsmen club real property if dedicate facilities for charitable purpose for a limited period of time each year. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4077: Freedom of Information Act—Prohibits public bodies from commencing civil actions against entities making FOIA requests. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4162: Special assessments—Allows townships to create special assessment districts for communications infrastructure including broadband and high-speed internet. *MTA supports.*

HB 4184: Open Meetings Act—Clarifies physical presence required for vote, excluding emergency meetings and elected members called for military duty; allows board to waive one meeting for each member for good cause. *MTA neutral.*

HB 4290 & SB 756: Sewer backup liability—Amends definition for a sewage disposal system event, clarifies the identification of a design or construction defect in a sewage disposal system, and provides governmental agencies with expanded immunity from system overflow or backup. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4359, 4370 & 4371: Special assessments—Allows townships to create special assessment district for private utility services. *MTA supports.*

HB 4397: Dark stores—Requires Michigan Tax Tribunal determinations to consider all three methods of appraisal in assessment disputes and prohibits deed restrictions on valuation of property. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4431-4432: Legislative subpoena—Expands legislative subpoena authority to include local public bodies. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4671: Election administration—Allows local or county clerk to conduct election activities for a local clerk if approved by the governing bodies of both participating entities. *MTA neutral.*

HB 4679 & SB 495: Legislative fiscal note—Would require fiscal notes to be prepared on the financial impact of legislation before legislative action could occur. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4747-4748: Filing fee for township candidates—Provides option for individuals seeking township offices to pay a filing fee or file signature petitions to be on the ballot. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4814-4815: Millage election limitation—Limits all millage ballot questions—including new, increasing and renewal millages—to November general elections after Dec. 31, 2017. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4766: Open Meetings Act—Allows additional remedies for noncompliance to include attorney fees and allow a one-year window during which civil actions may be brought. *MTA opposes.*

HBs 4986 & 1042: Disabled veterans' property tax exemption/income tax—Provides an income tax credit for disabled veterans in an amount equal to 100 percent of the individual's property taxes paid or 23 percent of gross rent paid and repeals the disabled veterans' property tax exemption. *MTA supports.*

HB 5098: Rights-of-way—Requires local governments to provide one-year notification, and waive permit and inspection fees, and prohibits request for any study or survey when requesting the temporary or permanent relocation of facilities owned by an entity holding a license under the Michigan Telecommunications Act or a franchise under the Uniform Video Services Local Franchise Act. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5207: Semi-open primary—Requires voter to indicate which political party ballot he or she wishes to vote at primary election. *MTA neutral.*

HB 5490: Michigan Transportation Fund—Allows townships to assume jurisdiction of roads under jurisdiction of county road commissions and receive a share of Michigan Transportation Fund revenue that would otherwise go to the county road commission. *MTA supports.*

HB 6049 & SB 1025: Assessing—Provides for the shift of certain assessment functions to county equalization departments. *MTA opposes.*



Can you explain the new Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) accounting standards that impact reporting and disclosures relating to the health insurance that we pay for our retirees?

GASB Statements Number 74 & 75 have made a dramatic impact on state and local government’s reporting of these unfunded or underfunded obligations in the Statement of Net Position and Statement of Activities—if your township provides “other post-employment benefits” (OPEB), such as post-retirement health care. Many of these OPEB plans are not prefunded, and use a pay-as-you-go methodology, wherein the township pays the health insurance premiums each month, rather than using a level cost-funding method used in pension plans.

Townships using “pay as you go” or partial pre-funding will see significant increases in the liabilities recognized on the “entity-wide statements” (not on your budgetary, modified-accrual books and records). In the past, under previous GASB standards, the unfunded liability was recognized incrementally each year as the amount necessary to “level cost fund” the obligation for current and retired employees and was compared to the costs the township paid. The difference was added each year and recognized as a liability on the township’s Statement of Net Position. Under these standards, the unfunded liability for current and future retirees’ calculated by your plan actuary or CPA will be recognized in total upon implementation of the new standard. This requirement is similar to the unfunded pension obligations under GASB 67/68.

Townships will be allowed to continue to fund and recognize expenditures in their books and records (budgetary basis) under the pay-as-you-go method, but will be required to implement these new standards on the entity-wide statements effective for years beginning after June 15, 2017. Earlier application is encouraged.



If we wanted to begin to set aside money in a trust for OPEB retirement benefits, what are some options?

Your first step is to meet with your township attorney and labor counsel to help you understand what is and isn’t permissible under Michigan law and federal tax law.

Provided below are the three most common approaches, and the mechanics of each:

Voluntary Employees’ Beneficiary Association (VEBA). A VEBA is a tax-exempt trust under Section 501(c)(9) of the Internal Revenue Code that is established to pre-fund retiree health benefits (or other employee benefits). The VEBA assets and earnings are specifically set aside in a trust for the sole purpose of providing specified benefits (e.g., health, life, accident or other). Governmental employers that establish a VEBA are exempt from some of the requirements that apply to private sector employers, including certain tax reporting and taxes on earnings. The assets in a VEBA trust are permitted under federal law to accumulate on a tax-free basis. Payments made out of the trust are also not taxed to the beneficiary (retiree) if they are used for tax-qualified benefits—e.g., medical and dental insurance, prescription drugs, etc. VEBAs have been in existence for some time and there are a significant case law and IRS rulings to support governmental organizations using them for this purpose.

IRC Section 115 Governmental Integral Part Trusts/State-Law (PA 149 of 1999). This is a grantor trust established by the governmental unit to set aside funds for paying future employee benefits. This approach allows the entity to prefund health benefits and hold in an exclusive benefit trust to pay current and future retiree health benefits. A governmental trust qualifies for exemption from federal income tax under IRC Section 115. It must be established only for an “essential government function” and the income earned on the trust’s investments must accrue to the benefit of the state or local government entity. Although there is no explicit legal authority that addresses the use of the fund for the retiree health care obligation, Treasury regulations and several IRS Private Letter Rulings are favorable (MERS of Michigan obtained a specific private letter ruling authorizing them to establish such a trust) to using an IRC Section 115 trust as a retiree health benefit funding vehicle.

401(h) trust. An IRC section 401(h) trust is a separate account, established within an existing qualified pension fund, which is dedicated to paying OPEB benefits. These trusts are usually for single employer arrangements, although some employers have access to a statewide plan. A 401(h) trust is governed by the pension board and must meet IRC requirements to avoid jeopardizing its tax-qualified status. The medical benefits are considered “subordinate” to the pension benefits.

Special thanks to the Government Finance Officers Association and National Association of Defined Benefit Retirement Administrators for the use of their materials.

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.

Give me shelter

Townships help coordinate emergency shelters during times of crisis

Every time the phone rang, **Dave Morgan** heard more bad news. Another toppled tree. Another damaged roof. More power lines down.

The **Pennfield Charter Township** (Calhoun Co.) supervisor wasn't fooled by the blue skies and bright sun he saw from his office window. He knew a major storm was wreaking havoc just outside. Winds nearing 70 mph whipped through the township, leaving the streets littered with branches, trees and downed power lines. Thousands of residents were left without power on a night when temperatures were predicted to dip into the low teens.

But Pennfield Charter Township was ready. Morgan knew the local high school already had the American Red Cross's stamp of approval to function as an emergency shelter for the township if the occasion ever arose. After making sure the township hall's emergency generator was up and running so that normal business could continue, Morgan touched base with the school district superintendent as well as **Durk**

Dunham, director of the Calhoun County Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division, to work out the details of opening a shelter if they decided it was needed. Then, when he learned that it could be days before Consumers Energy was able to restore power, he and Dunham made the final decision—the shelter was a go. By the next morning, a full-blown shelter with snacks, drinks and even toys for children was up and running.

While the shelter wasn't crowded, and no one stayed the night, Morgan feels good knowing Pennfield Charter Township provided residents with a warm place to stay if they had no other alternatives. Opening an emergency shelter was just an extension of what township officials already do—serve their residents. And with a plan in place, officials weren't scrambling to react to the situation. They were ready to act.



“I’m always thinking what’s the worst thing that could happen, and what are we going to do when it does?” said Morgan, noting that his township fire department was invaluable during the crisis. “When the wind storm happened, within an hour, our township took action. That came from having a lot of good people who were willing to step up.”

When chaos strikes, townships have an opportunity to be a force of stability and safety for their residents. Michigan may experience fewer natural disasters than other states, but they’re not unheard of. Anything from floods and blizzards to house fires and chemical spills could easily leave residents in search of a place to stay. Even extreme heat or cold can be an opportunity for townships to open their doors and offer families a place to warm up or cool down.

Opening an emergency shelter may require partnering with your nearby schools or municipalities. It will also require

communication and coordination with your county emergency management director. The time for planning, however, is not during a natural disaster. Every township should have an answer to the question—where will our residents go if disaster strikes?

Why emergency shelters?

Public safety is at the heart of serving your township’s residents. Having a plan in place for an emergency shelter assures your residents that if the worst should happen, their township is ready and able to help.

“What bigger responsibility do you have as a township official than to make sure you do everything in your power, whatever that might be, to make your community as safe as possible?” Dunham said.



Townships can open their doors as a heating or cooling center when extreme temperatures threaten vulnerable residents. If your township hall has running water, heating and air conditioning, and a few places to sit down, you're ready to be a heating and cooling center.

Some residents don't have nearby family or the means to stay at a hotel for days on end while they wait for power to be restored. And many rural areas don't have hotels at all. While some might choose to take their chances at home even in an emergency, vulnerable populations—such as the elderly, people with medical conditions or very small children—can't take that risk. Emergency shelters may be a last resort, but they're a necessary safety net that must be available in dire situations.

While disaster relief efforts are coordinated at the county or regional level, that doesn't mean townships should take a hands-off approach. Offering up a building to serve as an emergency shelter is a simple way your township can contribute to the greater good. Your building might be used as a shelter only a handful of times. It's also possible that it will never be used. But there's also no downside to getting a building approved as an emergency shelter, Morgan said, so why not?

"I would highly recommend that every township have a plan," he said. "You just never know."

Getting a shelter approved long before a disaster ever hits also helps the American Red Cross respond faster to displaced residents, said Armando Falcon, disaster program manager of the American Red Cross Southeast Michigan. When an apartment fire or a gas leak forces evacuations, the Red Cross needs to know in advance where it can set up cots and a lunch room as quickly as possible. Without a designated shelter in place, the organization is instead left scrambling to contact police and fire departments searching for a building.

"It's really about making sure we're caring for our communities," Falcon said. "It helps us to have the townships working with us and even suggesting locations."

The process

Shelters are just one link in a larger emergency response, and there's a specific chain of command. Counties may have their own protocol for when they open an emergency shelter. In Calhoun County, Dunham takes a 72-hour approach. Barring a few exceptions, most people should have the supplies they need to make it on their own for 72 hours without power, he said. But when a power outage is projected to extend beyond that three-day window, or it is a large-scale emergency, that's when he starts to consider whether it's time to open a shelter. Emergencies resulting in casualties or fatalities could also precipitate a need for a shelter.

Many times, emergency management directors then make the call to open a shelter. These directors act as coordinators, communicating with the local unit that has a designated shelter as well as the American Red Cross, which oversees every aspect of shelters that they run. Because the Red Cross provides all the supplies and volunteer personnel for their shelters, directors must also look at whether nearby communities have already opened shelters, and if opening another one would put too great a strain on limited resources.

"A shelter to me is something where there has to be a significant reason for it," Dunham said. "I don't just open it because we've had four days in a row at 95 degrees. We have a responsibility to try and use the resources that we have, which in some cases is not a lot, and make sure we're using them properly."

Sometimes, the Red Cross might open a shelter at the request of local units, fire departments or police departments, Falcon said. If the organization hears there's a need, it will typically send a team to find out how many people truly need a place to stay before deciding to activate a shelter. The Red Cross may even place a shelter on standby or open one on its own for major storms or apartment fires that the organization feels renders homes unlivable.

Within two hours of a decision being made, the Red Cross will have a shelter open if all goes according to plan. An exception, of course, can be if a decision is made in the middle of the night, when key people can't be reached quickly.

Finding the right building

When a county decides to open a shelter, the officials don't take out a phone book and start making calls. Long before a disaster takes place, counties already have a list of designated shelters that are approved by the Red Cross.

Not just any building can become a designated emergency shelter—and different types of shelter designations come with different requirements. A short-term shelter, such as a heating or cooling center or a shelter from a nearby fire, is typically handled at the county level. The American Red Cross handles long-term shelters, which provide amenities for a longer stay, including overnight.

Chances are, your township hall already has trappings of a good emergency shelter. Clare County Emergency Management Director **Jerry Becker** said the list of needed qualities isn't long. Shelters need a large space, perhaps the size of a quarter of a gymnasium. The building needs functional bathrooms and running water—showers are a bonus—and it must meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It also must have a controlled climate, with heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer. In cases of power outages, it's helpful to have a generator. Ideally, the building would also have ample parking available.

If your township hall doesn't have the right specifications, find another building within the township that might fit the bill. Some townships might use a school, a church or a community center instead. In that case, your board would want to have a memorandum of understanding with the building's owner, spelling out what they're agreeing to and who assumes liability for costs such as utilities and damage. Dunham generally recommends that townships assume that liability.

What's the cost?

Townships don't need cots or emergency supplies, or even a plan for how the shelter would be staffed. Emergency shelters are run by the Red Cross, which supplies everything a shelter could possibly need. Essentially, what the township is providing is a shell to operate their shelters. If your township has volunteers who want to help, they're welcome, as are any other resources you have available—but they're not expected, Falcon said.

Some buildings might have kitchens and food preparation facilities, but Dunham said that's not necessary, and townships aren't expected to provide meals. Food prepared for a large group of people at a shelter would most likely run into health code violations. Instead, the Red Cross has its own food vendors, and many times, local restaurants and grocery stores donate meals for those staying in the shelter.

Your township would be responsible for any increased utility costs when the shelter is in use, as well as any damage done to the building. If you're using a building other than township property, this would need to be spelled out in your memorandum of understanding.

Working with the county

After deciding to seek approval for a designated shelter, your township's first call should be to the county director of emergency management or homeland security. The director will help your board start the process of working with the Red Cross.

From there, the Red Cross sends a shelter team to a prospective building for a quick survey, checking to make sure there's enough space to set up cots and a lunch room and that it meets other specifications. Once it's approved, the Red Cross enters the building into a national shelter system that's also available to the Federal Emergency Management

Agency (FEMA). Then, when a disaster strikes, the Red Cross uses the database to find the nearest shelter in a safe zone to house displaced residents.

While some counties may approach townships about getting a designated shelter approved, generally speaking, townships should expect to make the first move. Many times, county emergency management departments have extremely limited staff—often just the director. These departments are responsible for planning and coordinating for each municipality within their borders, and their staff is most likely too busy to initiate one-on-one meetings with township officials.

Grant Township (St. Clair Co.) officials knew their township hall would be the perfect spot for an emergency shelter, especially with its 60-kilowatt generator. So they reached out to the St. Clair County Office of Homeland Security/Emergency Management to find out where to start. Supervisor **Bill Deater** said the director communicates with him regularly and even conducts meetings where local leaders can hash out solutions to their problems.

"I can't think of anything that isn't positive about it," Deater said.

Calling your county's emergency management agency shouldn't be limited to setting up your emergency shelter. As your board plans for future emergencies, it should be noted that your county director could play a major role in your township's response. A strong working relationship between your two entities will make for a better emergency response—and the time to build that relationship isn't in the middle of a natural disaster.

Dunham recommends designating one person to act as a point of contact with the county in an emergency. Then, pick up the phone. Discuss how your township would work with the county if a severe thunderstorm struck, or a tornado left a string of casualties and destruction in its wake.

"It would be very high on my list to make sure I connected with anyone who could potentially mitigate the risk to my citizens," Dunham said.





When chaos strikes, townships have an opportunity to be a force of stability and safety for their residents. Every township should have an answer to the question—where will our residents go if disaster strikes?

Taking action

After the Red Cross approves your building as an emergency shelter, you may not hear anything about it again until an ominous roll of thunder or a sudden heavy rain. But when looming severe weather threatens massive power outages, your township should be prepared to get the call from the county emergency manager.

Usually, the county will decide to activate a shelter, and the Red Cross will send in volunteers and resources to run it. This approach makes sense because natural disasters know no municipal boundaries. If your township is experiencing power outages, the surrounding municipalities probably are too. The county emergency manager will know where the damage or power outage is most concentrated and will divvy up resources accordingly. Not every township in an affected area will have a shelter. Red Cross resources are limited, and opening too many shelters could stretch them to the point where their shelters aren't as effective as they could be.

While activating a shelter is typically the county's or the Red Cross's call, your township could certainly make the case for opening one. As the form of government closest to the people, no one has a better sense of what your residents need than township officials.

That's what Morgan did when he saw the wind storm's destruction in Pennfield Charter Township. He didn't wait for Dunham to call him. He picked up the phone the moment he thought an emergency shelter would be the best move. This is a time when having a strong relationship with your emergency management director comes in handy—you don't want the first time you speak to one another to be in the middle of a natural disaster.

In some circumstances, local units have opened informal emergency shelters at the request of their residents, running the shelter without the help of the Red Cross or the county.

Deater, a 43-year volunteer firefighter, remembers residents sleeping on old army cots in the township hall when a 1970s ice storm left the Grant Township community without power for a week.

The Red Cross even offers training for communities to learn how to run their own emergency shelter with township volunteers. It's also possible for local units running their own shelter to borrow cots or other supplies from the Red Cross, Falcon said. However, it's important to remember that if your township opts to do so, it would assume all liability if someone was hurt at the shelter or another issue arose.

Spreading the word

As soon as Morgan knew his township's shelter would open, he made sure his residents heard about it. After sending a press release to the local TV and radio stations, he posted the information to the township website. He worked with Dunham to have the county send out a message through Nixle, a notification service that allows government agencies to alert residents to emergencies.

Then Morgan, still worried that some residents might have missed the message, spent the next three days walking the township, knocking on doors and checking on seniors or anyone else riding out the power outage at home. The ordeal attracted plenty of media coverage, with one TV news reporter visiting the shelter multiple times and even following Morgan as he knocked on doors.

Getting the word out is a key part of opening an emergency shelter—and it's a job that can be handled by your township. In addition to a media blitz, social media messages typically draw the best response, Becker said. He also recommends using subscription-based emergency call systems, such as Nixle, RAVE Mobile Safety, CodeRED Mobile Alert or other options. The best way to spread the word, however, is up to your township and the emergency manager.

"What works in Bay City may not work in, say, Kalkaska," Becker said. "That's where the emergency management coordinator acts as boots on the ground. They know what works for reaching people."

Providing another option

While the term "emergency shelter" might conjure images of bedraggled men and women sleeping on rows of cots, don't be surprised if your township's shelter is far less dramatic. In many cases, like in Pennfield Charter Township, only a handful of people might come during daytime hours, and no one will spend the night. In Grant Township, which set up its own daytime shelter during a days-long power outage following a recent wind storm, Deater said many residents dropped by simply to charge their cellphones or other electronics before returning home to ride out the outage.

But the point of a shelter isn't to draw large crowds. By design, they're meant to serve as a last resort for anyone who

has no other option, Dunham said. He considers it a success when shelters simply serve the residents who need them.

Cool down or warm up

On a lesser—and more common—scale, townships can open their doors as a heating or cooling center when extreme temperatures threaten vulnerable residents. These types of shelters are activated more frequently than long-term emergency shelters, and they don't require the same approval process. If your township hall has running water, heating and air conditioning, and a few places to sit down, you're ready to be a heating and cooling center.

Some counties, like Macomb County, have a database of heating and cooling centers so that residents can easily find a place to go. The county has contacted some area townships to request that a township facility be added to the list. Being a designated cooling center often requires little to no extra effort, and with other options—such as malls, stores, libraries, etc.—most residents may not use it. But when someone is in need, the townships' doors will be open.

Helping your residents prepare

As your township takes steps to prepare for an emergency, residents can get involved by making sure they're prepared, too. Tell residents that your township has—or is getting—a designated shelter in case of a disaster, and that they should have a plan in place, as well.

After the 2017 wind storm, Morgan helped Pennfield Charter Township plan a preparedness event to equip residents with the tools they'd need to ride out a storm. A representative from Nixle attended to get as many residents as possible to sign up for the emergency alert, so that more people would be reached by county notifications. Representatives from a generator company as well as a hardware retailer even offered discounts on purchasing and installing a generator to provide them with a power source in an outage.

"We were able to take care of residents, so if it ever happens again, we don't have to worry about them," Morgan said.

No one should wait until an emergency is imminent to prepare. Whether it's working with the Red Cross to have a building designated as a shelter, or simply making a phone call to your county emergency management director, the steps your township takes today will keep your residents safer down the road.



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upcoming MTA event

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

MTA UP North Summit

MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

Incredible value—only \$205, includes all meals
Join fellow officials from across the state August 1-2 for MTA's **UP North Summit**. Held at the Island Resort in Harris (west of Escanaba), this event offers excellent networking opportunities and premier educational programming.

Practical techniques and valuable resources
The program features four informative general sessions offering topics relevant to the entire township board, and eight breakout classes offering something of interest for each office. Descriptions appear in registration materials online at www.michigantownships.org.

Mini expo
Take a stroll through the "Northern Market Expo" and network with vendors to find providers of products and services that can help your township run more efficiently. You may even win a prize!

Pre-Summit classes
Come early and expand the learning! Join us on July 31 for half-day courses on **Cemeteries** and **Payroll**. Ask your township attorney to join you and take part in our all-new **UP North Legal Institute**.

Evening Activity
Get out of the classroom and into the fun! After a full day of education, we know you'll be ready for some fresh air. MTA teams up with the Island Resort to bring you a fun, festive, fabulous ... outdoor fiesta. Olé!

Cancellations & Substitutions:

Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office by July 16 will receive a full refund. No refunds will be issued thereafter. You may substitute another individual from your township for your registration at any time without incurring a charge; please notify MTA of the change.



UP North Summit

_____	_____
Name	Title
_____	_____
Township	County
_____	_____
Daytime Telephone	Email Address
_____	_____
Guest Name	

Please copy this form for additional registrants.

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

Full Program: (August 1-2)

Includes all meals, refreshments, activities, workshops and materials.
 \$205 per person (\$235 after July 16)

Pre-Summit Classes: (July 31)

<i>If registered for the Summit</i>	Before July 16	After July 16
<input type="checkbox"/> Both sessions	\$123/attendee	\$143/attendee
<input type="checkbox"/> Pay, Processing & People	\$80/attendee	\$100/attendee
<input type="checkbox"/> Cemeteries	\$80/attendee	\$100/attendee

If NOT registered for the Summit

<input type="checkbox"/> Both sessions	\$132/attendee	\$152/attendee
<input type="checkbox"/> Pay, Processing & People	\$89/attendee	\$109/attendee
<input type="checkbox"/> Cemeteries	\$89/attendee	\$109/attendee

Single Day: Check the day you wish to attend.

Includes that day's meals, refreshments, activities, workshops and materials.
 August 1 August 2 \$123 per person (\$143 after July 16)
 Legal Institute \$123/attendee \$143/attendee

Guest Package:

Includes that day's meals, refreshments and activities; guests cannot attend classes.
 Full Program \$104/person
 Day One ONLY \$66/person
 Day Two ONLY \$38/person

TOTAL DUE: \$ _____

Single-session rates are also available. Visit www.michigantownships.org or refer to the full Summit brochure in the June Township Focus for details.

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.



Talking township issues with Michigan's 2018 gubernatorial candidates

To introduce our members to the 2018 Michigan gubernatorial candidates, and to give township officials better insights into how those candidates feel on a variety of township-related issues, MTA asked the seven candidates running for governor in the August primary questions on issues of importance to local government.



Brian Calley (R)

- Michigan lieutenant governor
- Served two terms as state representative
- Served as vice chair of Ionia County Board of Commissioners for two terms



Patrick Colbeck (R)

- State senator since 2011
- Aerospace engineer
- Bachelor's and master's degrees from University of Michigan



Abdul El-Sayed (D)

- Former health commissioner for City of Detroit
- Medical degree from Columbia University
- Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University



Jim Hines (R)

- Medical doctor
- Immediate past chief of medical staff of Covenant HealthCare
- Former president of Christian Medical & Dental Associations



Bill Schuette (R)

- Michigan attorney general
- Former U.S. congressman, state senator and state Court of Appeals judge
- Served as director of Michigan Department of Agriculture



Gretchen Whitmer (D)

- Served as minority leader in Michigan Senate, and as state representative for six years
- Former Ingham County prosecutor

Note: Democratic candidate Shri Thanedar did not respond to MTA's invitation.



How would you frame the respective roles of state and local governments to regulate businesses and land uses?

Are there regulations currently within local government authority that would more appropriately be handled by state agencies or removed from local government authority? Are there areas of public policy where local government authority should be expanded?

Calley: Local governments have significant responsibilities for public well-being and are empowered by the state to govern and make public policy decisions that directly affect individuals closest to where they live. For land use planning, local communities should be able to establish rules that reflect the character and wishes of the specific jurisdiction. Generally speaking, I believe that the authorities vested at the local level are at appropriate levels. One area I do believe that townships should have more say is in the use of state-owned vacant or unimproved property not opened to the public.

Colbeck: The state should provide uniform rules for commerce, but local units of government should be responsible for regulating land use short of abridging private property rights.

El-Sayed: I am the only Democrat with experience in municipal government—serving the City of Detroit as health director. I understand the challenges municipalities face. Michigan’s emergency manager laws have proven ineffective and cruel. I would repeal these laws in favor of consent decrees in partnership with municipal councils and commissions. I would seek to restore full revenue sharing to empower municipalities, and cut red tape that prevents them from raising needed revenue locally, as well. Further, local authority should also be expanded in its new business licensing prerogatives.

Hines: We need to have limits on regulatory overreach on our local units. Reasonable ordinances in place that prevent citizens of the township or city from harming one another are fine. Statewide standards as a guideline are critical to clear up any ambiguities.

Schuette: I generally feel less government is better and that solving problems locally is best. We need less burdensome rules and regulations in our state so that businesses can grow and succeed. As governor, I want to cut taxes and regulation at the state level, focus on cutting auto insurance rates, and fix our third grade reading scores.

There are some areas of government where the state can play a role by setting clear and uniform standards, so we do not have a patchwork of rules and regulations. But overall, I largely oppose government mandates.

Whitmer: Local governments should be empowered with the authority and resources necessary to help resolve community-level issues and improve the quality of life for everyone. There are certainly issues that are best resolved at a larger level, such as massive environmental clean-ups and coordinated, statewide infrastructure improvements. But local governments are the primary deliverer of government service, and this is too often overlooked when the state is passing laws and determining how to allocate resources. The best zoning, ordinance and general governmental decisions for communities are made at the community level, from whether pets should be allowed on restaurant patios to whether to treat municipal drinking water with safety additives. Local leadership in economic development and placemaking will be vastly important as we improve our economy and make Michigan the state people move to again for opportunity.



The adoption of Proposal A in 1994 elevated property tax stability and predictability over the principle of taxation equity.

Consequently, local government tax revenues no longer adjust to property valuations. Is the current property tax structure capping taxable value increases in need of reform?

Calley: When Proposal A passed to reign in high property taxes, few predicted the issues it would cause during an economic collapse. Plummeting property values following the Great Recession are capped at the rate of inflation or 5 percent because of Proposal A, severely limiting the ability of local governments to recover from pre-2008 levels. The state should examine ways to improve the ability of local governments to provide services in this constrained environment.

Colbeck: No, but I do advocate shifting state spending to local units of government via an enhanced revenue sharing framework.

El-Sayed: Our municipal finance system is in desperate need of reform. Cities and counties have lost \$6 billion over the last 12 years to patch state budget holes. Despite the rebound in post-recession property values, taxes collected by Michigan cities declined by more than \$139 million from 2008 to 2015. Our current system is starving municipalities in favor of filling budget holes at the state level; this is unacceptable. I will reinstate revenue sharing through executive channels and push for an exception to the Headlee Amendment that allows municipalities to adjust property taxes to account for post-recession valuation, while holding municipalities accountable for over-assessments as often happens in low-income communities, like Detroit.

Hines: I am aware of the concern that Proposal A allowed assessed values to drop below taxable values to an unlimited level, which affected the tax base of some local units of government. I have been told that in many communities, even a 2 percent inflationary increase in taxable values would by 2030 put us at a 2008 pre-market collapse tax base for our communities. I am committed to working with the Michigan Townships Association on a palatable solution to this crisis, but fully aware that a constitutional amendment, vote of the people is a tough task for a Legislature and an executive to climb.

In the meantime, local units have the ability to ask voters for adjustments to their tax base with votes of the people. Those efforts will be much more likely for success than getting a two-thirds legislative support for a vote.

Schuette: Proposal A has protected taxpayers in Michigan and has provided relief to many residents who were being taxed out of their homes. It has worked as it was intended to work.

Changes to Michigan's constitution are difficult and must be fully vetted to make sure they are wise. There is a mechanism in place—a Headlee override—that can be utilized if capping taxable value increases is a problem for local government. This involves asking the voters to approve a millage above its current rate, but no higher than its original rate authorized by the voters.

Whitmer: Proposal A is 25 years old and has never delivered the promises of an equitable funding system that it was supposed to. Since its passage, the state government has eliminated funding sources for local governments through vehicles like phasing out of the personal property tax and tax increment financing authorities. Due to the provisions of Headlee and Proposal A, Michigan communities have no real ability to track with the ebbs and flows of the economy. They experience the devastation of a decline, but they never realize more than inflationary growth during times of economic prosperity.



Jobs and population in many rural Michigan communities are disappearing. Michigan has a long history of focusing resources and policies on urban areas. Should rural Michigan also be a focus of revitalization efforts? If yes, what would those efforts be?

Calley: When I visit Michigan's rural communities, a common issue I hear is the need for reliable and affordable high-speed internet access. As lieutenant governor, I

have worked to evaluate and enhance broadband services to address coverage gaps, the need for higher speeds and affordable access. As governor, I would work to address these gaps. I would also work with the 288 Opportunity Zones in all of Michigan's 83 counties to help ready them for tax incentives now available through the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that could result in significant investment in many rural communities. Finally, I will continue the Rising Tide program to help smaller communities in all 10 regions of Michigan.

Colbeck: Article 1, Section 1 of the Michigan Constitution stipulates that our policies are intended to serve the best interest of all the citizens and not show partiality. I took an oath to support the Constitution.

El-Sayed: Revitalizing rural Michigan by raising median household income and investing in small business is critical. I will encourage small business by standing up to big corporations and agricultural monopolies, investing in rural green infrastructure like roads and broadband, and protecting our environment by shutting down Line 5. I will protect rural Michiganders by fighting for a \$15 minimum wage, funding affordable housing, and drafting a bill of rights encouraging fair, predictable scheduling and increased protections for part-time and seasonal workers. You can learn more at <https://abdulformichigan.com/ruralagenda>.

Hines: Yes, I think profiling our rural communities more through our economic development agencies, making it a priority to suggest facilities in rural areas with good highway access, and developing a database of individuals in rural areas open to entertaining job development in their communities.

Schuette: Absolutely. Our rural areas need more people and more people working. My economic plan is designed to revitalize all Michigan communities. We need good roads to get people to work and products to market. As governor, I will prioritize infrastructure funding. Our schools must compete with those in other states, but right now only 35 percent of our third-graders are proficient readers. When I'm governor, I'll have a literacy director in my cabinet, specialized coaches in every elementary school, and our children will read. I will also bring everyone to the table and build consensus to lower auto insurance rates.

Whitmer: Rural Michigan experiences some of the highest poverty rates in our state. When 40 percent of Michiganders struggle to pay for basic necessities, and 450,000 households lack access to the internet and 21st century economy, something must be done. My administration will expand access to high-speed broadband internet through a proposed Rebuild Michigan Bank that will finance \$3 billion a year in infrastructure upgrades.



What, if any, is the proper role of state government to assure a minimum funding level to local governments of various populations, density and wealth?

Calley: Michigan has a long history of prioritizing local government. Ensuring our municipalities are properly funded is a priority to enhancing the quality of life in our communities. Overall, local government funding should match the services needed in each area. One of our largest current needs is for roads and bridges. I have worked to identify an extra \$300 million in the FY '19 state budget for roads, and as governor will work to ensure more infrastructure dollars are directed to local governments.

Colbeck: The proper role starts with a recognition of the constitutional revenue sharing provisions of our Michigan Constitution. Beyond that, I would promote a shift in state spending to locals for services best handled at the local level.

El-Sayed: Constitutional revenue sharing states that each city, township or village receives a portion of 15 percent of sales tax revenue allocated by population density. However, this funding is calculated solely on population density and is not informed by local need. State government should continue to assure a minimum funding level based on population density, but should grant additional revenues to lower-income municipalities that are not able to rely on property taxes for complete funding. By including local needs in the funding formula, state-guided revenue sharing could become the boost so desperately needed by poor urban and rural localities.

Hines: While the ultimate goal is to send back to the local community dollar for dollar that was sent to Lansing, obviously this isn't completely possible. I would support looking at PA 51 for reform as well as reprioritizing general fund spending and using existing dollars saved through impending reforms to the state's public assistance system. That same public assistance is now encompassing 45 percent of the state's general fund budget in a state that has 105,000 jobs available.

Schuette: My top priority can be summed up in one word: growth. Michigan needs a growing population and growing paychecks to become one of the leading states in the country economically. We need more people buying houses, filling jobs, and contributing to the growth that will allow us to invest in better roads and improved infrastructure. We need more boots on the ground and more cranes in the sky in Michigan. Airplane loads of people arrive in places like Austin and Nashville and it isn't because of the weather. It is because those states have better economic environments and more opportunity.

Whitmer: It should be a constitutional requirement that the state ensure basic funding amounts to local governments. This includes not just restoring cuts to revenue sharing, but

also maintaining state statutes to prevent tax loopholes that carve into local governments' operation budgets. Legislation to fix the dark stores problem will be a top priority for my administration, as will appointing competent members to the state's tax tribunal.



What, in your opinion, do local governments need to do better?

Calley: Municipalities across Michigan and the nation are facing growing, unfunded long-term liabilities. As governor, I would evaluate the recommendations made by legislators, state and local government officials, employee representatives, pension managers and insurance professionals who have worked together to determine how we can best reform local government pension and health care in Michigan. We need to be proactive in taking action so that local governments can maintain their obligation to their residents.

Colbeck: Local units of government need to manage long-term liabilities more responsibly. Furthermore, municipalities such as counties, cities and villages need to emphasize cost-effective, high-quality road construction and repair techniques. County commissioners have a responsibility to see that their road commissioners, political appointees who are not accountable to voters, are doing their job.

El-Sayed: Most of the improvements local governments need to make stem from state policy that limits them. Inadequate funding remains one of the largest challenges for local revitalization, and in lieu of any real change at the top, local governments should be empowered to find alternate methods. I am proposing a commission to explore options for how Michigan could establish municipal and county sales taxes. I intend to lead a review of state law to identify—and hopefully remove—the barriers that prevent municipalities and localities from introducing these taxes through a vote of the people.

Hines: Aggressively go after the unfunded liability issue.

Schuette: Local governments provide a vast array of services very efficiently, such as elections, zoning, public safety, parks, recreation, and waste removal. They are closest to the people they serve and many times more agile at adapting to changes. I believe there are some areas where increased intergovernmental cooperation could yield additional cost savings for taxpayers; however, I am not a proponent of government mandates. As governor, I would work to facilitate increased intergovernmental cooperation.

Whitmer: Local governments have been hit hard over the last seven years and services have been consolidated to a great degree. Little funding has been left to deal with unfunded liabilities in municipal retirement systems and unfunded liabilities have piled up to a point that many local governments face crippling budget projections. My administration will ask for the help of local governments to come up with a plan to fix this problem and help our local communities get on the track to financial prosperity once again.

‘Good things are happening’

Northern Michigan township comes together, sees opportunities during tough times

Rolling hills, lush hardwoods and silos set on checkerboard pastures, all nestled between Lake Michigan and Ellsworth Lake—that’s **Banks Township** (Antrim Co.). The area is beyond picturesque. But when the economy took a turn in the 1990s, it was hard hit.

But what happened next is truly amazing! The community came together and took steps to keep things moving forward—even with a good portion of the population moving away to find work. Together, they established a resale shop and food pantry called The Good Samaritan. The food pantry portion serves more than 700 families monthly in the surrounding area and takes pride in a ministry outreach for mothers with young children. “The Mom and Tots” offers an opportunity to earn a GED, and provides diapers, cribs, car seats, clothing and other necessities as well as parenting classes. This ministry recently celebrated the grand opening of a new building addition that will house a men’s mentoring ministry called “His House.” In 2017, The Moms and Tots served 365 separate individuals.

Not wanting the only village in the township to become a ghost town, community members banded together and opened a “by donation” restaurant to give locals a place to gather despite the economy. The restaurant had several owners who just couldn’t make it in the small town and it had been closed for a few years. The Front Porch, now a 501(c)(3) organization, was instrumental in getting an oppressed community over the hump and is still a success—you can’t find a seat on Thursdays, better known as “Senior Day.” Patrons needing a meal but short of funds are still welcomed and fed. Donations and volunteers are the backbone of the organization.

During the long decades of hardship, the community festival known as the “Pig Roast” didn’t miss a beat. Now in its 37th year, the volunteer-run event provides games for the kids, a pulled pork dinner complete with homemade desserts, horse pull competition, 5k race, tough mudder obstacle course, a parade and entertainment—all finished off with a fabulous fireworks display. And it’s all free.

Working together for a common goal

During these difficult economic times, an idea was formed to promote tourism in the area. A committee was established, a grant was secured from the State of Michigan, and County Road 48 was dubbed “The Breezeway”! Marketing it for what it is, a beautiful drive through pretty countryside and quaint towns, the Breezeway Task Force,





comprised of seven member municipalities, has promoted the scenic route throughout the state. Ten years after the marketing began, the Breezeway has become well-known and vital to attracting visitors. A bonus for local businesses, the mile-marker signs help with their wayfinding efforts as well!

Following a devastating fire on the main four corners in the village of Ellsworth, resulting in the loss of a service station, a crowdfunding campaign was launched by the village council and the community again came together to create a green space downtown appropriately called the Community Square. At the same time, the township board applied for and received a Michigan Recreation Passport Grant to give the township park on the shores of Lake Michigan a facelift, making it handicap accessible and an even more popular place to watch the glorious sunsets.

While the park grant application was being evaluated, the township board turned its focus to the township hall. The two-storied stone building was built in 1933 with stones brought to town by the surrounding farmers—many of whom have descendants still farming the same land—and is the pinnacle focal point in the Village of Ellsworth. The mortar between the stones was repaired, exterior painting completed, the heating, electrical and insulation was upgraded, the lower level was painted, and necessary appliances for the kitchen area were purchased. The most significant work was done in the entryway where a lift was installed to assist elderly and handicap visitors, and the stairwell was refinished.

The project revealed some treasures long enclosed under the stairs. In the great room upstairs, historically accurate lighting and acoustic panels were installed to create a wedding and concert venue. Many community events that were traditionally held in the lower level of the building due to the reverberating noise have been relocated to the now more appealing great room. Completion of the \$220,000 renovation and repairs project was made possible with a \$30,000 Rotary Charities Grant and contributions from a community working for a common goal. In honor of the good work accomplished on the hall, Banks Township was awarded the Renaissance Award from its area chamber of commerce.

A couple blocks away, another stone house was also being restored to its original state. Once completed, to everyone's surprise, the house and grounds were graciously donated to the Banks Township Historical Society. The Anderlie House is presently being used as a museum displaying items used in the township during the late 1800s.

Preserving the past, looking to the future

The township board is always interested in preserving the past and is in the process of documenting the burials in the Antrim City Cemetery, one of four cemeteries in the township that are more than 100 years old. Burials in Antrim City Cemetery date back to the Civil War.

Not just concerned with the past but looking to the future, this small community voted to support a \$3 million bond to upgrade school buildings that hadn't been seriously upgraded since the 1970s and some of the infrastructure further back than that. In November 2017, township residents filled the great hall to listen to "State of the Community" addresses from the school superintendent, village president, township supervisor, Pig Roast committee chair and Breezeway/ Chamber of Commerce director. Then they sat down together in planning groups to plan what wonderful things can be accomplished in the future.

All agree—good things are happening in Banks Township!

—Submitted by Banks Township Clerk Donna Heeres

Tell us your story

The Michigan Townships Association knows that every township has a story—and we want to help tell yours.

We want to know what's happening in your township—no project, service, collaboration or experience is too small. Your insights, suggestions and ideas could be featured in *Township Focus* magazine, as part of our "Township Happenings" column (see page 6). Or they could inspire a longer article or a feature on your township (like "Around the State" on page 32), or be included in cover stories. Or we may share with our followers on social media. You could even be asked to share your insights and experiences as part of an MTA workshop or Conference session.

You're proud of your township, and we are, too. Let us help you tell your story. Email your story ideas, happenings in your township, pictures, township newsletters, etc. to *Township Focus* editor Jenn Fiedler at jenn@michigantownships.org.

We're waiting to hear from you!

aroundthe**state**

townships in the spotlight



Kawkawlin Township

Kawkawlin Township (Bay Co.)—whose Indian name, U-Gu-H-Kon-Ning means “place of the pike fish”—is located on the west shore of the Saginaw Bay. In 1855, 13 years before the township was even established, “Kawkawlin consists of two mills, five cottages, two log huts, several Indian wigwams, and 100 million mosquitoes to the square mile,” according to Frederick Kaiser, one of the area’s first settlers, who owned a steam mill at the time.



The township was established on Jan. 7, 1868, after the Bay County Board of Supervisors detached its territory from **Bangor Township** (Bay Co.). The first annual meeting was held at the home of Q.A. Ballou in the village of Kawkawlin, which no longer exists in the present-day township. The vast timbers quickly brought settlers to the township. After the timber was cleared, it brought in the farmers. It was said that the valleys of the Kawkawlin River were the richest farming district in the state.

Today, the township has a population of just under 5,000. A mostly rural, agricultural community, sugar beets, corn, wheat, oats and dry beans are the main crops farmed in the township.

The Saginaw Bay is well known for its recreational activities. Walleye and perch fishing brings many anglers to the township year-round, both on the ice and by boat.

The township has three main parks: Brissette



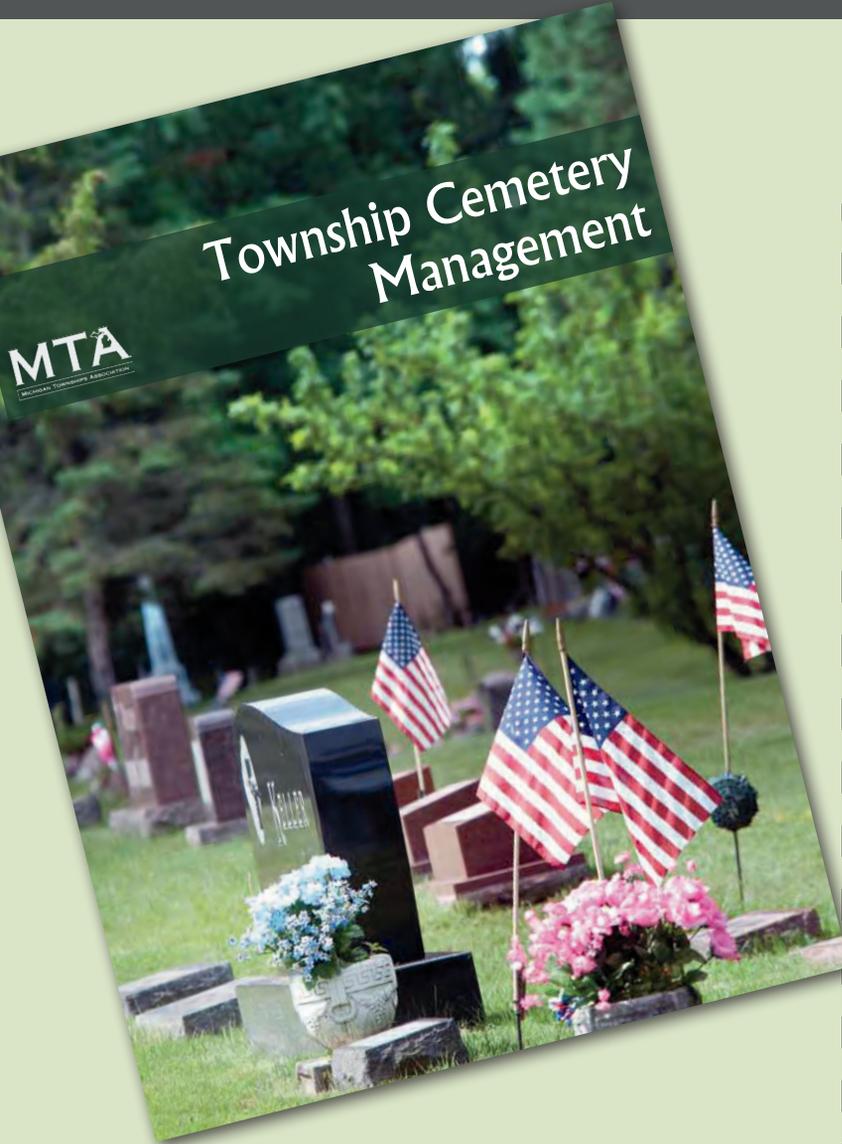
Beach, which has a beach on Saginaw Bay; Linwood Scenic Park, shared with **Fraser Township** (Bay Co.), which has year-round access to the Saginaw Bay, and the Township Recreational Park, which has ball fields with a concession stand, soccer fields, tennis courts, playscapes and a pavilion.

The township has partial water and sewer services. The Bay Area Water Treatment Plant was built in 2015, a cooperative effort of 13 Bay County municipalities. Residents are protected by an on-call fire department with five trucks, including a brand-new Spartan engine and a water/ice rescue boat.

Celebrating its 150th birthday in 2018, the township is planning sesquicentennial festivities this month.



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