

Michigan Township Focus

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

Townships and America's 250th



250 years of the American experiment
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250 years of the American experiment

This year, as we prepare to celebrate Independence Day, there will be the familiar traditions of grilling out, parades, celebrating with our friends and families, and watching fireworks. While those traditions are important and are a part of the commemoration of our independence as a nation, this year is a little more special.

It is hard to know what our founding fathers thought as they signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and if they even thought our country would survive for 250 years. If time travel were possible, they may have been shocked to see how advanced our military and technology in general have become. Perhaps, they would marvel at how our borders have expanded from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, and that we survived a civil war and put a manned spacecraft on the moon. Hopefully, they would feel a sense of satisfaction that we have survived for 250 years as a democratic republic. One could guess that they might detest the seemingly endless campaign commercials we see on television!

Over 250 years as nation have tested the boundaries of our democratic republic. Slavery, civil war, expanding the right to vote, two world wars, the impeachment and resignation of a president, hanging chads and a presidency settled by the U.S. Supreme Court, global pandemics, and an insurrection at the Capitol are just a few of the occasions that have challenged our nation. Through it all, we remain able to determine our representation at every level of government through safe, secure and democratically held elections.

This is the beauty of our nation and the strength of townships. Just as we determine our representation of our government officials, we also choose where we would like to live based on the dynamics of each community. Townships are the ultimate places of freedom as each one of Michigan's 1,240 townships is unique. Residents determine who is elected in each township and, as the closest form of government to the people, township leaders need to be particularly in tune with the needs and desires of the people who live there. One township may have robust parks, public safety, libraries and other services, and another may choose to have the smallest amount of government services possible. There is no "one-size-fits-all" regarding townships in Michigan, and it is incumbent upon us to protect the freedoms offered by township government.

As we celebrate Independence Day in 2026, we should take a moment to reflect on the rich history of our nation, and all our nation's accomplishments and freedoms over these 250 years. It is vital that we do not forget how important townships are to our nation's history and the critical role we will play well into the future. Happy Independence Day and happy 250th, America!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Hickson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

It is vital that we do not forget how important townships are to our nation's history and the critical role we will play well into the future.

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allied service provider index



president's round table

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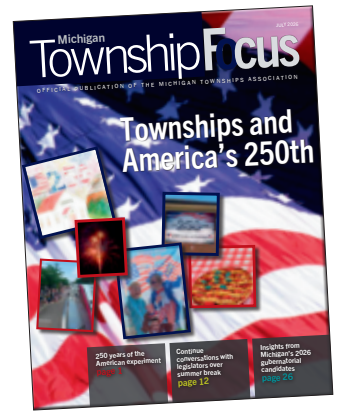
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mission statement

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



featured articles

18 Townships and America's 250th

July 4, 2026, marks the 250th anniversary of the formal adoption of the Declaration of Independence. The form of government championed by Thomas Jefferson and that encapsulates “of the people, by the people and for the people”—township government—remains as vital and valuable today as it was centuries ago when our nation was born. As MTA celebrates townships, see how Michigan’s townships are celebrating our nation’s extraordinary semiquincentennial milestone.

26 Talking township issues with Michigan's 2026 gubernatorial primary candidates

To introduce our members to the 2026 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 major party candidates running for governor in the August primary questions on issues of importance to local government. We share their responses.



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HELP AT THE POLLS

Democracy MVP program helps recruit election workers

With early voting and the upcoming August primary and November general election, there is a critical need for poll workers, and townships may be struggling to find enough individuals to meet this need. The state’s “Democracy MVP” program aims to make it easier for individuals to learn more about and share their interest in becoming election workers—and shares information with clerks when individuals apply.

Share program details with individuals in your township and help attract more election workers to assist in your local elections (there is even a Democracy MVP toolkit to help you spread the word, including graphics and sample social media posts), available on michigan.gov/sos/elections/pollworker.

The program website allows individuals to complete an interest form online, explore an extensive election inspector resource library (including an “Election Worker Intro” video) and review frequently asked questions about this important role. It even allows individuals to sign up with a friend or as a group. After individuals apply through the Democracy MVP program, the local clerk is notified, allowing them to contact the new potential election worker to complete the application and hiring process.

The program also encourages individuals to apply directly with local clerk’s offices. Hiring and placement of election inspectors are determined by local clerks, not Democracy MVP.

Visit MTA’s “Elections Administration” webpage for more information and resources, including an MTA Fact Sheet, “Who Can Do What ... for Clerk and Elections Duties.” MTA-member township officials can find this, and numerous additional elections webpages on michigantownships.gov (via the “Answer Center” under the “Member” tab; member login is required).

UP TO THE CHALLENGE

Townships recognized for sustainability accomplishments

Eight townships were among the 68 Michigan communities celebrated by the Michigan Green Communities Challenge for their environmental efforts that help improve the quality of life for their residents. The recognized townships, counties, cities and villages—which collectively represent 5.6 million Michiganders—logged actions taken in 2025 related to community leadership in various areas, including energy efficiency, climate resilience, recycling, environmental stewardship, and more. MTA is a Michigan Green Communities partner.



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

“Sustainable communities are built through collaboration, strong partnerships, and—most importantly—local leadership and action,” said Julie Staveland, assistant division director for the Materials Management Division of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), which helps support the MGC program. “The communities we are recognizing today are leading by example through their commitment to sustainability and continuous improvement. Their efforts are strengthening community resilience, supporting economic development, and creating healthier environments for both people and the natural world.”

Michigan Green Communities is a sustainability networking, benchmarking and technical assistance program that guides and supports local government in creating a more environmentally and economically sustainable future for the state of Michigan. The program also helps communities to protect infrastructure and improve the quality of life for residents. The goal of this work is to create a more environmentally and economically sustainable future for Michigan.

The program is free and open to all local governments in Michigan. Learn more at migreengreencommunities.com.

MTA's lunchtime learning series, *Now You Know*, offers timely updates, insights from our experts and a chance to get your questions answered—all in just one hour! Don't miss our next episode held **Wednesday, July 15 from noon to 1 p.m.**

Summer Update: Legislative News from the Capitol



Join MTA's Government Relations team for an inside look at the most recent developments at the state Capitol. We'll break down the 2026 legislative session to date—including the state budget and revenue sharing—and provide updates on housing preemption legislation and property tax reform. Get the latest on key issues at the forefront, upcoming measures on the horizon and what they could mean for your role as a township official. Watch live on July 15, catch a recorded version later, or both! It's a great way to stay informed and ahead of the legislative tide.

Register online at bit.ly/NYKmta for just \$25* per session! Townships with an MTA Online subscription at the Premium level have **FREE** access to **EVERY** session for their entire township team!

To see a listing of past episodes available on demand, visit learn.michigantownships.org/nyk.

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MTA leadership participates in 'America's Town Hall'

Members of MTA's Board of Directors and staff brought the township message to our nation's capital in May, where they met with members of Michigan's congressional delegation to discuss key issues of importance to townships in Michigan and across the country.

MTA leadership were part of "America's Town Hall," a federal advocacy and educational event organized by our national organization, the National Association of Towns and Townships (NATaT). The event included a day of policy briefings, following by two days of advocacy meetings across Capitol Hill. The event allowed local officials to hear from federal agency leaders, policy experts and advocates on issues critical to America's smaller communities and rural local governments.

Joined by MTA Executive Director Tom Hickson and Director of Government Relations Judy Allen, MTA leaders shared insights and perspectives on critical federal issues, including digital access, transportation issues including direct funding for local roads and bridges and a realistic definition of rural, and tax priorities. Participating were 2026 MTA President **Kevin Beeson, Pine River Township** (Griot Co.) supervisor; Immediate Past President **Connie Cargill, Golden Township** (Oceana Co.) treasurer; First Vice President **Malinda Cole-Crocker, Buchanan Charter Township** (Berrien Co.) supervisor; Second Vice President **Marvin Radtke Jr., Green Lake Township** (Grand Traverse Co.) supervisor; Treasurer **Glenn Rowley, Bangor Charter Township** (Bay Co.) supervisor; and Secretary **Matt Beattie, Boon Township** (Wexford Co.) supervisor. The MTA delegation met with U.S. Reps. John Moolenaar (*pictured above, top*), Bill Huizenga (*pictured above, bottom*), Jack Bergman and Tom Barrett, and staff with U.S. Sen. Elissa Slotkin and U.S. Reps. Haley Stevens, Kristen McDonald-Rivet, Hillary Scholten (*pictured above, middle*) and Tim Walberg. MTA thanks the federal leaders for their interest in and support of Michigan's townships and the value of local government.



profile



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Want to place a classified in Township Focus or on michigantownships.org? Visit michigantownships.org/classified for more information, email ashley@michigantownships.org or call (517) 321-6467, ext. 254.

mta events | july

- 14 *Creating a Vision for Your Township and Linking with the Community* workshops, Bay City
- 15 *Strategic Planning for Townships* workshop, Bay City
- 15 MTA *Now You Know* lunchtime webinar: Summer Update: Legislative News from the Capitol



profile



Advertorial

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JULY

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

First Tuesday in July. Deadline for governmental agencies to exercise the right of refusal for 2026 tax foreclosure parcels. (MCL 211.78m(1))

6 Deadline for notice of early voting site for Aug. 4 election to be provided when temporary changes needed to early voting site. (If starting early voting before required date, deadline is 21 days before start of early voting.) (MCL 168.662)

Optional early voting may begin. (MCL 168.720e)

Deadline for notice of days and hours for voter registration for Aug. 4 election at clerk's office to be published in the newspaper. If considered advisable by the township clerk, notice may also be posted in at least two conspicuous places in each precinct. Notice must include offices and proposals that will be on the ballot. (MCL 168.498)

Deadline for clerk to post and enter into Qualified Voter File (QVF) the hours the clerk's office will be open on the Saturday or Sunday or both immediately before Aug. 4 election, and any additional locations and hours if applicable, to issue and receive absent voter (AV) ballots. (MCL 168.761b)

7 Clerks intending to process or tabulate AV ballots before Aug. 4 Election Day must submit written notice to the Secretary of State (if notice is not submitted by this date, tabulation before Aug. 4 Election Day is not permitted). (MCL 168.765a)

14 Deadline for precinct inspectors for Aug. 4 election to

be appointed by local election commission. (MCL 168.674)

Deadline for notice of polling place to be provided when temporary changes needed to Aug. 4 Election Day polling place. (MCL 168.662)

16 Deadline for candidates without political party affiliation seeking partisan offices to file qualifying petitions and Affidavit of Identity for Nov. 3 election. Withdrawal deadline elapses at 4 p.m. on July 20. (MCL 168.590c)

17 Deadline to post notice on township website (if available) and in clerk's office of the location, dates, hours and number of election inspectors for AV counting place if processing and tabulating AV ballots before Aug. 4 Election Day. (MCL 168.765a)

20 Deadline for public logic and accuracy test of early voting equipment to be conducted for Aug. 4 election by applicable election commission. (If starting early voting before required date, deadline is five days before start of early voting.) Notice of accuracy test must be published at least 48 hours before test. (MCL 168.720j; R 168.778; 168.798)

Deadline to register by mail or online and be eligible to vote in Aug. 4 election. (MCL 168.497)

21 *Tuesday after the third Monday in July.* July board of review may be convened. (MCL 211.53b) 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))

Registration for Aug. 4 election must be done in person with local clerk with proof of residency between this date and Election Day. (MCL 168.497)

Candidates for local school board and community college trustee have until 4 p.m. to file an Affidavit of Identity and a nonpartisan nominating petition. (A \$100 nonrefundable fee may be filed in lieu of a petition.) Withdrawal deadline elapses at 4 p.m. on July 24. (MCL 168.303)

23 Deadline for challenges against qualifying petitions or Affidavits of Identity filed by candidates without political party affiliation to be submitted to filing official. (MCL 168.552)

24 Deadline for clerks processing and tabulating AV ballots before Election Day to post revised notice of location, dates, hours or number of election inspectors if needed. (MCL 168.765a)

Write-in candidates' declaration of intent form for Aug. 4 election due to respective filing official by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.737a)

Until 5 p.m. Deadline for electors to submit written request to spoil their AV ballot and receive a new AV ballot for Aug. 4 election by mail. (MCL 168.765b(1))

Until 5 p.m. Deadline for electors who have returned their AV ballot for Aug. 4 election to submit a written request in person to spoil their AV ballot and receive a new AV ballot in the clerk's office. (MCL 168.765b(3))

25 Deadline for county clerks to deliver remainder of ballots and election supplies for Aug. 4 election to local clerks. (MCL 168.714)

First day of mandatory early voting for Aug. 4 election. (Mich. Const., Art. II, Sec. 4)

27 Townships with a population of at least 5,000 with an established AV counting board that have provided timely notice they will preprocess and

tabulate AV ballots may begin processing and tabulating AV ballots. (MCL 168.765a)

28 Deadline to publish notice of Aug. 4 election. One notice required. (MCL 168.653a)

By 4 p.m. Deadline for petitions to place county or local question on Nov. 3 ballot to be filed with applicable local or county clerk. (MCL 168.646a)

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

Beginning of period when clerk must verify or reject AV ballot application or AV ballot return envelope by the end of the calendar day the application or envelope is received for Aug. 4 election. (MCL 168.766b)

By 31 Form 170-CFT, *Commercial Facilities Tax Report*, Form 170-CRA, *Commercial Rehabilitation Act Tax Report*, Form 170-OPRA, *Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act Tax Report* and Form 170-IFT, *Industrial Facilities Tax Report* must be filed with Michigan Department of Treasury Property Services Division on or before July 31 of the year following the tax year involved.

Clerk must post on website (if available) the location where precinct canvass of early votes for the township will take place for Aug. 4 election and time precinct canvass will begin. (Canvass cannot begin before 8 p.m. on Election Day.) (MCL 168.720j)

Eligible township that establishes Election Day vote center for Aug. 4 election must post notice of establishment and location of vote center on

website (if available) and in clerk's office. (MCL 168.523b)

Until 4 p.m. Deadline for applicant to cure a signature deficiency on the application to receive an AV ballot by first-class mail. (MCL 168.761)

Until 5 p.m. Deadline for clerks to send AV ballot via first-class mail. (MCL 168.761)

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

AUGUST

By 1 Deadline for township or local authority to file Form 5608, *Portion of 2025 Essential Services Millage Rate Dedicated for the Cost of Essential Services*. (MCL 123.1353(7))

Deadline for a municipality to file Form 5613, *Millage Rate Correction for the 2026 Personal Property Tax Reimbursement Calculations*. (MCL 123.1358(4))

1 *By 2 p.m.* Deadline for military or overseas voter (MOVE) to submit AV ballot application for Aug. 4 election. (MCL 168.759a(10))

2 Last day of mandatory early voting period. (Early voting may be held on the Monday before Election Day until 4 p.m.) (Mich. Const., Art. II, Sec. 4)

3 Township with an established AV counting board, which has provided timely notice that they will preprocess and tabulate AV ballots, may begin processing and tabulating AV ballots. (MCL 168.765a)

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

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

4 Election. (MCL 168.641)

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

Emergency absentee voting ends at 4 p.m. (Begins Friday, July 31 at 5 p.m.) (MCL 168.759b)

5 Early voting configuration sets for tabulators for Nov. 3 election must be selected. (MCL 168.720j)

Township that establishes an Election Day vote center for November election must inform applicable county clerk. (MCL 168.523b)

6 Boards of county canvassers meet to canvass Aug. 4 election by 9 a.m. (MCL 168.821)

7 *By 5 p.m.* Voter must cure signature on AV ballot return envelope, allowing an otherwise valid ballot to be accepted for tabulation for Aug. 4 election. (MCL 168.766)

10 Deadline for a ballot submitted by a MOVE voter and postmarked on or before Aug. 4 to be deemed timely received and counted. (Mich. Const., Art. II, Sec. 4)

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

Ballot wording of proposals qualified to appear on November ballot certified to local or county clerks by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.646a)

13 Local clerks receiving ballot wording for Nov. 3 election must forward to county clerk. (MCL 168.646a)

14 *Aug. 15 is a Saturday.* Deadline to certify 2026 essential services assessment statement and electronically submit essential services assessment in full to the state Department of Treasury without late payment penalty. (MCL 211.1057(3))

18 Deadline for boards of county canvassers to complete canvass of Aug. 4 election; county clerks forward results to Secretary of State within 24 hours. (MCL 168.822)

20 Beginning of period for regular inspection of AV drop boxes to ensure compliance with requirements for Nov. 3 election. (MCL 168.761d)

Beginning of period for required video monitoring of AV drop boxes (applies to all drop boxes, regardless of when they were purchased or installed). (MCL 168.761d)



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What is the 'ADA'?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The ADA applies to townships and affects all areas of public life. Perhaps the most well-known ADA rules concern physical access to spaces, such as automatic doors, ramps for wheelchair access, and other building requirements. But the ADA applies to other aspects of township government as well, including accommodations for public meetings, modifications to the township's website, and more.

What kind of accommodations does the township need to provide at meetings?

Public meetings are a hallmark of local government, where township officials deliberate and decide on some of the most important issues affecting our residents. It is therefore very important (and required by law!) that township meetings accommodate all residents, including those with disabilities. At a baseline, this means ensuring that the meeting room is physically accessible to those with disabilities.

Beyond the physical access requirements, the most common requests for accommodation at public meetings involve the hearing- or visually-impaired. For someone with partial hearing loss, the township may be required to provide auxiliary aids such as microphones or headphones to amplify sound. For someone with total hearing loss, the township may need to provide a sign language interpreter. For residents with partial or total vision loss, the township may need to provide audio recordings of printed materials being considered by the board. These are just a few examples—disabilities can range in type, severity and effect, and may require additional accommodations to satisfy the ADA. For any questions on a specific accommodation request or issue, you should contact your township attorney.

Are there other types of accommodation I need to provide at a meeting?

There are a wide range of accommodations that can be requested and may be required at a meeting. As one example, on April 7, 2026, the Michigan Court of Appeals issued an opinion regarding ADA accommodations for public comment during a meeting. In this case, *Blackwell v City of Inkster*, the plaintiff is paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair, which makes it very difficult to attend public

meetings in-person. Because the plaintiff cannot appear in person at meetings and give oral public comment, he asked that the city read his pre-submitted written statements aloud during the meeting. The city initially agreed to read his statements during normal public comment time, but then stopped. The plaintiff sued to compel the city to read his comments out loud.

The Court of Appeals held that under the Persons With Disabilities Civil Rights Act (Michigan's version of the ADA), the city is effectively required to read the plaintiff's pre-submitted public comment out loud during the public comment period as an accommodation for his disability. The court stated that merely placing the written comments into the board member packets or posting them online was insufficient, and that all citizens, regardless of disability, must be given an opportunity to have their comments spoken aloud at a meeting. The court further stated that such comments were still subject to standard public comment rules, including any time limitations. Further questions on this case or its implications for your township should be directed to your township attorney.

How do I know if I need to provide accommodations at meetings?

Townships are not required to provide all forms of accommodation at every meeting—generally, townships only need to provide an accommodation to those who ask for it. But townships should make the public aware of the availability of accommodations and give them a means to request it. The best way to notify the public is to include an ADA accommodation notice in all of the township's public hearing or public meeting notices. MTA provides a sample ADA accommodation statement, which is as follows:

The _____ Township Board will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired and audio recordings of printed materials being considered at the meeting, to individuals with disabilities at the meeting or public hearing upon ____-day notice to the _____ Township Board. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact the Township Board by writing or calling the following: (*List the name, title and telephone number of the contact person; usually the township clerk.*)

When determining the number of days' notice required, the township should ensure that the public has a fair opportunity to ask for accommodations, but also give enough time to arrange for those accommodations if a request is made.



I heard something about the ADA and websites. Can you explain?

This is true—under new U.S. Department of Justice rules, townships must ensure that their websites, mobile apps, social media content and certain online documents are accessible to individuals with disabilities. For most Michigan townships (those with populations under 50,000), the compliance deadline is April 26, 2028. Larger communities (above 50,000 population) must comply by April 26, 2027. Although those dates may seem distant, accessibility work often requires significant planning, technical review, and coordination with vendors and staff.

The governing standard is WCAG 2.1 AA, which is intended to make digital content usable for people with visual, auditory, motor and cognitive disabilities. In practice, that means eliminating common barriers such as scanned PDFs, text embedded in images, poor color contrast, inaccessible forms, missing captions or transcripts, and websites that cannot be navigated by keyboard or screen reader.

The risks of noncompliance are substantial, including lawsuits, financial penalties, increased insurance costs and negative public attention. But accessibility is not simply about avoiding liability—it is about ensuring that all residents can meaningfully access the information and services their local government provides.

Most importantly, accessibility is not a one-time fix. Once a site is updated, staff and content managers must be trained to keep new materials accessible going forward.

Find additional information about the ADA website requirements in the February 2026 Township Focus cover story (note that the article was published prior to the deadline extension), as well as on MTA's "Website Development" webpage in the "Answer Center" under the "Member" tab on michigantownships.org (login is required).

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



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Got township questions? MTA has answers!

MTA's Member Information Services (MIS) staff—which includes an attorney and three former local government officials—is available to answer your questions on all facets of township governance and administration. Our MIS team is here to help you, providing information on township operations and responding to requests for information from member township officials and personnel. Contact the MIS Department with questions Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call (517) 321-6467 (press option 1), fax to (517) 321-8908 or email:

- **MTA Director of Member Information Services**
Michael Selden: michael@michigantownships.org
- **MTA Staff Attorney Catherine Mullhaupt:**
catherine@michigantownships.org
- **MTA Member Information Services Liaison Judy Bigney:**
judyb@michigantownships.org
- **MTA Member Information Services Associate**
Shelly Schneider: shellys@michigantownships.org

Find additional township resources on the "Answer Center" on michigantownships.org, where hundreds of pages of samples, information, links and more offer insights and guidance at your fingertips (member login is required).



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Dec. 1 is new term of office date for township officials



All elected township officials will soon have their term of office begin no earlier than Dec. 1 following the November general election. Public Act 19 of 2026, sponsored by Sen. Jeremy Moss (D-Bloomfield Twp.), will change the term of office for all elected township officers to commence at noon on Dec. 1 following the officer's

November election. The new law is part of a four-bill package to ensure elected officials' election results are certified prior to taking the oath of office. The package also moves the start date for all newly elected city and village officials to Dec. 1.

The legislation has been discussed in previous sessions, but never received final approval. The measure was signed into law on June 22 and had immediate effect.

Updates on the state budget, property tax reform and housing preemption legislation

As of *Township Focus* press time, the Legislature was working to finalize the state's fiscal year **2026-2027 budget**, but details were unavailable as subcommittees and conference committees had yet to complete their work on the budget framework agreed to by leadership in the House and Senate and the administration. Watch MTA's *Township Insights* weekly newsletter for updates on the budget and enabling legislation.

It was expected that the **property tax reform proposal** passed by the House in May would not be part of the final budget implementation measures. MTA opposed two of the bills in the proposal, House Bill 5872 that would eliminate the uncapping or "pop-up" tax when the property is sold and HB 5878 that would eliminate ALL personal property taxes (including utility personal property taxes), due to the funding reductions and the substantial long-term fiscal impacts they would impose on local units of government. MTA continues to work to ensure any reform proposal includes full reimbursement along with a growth component to maintain critical services for communities long term.

Several bills intended to increase **affordable housing** in



Michigan were also in final consideration including creating a state low-income housing tax credit that would align with the federal income tax credit housing tax credit and bills to allow a multiple-family dwelling unit with up to four levels above grade plane to have a single interior exit stairway if the unit met specific conditions.

The nine-bill housing package to preempt local zoning authority and community based decision-making opposed by MTA are still pending. The legislation would significantly restrict local authority by preempting local decision-making on key zoning issues, including duplexes, accessory dwelling units, minimum setbacks, lot sizes, and dwelling unit sizes. *MTA urges members to take the opportunity over the summer months and before the election to continue talking with their legislators about the various infrastructure capacity, housing markets and factors impacting your community.* Michigan is not a one-size-fits-all state and overriding local zoning does not build new homes or improve affordability—it undermines local governance without a guarantee of success.

We will continue to provide updates for our members through *Township Focus* and *Townships Insights*, as well as our website and social media.

COA ruling in PA 233 renewable energy lawsuit appealed to state Supreme Court

An application for leave to appeal has been filed in the state Supreme Court, seeking to reverse the Michigan Court of Appeals opinion in early May in the case *In re Implementing Provisions of Public Act 233 of 2023*.

The case continues the efforts of dozens of local governments challenging certain provisions of an order issued by the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) concerning renewable energy legislation and local regulation.

In May, the Court of Appeals affirmed some parts of the MPSC's order and struck down other parts. Public Act 233 of 2023—which largely shifted siting of utility-scale renewable energy facilities to the state commission, unless a township adopted a "compatible renewable energy ordinance" with limitations on requirements—remains in effect.

MTA's Legal Defense Fund Committee was scheduled to meet just after *Township Focus* press time to consider a request to file an *amicus* brief in the appeal. MTA Legal Counsel filed a brief in support of townships on behalf of MTA when the case was before the Court of Appeals. Watch MTA publications for updates.



Legislative lowdown

A look at critical bills MTA is following as they move through the legislative process. Watch for updates in MTA's weekly newsletter, *Township Insights*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SB 120: Elections—Modifies process for voting without identification for election purposes to include proof of identity and proof of state residency. *MTA monitoring.*

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

SB 145: Employment—Prohibits an employer from seeking or asking certain information about a job applicant's

compensation history and credit history. *MTA monitoring.*

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

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

SB 246 & HB 4393: Landfills—Increases fees and surcharges for the disposal of solid waste, hazardous waste and naturally occurring radioactive material (TENORM), and limits certain disposal wells and TENORM disposal. *MTA supports.*

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

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

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

SB 278 & HBs 4539-4540: Housing—Modifies and expands the Housing and Community Development Fund to make financing available to middle-income households. *MTA supports.*

SBs 280-281: Recreation Passport—Makes state Recreation Passport fee mandatory for all vehicles, and modifies park passes for Recreation Passport and nonresident motor vehicle. *MTA monitoring.*

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

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

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

SB 319 & HB 5290: Collective bargaining—Requires minimum staffing levels within a bargaining unit

to be a mandatory subject of collective bargaining. *MTA opposes.*

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

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

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

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

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

SB 468: Elections—Prohibits use of electronic voting systems that contain certain parts or equipment. *MTA monitoring.*

SBs 484-485: Property taxes—Amends existing authority for land bank funding to increase property tax exemption period from five to eight years and add all parcels foreclosed and sold at auction or claimed under the right of first refusal. *MTA opposes.*

SBs 597-598: Marijuana—Places limit on number of marijuana retailer and medical marijuana provisioning center licenses. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 621: Elections—Clarifies the definition of identification for election purposes to exclude mobile licenses. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 624: Liquor licenses—Requires local legislative body approval for a specially designated merchant license or specially designated distributor license. *MTA supports.*

SB 691: Elections—Moves statewide primary election to May, eliminates August election date and adds February election date. *MTA neutral.*

SBs 721-722 & HBs 5305-5306: Economic development—Extends sunset for Commercial Redevelopment Act and Commercial Rehabilitation Act. *MTA supports.*

SBs 761-763: Data centers—Amends limits on water withdrawals and provides for energy and water usage report requirements for data centers. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 792: Economic development—Modifies Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act and extends sunset. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 793: Economic development—Modifies the industrial facility tax for plant rehabilitation. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 796: Appropriations—Provides funding for PFAS mitigation and water safety. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 817: Environmental contamination—Provides location guidelines for wastewater discharge. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 818: Environmental protection—Provides for guidelines on location of landfills. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 820: Elections—Allows consolidated precincts for certain local elections. *MTA supports.*

SB 829: Natural Resources Trust Fund—Provides funding for natural resources trust fund capital outlay projects. *MTA supports.*

SBs 898-899: Economic development—Modifies environmental brownfield redevelopment program. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 900 & HB 4644: Traffic regulation—Allows operation of golf carts on streets and county roads in municipalities with population under 65,000. *MTA neutral.*

SBs 934-939: Mobile homes—Modernizes and strengthens regulation of mobile home parks, revises licensing and enforcement and provides for resident protections. *MTA neutral.*

SBs 950-951: Water—Provides for the Michigan Water Trust Fund and requires permit and license for water withdrawal for water bottling. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 960: Local government—Provides process to vacate certain deed restrictions. *MTA supports.*

SB 961 & HB 5969: Elections—Creates State Voting Rights Act. *MTA opposes.*

SB 962 & HB 5970: Elections—Creates Voting and Elections Database and Institute Act. *MTA supports.*

SB 963 & HB 5971: Elections—Creates Language Assistance for Elections Act. *MTA neutral.*

SB 964 & HB 5972: Elections—Provides for voter access and assistance provisions. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 971: Land sales—Regulates the purchase of residential homes by investors. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 983: Taxation—Allows local units to levy excise tax on rentals of accommodations if approved by electors. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 985: Land use—Prohibits a local unit from adopting or enforcing a zoning ordinance that regulates land development for residential use. *MTA opposes.*

SB 988: Property tax—Increases the number of days from 30 to 35 days to appeal a claim for a poverty exemption to the Michigan Tax Tribunal. *MTA monitoring.*

SBs 1018-1019: Data centers—Provides for statewide moratorium on certain approvals for and the operation of any new data centers. *MTA monitoring.*

SBs 1046-1051: Data centers—Requires water and use permitting, energy contracts and ratepayer protection, labor standards for construction of data centers, prohibits nondisclosure agreements for public officials, requires community input processes and requires Michigan Public Service Commission to track and energy use by data centers. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 1053: Neighborhood Enterprise Zones—Increases percentage, from 15% of a local government's total acreage to 20%, for the maximum acreage allowed of neighborhood enterprise zones (NEZ) containing only new or rehabilitated facilities and NEZs containing only homestead facilities. *MTA supports.*

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

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

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

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

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

HB 4085: Land use—Preempts local zoning for mining cryptocurrency. *MTA opposes.*

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

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

HBs 4311-4312 & SBs 559-561: Revenue Sharing Trust Fund—Establishes a "Revenue Sharing Trust Fund" and dedicates a portion of general sales tax revenue to the fund for the purpose of distributing to townships, cities, villages and counties. *MTA supports.*

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

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

HB 4342: Revenue sharing—Provides for withholding of revenue sharing payments to townships, cities and

villages for enactment and enforcement of certain sanctuary policies. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4397: Public records—Creates a new act to allow legislators, current or former governors, and current lieutenant governor, attorney general and secretary of state to request a public body not publicly post or release certain information concerning themselves or their family members. *MTA monitoring.*

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

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

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

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

HB 4707: Elections—Prohibits ranked choice voting procedures. *MTA monitoring.*

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

HB 4757: Local government financing—Modifies financing requirements for investment of surplus funds of political subdivisions. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4763: Public employees—Modifies definition of “public safety officer” in Public Safety Officers Benefit Act to include certain medical examiners and part-time firefighters. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 4787-4788: Personal property taxes—Provides a personal property tax exemption for certain utility personal property and creates a specific tax on said personal property. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4799: Property taxes—Requires the postmark date to be determining date when property taxes are paid and other communications and notifications are provided by taxpayer. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4801: Property taxes—Exempts a qualified residential child day care from collection of property taxes. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4949: Shooting ranges—Expands liability exemptions for sport shooting ranges. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5057: Housing—Mandates director of the state Construction Code Commission to discuss and recommend modifications to construction code to allow for triplexes, quadplexes, five-plexes or six-plexes in certain residential structures. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 5079-5080: Crimes—Increases penalties and provides sentencing guidelines for disarming a law enforcement officer of a firearm if accomplished by force or if law enforcement officer is injured. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 5103: Natural resources—Authorizes temporary erosion control structures without permit during high water levels. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 5123 & SB 719: Franchise fees—Modifies definition of video service. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5192: Local government—Prohibits local government use of funds to hire certain lobbyists. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5225: Property taxes—Modifies eligibility level for a summer property tax deferral. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 5233: Labor—Requires up to 26 days of annual paid military leave for certain members of a fire department or law enforcement agency. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5246: Property tax—Requires parcels used to cultivate marijuana to be classified as commercial real property under the General Property Tax Act. *MTA supports.*

HBs 5319-5332: Drones—Regulates or prohibits use of drones in certain areas, prohibits purchase or use of certain drones by the state and public agencies, requires cybersecurity and data protection for drones, creates database of restricted zones and flight paths for unmanned vehicles, and provides penalties for using unmanned vehicles in a restricted zone or flight path. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 5333: Landfills—Increases civil, administrative and criminal fines on the owners and operators of a landfill who violate state statute. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 5396-5398: Sales and use taxes—Eliminates sales and use tax exemptions for data centers. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 5399: Public employees and officers—Prohibits local officials from signing nondisclosure agreements related to the construction of data centers. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 5450: Food trucks—Prohibits a county, city, village or township from adopting a rule, regulation, code or ordinance that imposes or collects a fee, tax or assessment for the operation of a mobile food establishment. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5451: Food trucks—Provides for annual fire inspections for food trucks. *MTA neutral.*

HB 5452: Criminal procedure—Modifies sunset on certain costs that may be imposed upon criminal conviction. *MTA supports.*

HB 5467: Elections—Provides deadline for putting replacement candidate on ballot to fill certain candidate vacancies due to death, withdrawal or disqualification. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 5468: Elections—Amends information required on nominating petitions and qualifying petitions to no longer require a candidate’s street address. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 5488-5489: Emergency medical services personnel—Allows licensure of medical first responders and emergency medical technicians at 17 years of age. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 5529-5530: Land use—Prohibits local ordinances from requiring a minimum parcel or lot size greater than 1,500 square feet for single-family residence. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5531: Land use—Limits required studies and documents for site plan approval and establishes a 60-day decision clock after receipt of an application. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5536: Natural resources—Amends the definition of wetlands. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 5572-5573: Property tax—Modifies exemption for real and personal property owned by a nonprofit corporation to include continuing care community. *MTA opposes.*

HBs 5574-5575: Crimes—Prohibits and provides penalties for intimidating or harassing an individual based on actual or perceived employment as a first responder. *MTA supports.*

HB 5581: Land use—Prohibits minimum area requirement greater than 500 square feet for a dwelling. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5582: Land use—Mandates parking requirements at no more than one space per dwelling unit for multi-family residential use of property and allows mobile homes in any residential zone. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5583: Land use—Mandates setback requirements at 15 feet or less from the front property line and five feet from the sides and rear for dwellings or outbuildings if the local unit of government is located in whole or part within a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) or is located adjacent to an MSA area. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5584: Land use—Creates a statewide definition of “duplex” and

mandates duplexes are a permitted use in any district where single-family residences are allowed. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5585: Land use—Creates a statewide definition of “accessory dwelling unit” (ADU), mandates ADUs be permitted by right in residential zoning districts and not subject to a public hearing, and requires mobile homes be allowed in any residential zone. *MTA opposes.*

HBs 5594-5595: Data centers—Provides for moratorium on certain approvals for and operation of any new data centers. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 5647: Property tax—Allows for county equalization department staff to perform township assessments. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 5660-5661: Housing—Creates the MI Home program and allows the Michigan State Housing Development Authority administration and operation of the MI home program and funds under the act. *MTA supports.*

HBs 5696 & 5945: Property taxes—Excludes property used to cultivate

marihuana from personal property tax exemption and revised definition of qualified agricultural property. *MTA supports.*

HB 5717: Elections—Allows township to contract with an accredited individual to perform election law duties in the absence of township clerk. *MTA supports.*

HB 5872: Property tax—Eliminates uncapping of taxable value for transfers of property. *MTA opposes.*

HB 5878: Property tax—Eliminates all personal property tax. *MTA opposes.*

HBs 5928-5929: Land sales—Prohibits use of residential property by certain businesses and modifies definition of a crime. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 6074: Land sales—Prohibits purchase of residential property by certain businesses. *MTA monitoring.*

HJR A: Property tax—Eliminates uncapping of taxable value for transfers of property. *MTA opposes.*

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Townships and America's 250th

July 4, 2026, marks the 250th anniversary of the formal adoption of the Declaration of Independence—the founding fathers' statement of freedom against British rule and belief in “certain unalienable rights” in the burgeoning country, among them “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” And the form of government that encapsulates “of the people, by the people and for the people”—township government—remains as vital and valuable today as it was centuries ago when our nation and states were born.

More so than any other form of local government, towns and townships are rooted in rural and small-town traditions. New England towns of the 17th century were the first English-style local governments on the American continent, with Virginia counties running a close second. The nation owes many of its present ideas of local self-governance to these colonial organizations, including the town meeting and the election of citizens to individual offices and boards. From New England, town government—in one form or another—spread south and west to several mid-Atlantic states and most of the Midwest.

Thomas Jefferson's vision of a new America

Township governments were actually in place in most of the Midwestern states before they achieved statehood. A strong advocate of government led by the people, Thomas Jefferson urged the Continental Congress to use the township model to settle the Northwest Territories. The Northwest

Ordinance of 1787 was enacted by Congress to establish the initial government of the territory that eventually became the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin. Thanks to Jefferson's vision, as America grew, the concept of self-governance would take root. As early as 1790, Michigan land descriptions using the rectangular (acreage) system were beginning to divide the territory into 36-square-mile numbered “survey townships.”

As people settled in the new territory, they began to organize the survey townships (or parts or combinations thereof) into townships with local government authority legally established by acts of the Legislative Council of the Territory of Michigan, which was the territory's governing body from 1824 to 1835. The first townships were formed in several counties across what is now Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin (before the “Toledo War” of 1835-1836).

“An Act to divide the several Counties in this Territory into Townships, and for other purposes,” approved April 12, 1827,



created the first 33 named townships in 10 counties, identifying the homes, courthouses (including one on the Island of Michilimackinac), schoolhouses, taverns and forts where the first meetings would be held. It also declared the townships “to be bodies politic and corporate, for the purpose of enjoying and exercising the rights and privileges which are or shall be by law given to them.” Another “Act to regulate the duties and privileges of townships” established the first laws regarding township government.

Securing independence and authority

In Alexis De Tocqueville’s famous work, 1835’s *Democracy in America*, the French philosopher and historian reflected on the virtues of the fledging democracy, particularly noting the strength of the small, self-governing form of representation. He stated, “In the township ... the people is the only source of power; but in no stage of government does the body of citizens exercise a more immediate influence.” He further wrote, “In America, not only do municipal bodies exist, but they are kept alive and supported by public spirit. The township ... possesses two advantages which infallibly secure the attentive interest of mankind, namely, independence and authority.”

When Michigan became a state in 1837, the new state’s Constitution empowered townships to provide the services necessary to address the basic concerns of health, safety and welfare of their residents. The principal functions of early townships involved relief for the poor, cemetery maintenance, road development, assigning damages caused by stray horses and cattle, and fence viewing to determine the responsibilities of adjoining livestock owners. Assessment rolls for road construction generally involved assessing against the

benefitted property owner a certain number of days to work upon the construction or improvement of a specific road, rather than an amount of money. If the property owner was unable to perform the labor, he or she was required to hire someone to fulfill the assessment.

Since those early years, the population of Michigan has grown from almost 400,000 in 1850 to more than 10 million today. Naturally, with such population growth, the authorities and responsibilities of townships have expanded over the years in order to handle the increased demands for services and township government involvement. Throughout this time, townships have endured and thrived—even surviving an abolition attempt during the 1963 state Constitutional Convention (local government consolidation efforts in the years leading up to the Con-Con were the impetus for the forming of the Michigan Townships Association in 1953).

Thomas Jefferson’s vision of the “perfect government institution” provides as much value today as it did 250 years ago—perhaps even more so. Local government—and particularly township government—remains the most accessible and effective representative government. Protecting and nurturing that noble charge 250 years in the making remains MTA’s purpose on behalf of our members and the millions of residents they serve—remaining true to Thomas Jefferson’s vision yesterday, today and tomorrow. Just as MTA continues to celebrate townships and local democracy, townships throughout the state are celebrating America’s 250th birthday. Read on for some of these celebrations.

Information shared from Grassroots Governments and the People They Serve, from the National Association of Towns and Townships, and MTA publications, including Authorities & Responsibilities of Michigan Townships.

'A true hometown celebration'

Every year in **Bessemer Township** (Gogebic Co.), residents and visitors alike gather for the annual "Rumble Over the River" Independence Day celebration. That rumble could refer to one of several things: the dancing feet of those young and old alike during the street dance, the lively performance by—and cheering audience response to—the popular local drum and bugle corps Marty's Goldenaires, or the boom of the fireworks display that closes out the day.



Whichever way you look at it, it's a celebration of community and our nation—and one that will help celebrate America's 250th birthday this year.

A small group of dedicated volunteers works for months to plan the annual event, which draws over 1,000 people to the township located near the Michigan-Wisconsin border in the far western Upper Peninsula. In addition to the dance, music and fireworks, the four-hour community party includes a 50-50 raffle, food trucks, and children's activities

like face painting, balloon animals and chalk art. It's always held on July 2—with the evening specifically set aside as a break in activities during the City of Bessemer's "Bessemer Blast," which includes seven days of festivities and the biggest Independence Day celebration in the Upper Peninsula.

A lifelong Bessemer Township resident, **Jody Jurakovich** can recall local July 4 celebrations when she was a child. Now, she is president of the Bessemer Township/Ramsay 4th of July Committee, helping to coordinate the event that continues to be an annual tradition today. "I grew up in Bessemer Township, I live in Bessemer Township," she said. "I wanted to help the community."

Jurakovich can sum up the "Rumble" in three words: "Community and families," she said. "There's food, there's laughter, there's the band. It's fun. A lot of families get together, and a lot of people come home, too, for the Fourth of July. You get a lot of families, classmates. It's seeing everybody that you don't normally get to see on a day-to-day basis. It's nice."

People even cross the state border to attend the township gathering, with some coming from Wisconsin towns to take part in the fun. "You get people from everywhere," Jurakovich said.

"It pulls in a lot of people," echoed township Fire Chief **Steven Selin**. "The community loves it, they really do."

The township fire department is also involved in the event, hosting its second fundraiser of the year throughout the evening.

Clerk **Hope Tarnaski** calls Jurakovich and Selin "the heart and soul of the Bessemer Township celebration. Without their dedication, we would not be able to have a celebration," she said.

Before dusk falls and an impressive fireworks display lights up the sky, Marty's Goldenaires take the stage. Among the 100 members of the parade and concert corps, affiliated with Bessemer's American Legion Post 27, are residents from throughout Gogebic County, including Bessemer Township. "They are like rock stars and have a huge community following," said Tarnaski, whose son is a past Goldenaire. The band—believed to be the only American Legion-sponsored corps in the country—also helped the nation celebrate America's 250th when it was selected to represent Michigan in the U.S. National Memorial Day Parade, where it performed before 300,000 attendees in Washington, DC.

The "Rumble Over the River" sees a great deal of community support, with a donor list of more than three dozen local businesses and organizations. In addition to the fire department, the township and its officials pitch in, including its department of public works that helps prep Ramsay Memorial Park and surrounding areas for the influx of visitors. "We have such great support from the township," said Jurakovich.

It's a day that makes the community proud—and typifies Michigan's townships. "It is a true hometown celebration displaying talents that we are proud of," said Tarnaski. "Isn't that what the grassroots of township government is really all about?"

A celebration of patriotism, history and unity

On June 26, **Elmwood Charter Township** (Leelanau Co.) joined communities across the nation in commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States of America with a family-focused celebration designed to honor our nation's past while inspiring future generations.

The Elmwood Township 250th Anniversary Celebration took place at Cherry Bend Community Park, bringing together residents, businesses, veterans, farmers, children, community organizations and visitors for an evening of patriotism, music, history and community pride.

Leading the effort was Event Chair and Township Harbormaster **Dan Jenuwine**, whose vision for the



celebration extends beyond simply marking a historic milestone. “The driving force behind this event is to help our young people understand what patriotism feels like,” said Jenuwine. “Many of us grew up with a strong appreciation for our country, our freedoms, our veterans and our communities. We want this celebration to create an experience where children and young adults can see, hear and feel that pride for themselves.”

The evening began with family activities and community gathering opportunities before transitioning into a patriotic parade and concert. Highlights of the celebration include a children’s bicycle parade, a farm tractor parade honoring the townships agricultural heritage, a children’s community choir and a community sing-along, recognition of local veterans, and more.

The event, held just after *Township Focus* press time, was expected to draw residents from throughout the township and surrounding communities.

One of the evening’s most meaningful activities was the creation of an Elmwood Charter Township Time Capsule. Residents were encouraged to submit family letters, photographs and personal messages describing life in Elmwood Township today. The time capsule was buried during the celebration and is scheduled to be opened in 2076, when America celebrates its 300th anniversary.

“Imagine a child placing a family letter into the capsule today and their grandchildren opening it 50 years from now,” said Jenuwine. “It creates a direct connection between generations and preserves a snapshot of our community for the future.”

The celebration was made possible through the support of local businesses, volunteers, civic organizations, and residents who have contributed their time, talents and resources.

“This event belongs to the people of Elmwood Township,” said Jenuwine. “It has been inspiring to watch our residents, businesses, farmers, volunteers and community leaders come together to create something special. This is exactly what makes small-town America such a wonderful place to live.”

As the nation marks 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Elmwood Charter Township’s celebration serves as both a tribute to the past and an investment in the future. Organizers hope that long after the music ends and the festivities conclude, young people will leave with a greater appreciation for their country, their community and the responsibilities that come with citizenship.

“If a child leaves this event feeling proud to be an American, proud to be part of Elmwood Township, and inspired to contribute to their community, then we will have accomplished our goal,” said Jenuwine.

—Submitted by Dan Jenuwine

Patriotic pride on full display

Georgetown Charter Township (Ottawa Co.) is all decked out to celebrate America’s birthday—and to honor residents who have served our country. The township installed 48 veterans banners—which will continue to be displayed through Veterans Day—at its library and by the Veterans Memorial Plaza. In addition, the township decorated with extra flags in its business corridor, bunting on its entry sign and clock tower, and a large banner on the library.

Superintendent **Justin Stadt** noted that the township has received great feedback on its patriotic decorations. “In Georgetown Township, we are proud of our country and recognize that freedom is not free,” he said. “We celebrate the men and women who have fought for our freedom.”

The township also honored “250 years of Service and Sacrifice” during its 2026 Memorial Day celebration, with a two-day “Honoring Heroes” community event in its Rosewood Park, including a car show, food trucks, family activities, and local artists and makers. Following the Jenison Memorial Day Parade, a memorial service was held in the Georgetown Township Cemetery, with guest speaker City of Grandville Police Chief Paul Anglim, whose father was killed during combat operations in Vietnam. That experience guided Anglim career in public service and honoring those who have fallen in defense of others. Volunteers also laid hand-crafted commemorative tokens at interment locations of fallen heroes. As shared on the township’s website, “All of us play a role in keeping their legacies alive through service.”

Telling the story of today’s township

A June celebration will ripple for decades in **Hamburg Township** (Livingston Co.), where community members and local leaders gathered to bury their Community Time Capsule, filled with written submissions, photos, artwork and more shared by residents, reflecting the story of current life in the township.



Surrounding the capsule site is a new Legacy Circle, located outside the main entrance of the township hall. Personalized bricks encircle the area, bearing the names of residents and businesses who contributed to the township's shared history and legacy they leave behind for future generations. The capsule is scheduled to be opened in a quarter-century, on June 20, 2051.

"It's an enduring reminder to everybody," said Supervisor **Jason Negri**. "We did this. It's a one-time event, but it's going to be around for the next couple of decades to remind people of what we did and who we are."

"The whole point is a snapshot of what life is like in Hamburg at this point in time in 2026," he continued. "Far too few of us appreciate the lessons of history. In 25 years, who knows what sorts of changes we're going to have. For us to be able to paint that picture for the next generations is kind of cool."

The time capsule event was part of the township's America250 celebration and coincided with the last day of the Hamburg Family Fun Fest, a jam-packed, multi-day event in the township's Manly Bennett Park, which also included fireworks and a laser show honoring the nation's birthday. "Hopefully, there will be some synergy between the two events," said Negri, who spearheaded the 250th birthday festivities with a small committee of township staff and fellow board members.

The township created another lasting memento of the occasion: producing a brightly colored, detailed commemorative coin available for purchase (one is also included in the time capsule!), reflecting both the 250th birthday of America and the sealing of the time capsule. "It's something tangible to commemorate the day and the event," Negri said.



In addition to residents and community members, state and federal lawmakers attended the afternoon event. Attendees were also able to see township emergency vehicles on display, enjoyed hotdogs and ice cream, and sampled the homemade submissions for an apple pie contest (Supervisor Negri, Clerk **Mike Dolan** and Treasurer **Jennifer Daniels** were tapped with the sweet roles of serving as contest judges).

To Negri, Hamburg Township was the ideal place to celebrate community and county. "I'm pretty patriotic," he said. "I love this country and when I heard the idea of celebrating our semiquincentennial, I thought, 'What better place to do this than small town America?' This way of local government—people taking responsibility for their own communities—it really exemplifies this idea of American self-government."

Honoring 'We, the people'

Part of Macomb Township's (Macomb Co.) America250 celebration will endure long past the semiquincentennial. In addition to numerous summer activities to honor the country's birthday, the township also unveiled its new town square in front of the township hall. The improved space includes a water feature, etched with perhaps the most famous words in our nation's history: "We, the people."

The township has been working on numerous improvements over the past few years and received several grants, including a state placemaking grant, for the new square, whose completion coincided with the summer 2026 festivities. "We decided to unveil our new Liberty Fountain, which is the centerpiece of the new town square," said Supervisor **Frank Viviano**.

"Inside of the lower bowl of the fountain is a ring of letters with the 'We, the people ...' beginning part of the preamble of the U.S. Constitution, embedded permanently in our Liberty Fountain."

The reveal coincided with Viviano's 2026 State of the Township address on June 23. Two days later, the township kicked off its annual Concert in the Park series with a number of special additions to celebrate the nation's birthday. "Our whole A-250 celebration is really centered around this concert," said Viviano, noting the addition of numerous activities, including a performance by the 1st Michigan Colonial Fife & Drum Corps, a flyover from Selfridge Air Force base, singing of the national anthem, and a flag presentation with a local retired brigadier general participating in the flag raising. At the close of the night, attendees looked to the skies for an impressive fireworks display worthy of celebrating 250 years.

In the spring, the township also held an America250 poster contest, with submissions from children in the township. "We thought it was a nice way of getting some community input on the 250th-anniversary celebration and it turned out well," said Viviano, sharing that six winners were named in two categories: under 12, and 13 and older. The winning entries were turned into banners displayed on lamp poles throughout the township in June and July. The original works were displayed in the lobby of the township hall.

Coming together as community is a quintessential part of Macomb Township, Michigan's third-largest township with more than 96,000 residents, which Viviano describes as a "big community that operates like a small town."



“We always have a strong sense of patriotism in our local government,” he said. “Local government is sort of the embodiment of the great American experiment. We think it’s important to celebrate that, and want to reinforce our sense of duty and patriotism throughout our community.”

‘Let’s do something special’

In **Mills Township** (Ogemaw Co.), America’s semiquincentennial was the perfect inspiration to hold its first annual July 4 celebration—with hopes that the community event will continue into the future.

The township is known for its outdoor recreation, particularly fishing. In years past, the township had held fishing tournaments and winter ice festivals when lakes froze over, but those events had fallen by the wayside in recent years. The township does hold annual July 4 fireworks, but Clerk **Jackie Allen** was inspired by America250 to kick things up a notch. And the Mills Township 1st Annual Fourth of July Festival was born.

“Given that it’s going to be our country’s 250th anniversary, the board came up with the idea—in addition to our fireworks display—to hold a festival to go along with it,” said Allen, who has been clerk for just over a year. “Let’s do something special.”

Following enthusiastic discussion and approval at a board meeting, the township also worked with the local chamber of commerce and Optimist Club to garner their support and participation. The majority of coordination, however, is through the township, which will also festoon the area with patriotic décor including flags and banners.

The festival, to be held on Friday, July 3, kicks off with a parade and includes a full day of activities for children and the whole family, as well as live bands and food trucks, culminating with the fireworks display. There will be giveaways, a children’s bike raffle, pony rides and a petting zoo, and the township fire department will bring a fire truck for kids (and kids at heart!) to check out and distribute coloring books and safety information.

“It’s a big undertaking, and the board is hoping that it’s very successful and that we get a nice turnout,” Allen said.

In addition to township residents and community members, the festival will likely be a draw for the many downstate residents who have summer cottages in the area or visit on weekends to enjoy the Up North atmosphere and many lakes. Township officials believe that as many 5,000 people could join the festivities, which will be held in the township’s Newman Park.

The township also hopes the event will be beneficial for businesses along its Main Street. Many of those businesses, along with the county sheriff’s department and township fire department, will also take part in the morning parade, as they do with the township’s annual Halloween parade.

The community can look forward to a “fantastic, fun-filled” event,” said Allen, adding that the board already has visions of making future years even “bigger and better” and creating a township tradition for years to come.

‘A significant milestone—let’s celebrate it’

Fifteen months of planning will culminate in a day-long celebration of America’s 250th birthday for residents and community members of **Waterloo Township** (Jackson Co.).

The event, spearheaded by Clerk **Bill Richardson**, has been fully arranged by an eight-member volunteer committee and completely funded through contributions from residents and local businesses.

“It’s pretty amazing, in that regard,” said Richardson, a self-described “patriotic person,” who brought the celebratory idea to the township board for approval over a year ago and assembled a committee to brainstorm ideas to bring the community together for the historic day.

The advanced planning allowed the committee members to generate and plan for a wide range of activities for the 250-year anniversary celebration, held July 3 at the township hall. And plan they did, with activities ranging from a patriotic costume contest and colonial reenactors to family activities, like a classic potato sack race and t-shirt tie-dyeing, to food galore, music and more. Attendees will also be able to get up close to the enduring symbol of our nation, with a bald eagle encounter.

“That one’s really going to be a crowd pleaser, I think,” Richardson said, adding that the handler will share information and answer questions about the emblematic birds. “That one will be really neat.”

In addition to celebrating America, the township will also share some of its own history, with documents and artifacts, including some dating back to the late 1800s that were shared with Richardson by a couple who discovered a cache in the upstairs of a 100-year-old farmhouse they had recently purchased in the township. “We have one person who has a lot of historical knowledge of the township from way back when, and he’s going to share his insights at the event,” said Richardson.

Richardson created the township’s America250 celebration webpage more than a year ago to help spread the word to residents about the event. To ensure every household received word, the township also included information in the tax notices, created a Facebook page and discusses updates at township board meetings each month. Richardson is hopeful the day will be one of community and celebration, bringing together township residents to reflect on all that this country stands for.

“I have a lot of love for our country,” he said. “We are all blessed to have been born in this country, and in my mind we have a lot to be thankful for. I remember the bicentennial when I was just a kid growing up in Detroit. That was a big deal, and 250 years is a pretty significant milestone—we should celebrate it and be proud of our country.”



Celebrating democracy at the community block party

As America prepares to celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2026, **Watertown Charter Township** (Clinton Co.) Clerk **Carolyn Brokob** helped bring the spirit of democracy to life at a community block party in June.

With approximately 2,000 attendees enjoying the event, Brokob hosted an interactive booth designed to teach voting literacy and encourage civic engagement. Children participated in a special “Kids Vote” election, casting ballots for their favorite ice cream flavor, video game, book, and character. More than 80 votes were cast throughout the event, with election results shared periodically to create an engaging and interactive voting experience. (After the electorate had spoken, the winners were: Superman ice cream, Super Mario Bros. video game, Disney characters, and *Dog Man* for favorite book.)



The booth received overwhelmingly positive feedback from both parents and children, who enjoyed learning firsthand about the voting process and the importance of participating in our democracy. Visitors also had the opportunity to take photos at a fun America250-themed birthday photo stand celebrating the nation’s upcoming milestone anniversary.

In addition to the educational activities, Brokob offered voter registration services, reinforcing the importance of civic participation for residents of all ages. The event served as a meaningful reminder that democracy thrives when communities are engaged, informed and involved.

—Submitted by Carolyn Brokob

Share your township’s America250 celebrations with us!

We’ll continue sharing township celebrations, events, projects or proclamations to celebrate our nation’s 250th birthday in future issues of *Township Focus* and on our social media. Send your events (and pictures!), and let us share how your township is commemorating and celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Send details to jenn@michigantownships.org or call (517) 321-6467, ext. 229.



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- Zoning and Land Use Planning



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Q Do election workers receive W-2s or 1099 forms?

Election workers do not receive 1099s—they are township employees, and 1099 forms are issued to independent contractors. Election workers are a very special class of employee under federal tax law:

- Payments to election workers are generally exempt from federal and state income tax withholdings. (IRC Sections 3121 (b)(7)(F)(iv) and 3121 (u)(2)(B)(ii)(v))
- Election workers earning less than \$2,500 per year in 2026 are exempt from Social Security and Medicare (FICA) taxes—even if the employment is covered by a 218 Agreement. “Modification 975,” effective Jan. 1, 2004, made this change to the state’s master agreement with the Social Security Administration.

If the above exemptions apply—no federal income, Social Security or Medicare taxes were withheld—federal tax law does not require employers paying election workers less than \$600 to issue W-2s.

Q For purposes of the exemption from Social Security and Medicare taxes, what services are considered performed by election workers?

Election workers are individuals hired by government entities (including townships) to perform services at polling places in connection with national, state and local elections. An election worker may be referred to by other terms and titles, for example, poll worker, moderator, machine tender, checker, ballot clerk, voting official, polling place manager, absentee ballot counter or deputy head moderator. These workers may be employed by the township exclusively for election work, or may work in other capacities as well.

Q What if the annual pay for the election worker exceeds the \$2,500 threshold?

FICA taxes apply from the first dollar paid if an election worker is paid the federal threshold amount or more. For example, when payments made to an election worker in 2026 meet the federal threshold amount, \$2,500, all amounts paid to the worker are subject to FICA, including the first \$2,499.

If it’s anticipated that an election worker may earn the federal threshold amount or more in a calendar year, the employer may choose to begin withholding FICA taxes on the first dollar earned. If the worker then earns less than the

federal threshold amount in the calendar year, the worker would be entitled to a refund of the withheld FICA taxes. If the employer chooses not to begin withholding until after the worker earns the federal threshold amount, then the employer would be liable for the total amount of FICA taxes due.

Q What if one of our employees also performs services as an election worker?

The services are bifurcated—the services as an election worker, if under the threshold, are exempt from federal and state withholding, as well as Social Security and Medicare taxes. The other services to the township would be generally subject to income, Social Security and Medicare taxes (assuming that there is a 218 Agreement in place, or the township doesn’t have a 218 Agreement nor does it have a “public retirement system” in place).

For example: Township A pays Worker Y \$100 in 2026 for election worker services, and also employs Worker Y in another capacity in which Worker Y earns \$1,000. The services of Election Worker Y are excluded from the 218 Agreement (State of Michigan Modification 975), but non-election services are included. The \$1,000 payment is subject to income tax and FICA withholding, but the \$100 payment is not. Because it made payments in 2026 to Worker Y equal to \$600 or more, the township must report all payments as wages (Box 1) on Form W-2. Separate Forms W-2 may be used for the two types of payments.

It is recommended that townships give all election workers W-2s regardless of the amounts paid, as a means of informing the election workers the amount they were paid annually, as these amounts are taxable to the election worker, even though they are exempt from income tax withholding.

Additionally, according to the State of Michigan, election worker pay is reportable on quarterly unemployment forms, as they are considered part-time temporary employees.

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.



PRIMARY ELECTION

Talking township issues with Michigan's 2026 gubernatorial candidates

To introduce our members to the 2026 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 major party candidates running for governor in the August primary questions on issues of importance to local government. The following are their responses, as submitted.



Jocelyn Benson (D)

- Michigan secretary of state
- Former dean of Wayne State University Law School
- Graduate of Harvard Law School and Wellsley College



John James (R)

- U.S. representative for Michigan's 10th congressional district
- U.S. Army veteran
- West Point Military Academy graduate, earned master's degrees from Penn State University and University of Michigan



Chris Swanson (D)

- Genesee County sheriff since 2020
- Former police officer and paramedic
- Earned bachelor's degree and master's of public administration from University of Michigan

Note: The campaigns for Republican candidates Perry Johnson and Mike Cox did not respond to MTA's invitation. Republican candidate Aric Nesbitt submitted responses, but withdrew from the race just prior to Township Focus press time.

Q From housing policy to renewable energy siting, state efforts often seek to create a one-size-fits-all approach across Michigan communities. As governor, how would you make determinations about retaining local control versus exercising state authority?

Benson: As the CEO of one of our state's largest agencies, I've seen firsthand how important it is to balance statewide goals with local needs. The key is collaboration and flexibility—ensuring that local leaders have a seat at the table in developing statewide policies and ensuring those policies are implemented in a way to allow for local flexibility. Because the needs of a community in the Upper Peninsula or Grand Rapids are different from needs in Detroit or Traverse City. That's why I developed my plans—from housing to healthcare to energy affordability to education—with the advice and counsel of local leaders. My education plan, for example, will replace our current one-size-fits-all funding model with an equitable, transparent funding system that meets the needs of each individual community. Just as I've done as secretary of state, I'll ensure local leaders have a seat at the table in my gubernatorial administration.

James: I would start by reversing Gov. Whitmer's "green energy" mandates and by supporting the restoration of local control on energy policy by pushing for the repeal of Public Act 233 of 2023. PA 233 was a brazen power grab by the politically powerful elite in Lansing to remove decision-making authority from local communities. I also oppose similar attempts to create new state mandates and override local control on housing and other policies. While there can be no question that Michigan must confront the rapidly increasing cost of housing, effective solutions can be achieved by addressing the labor shortage and embracing other market-based policies instead of removing local control. Any business or resident who is dissatisfied with local housing and zoning policy already has effective recourse available at the local level through the electoral process and amending local ordinances at the local level. I oppose giving the state more power to override local zoning ordinances on housing.

Swanson: Michigan is a diverse state, and policies that are needed in some communities may not be appropriate in others. In addition to differing needs, communities often have differing priorities and visions for their future. That is why I believe local governments and residents should have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them. For example, I have said publicly that communities should have significant input when considering major developments such as data centers. My approach as governor would be to ensure local perspectives are heard and respected.

Q Property tax reform has dominated conversations thus far in the 2026 cycle. Do you support reforming Michigan's property tax structure? If so, how will you ensure local governments have a sufficient, reliable funding source to provide essential local services?

Benson: One of my top priorities as governor will be to reduce costs for Michiganders. For too many working Michiganders, it feels like the deck is stacked against them—whether it's rising costs, stagnant wages, or the growing burden of caring for aging family members. It's why I'll work to ensure no new taxes on middle class families. And similarly for local governments, ensuring consistent, reliable funding and revenue sharing will be critical as costs continue to rise.

We can achieve this by reexamining how we're generating revenue in the state and growing our economy, identifying more resources, and closing many of the antiquated or illogical loopholes in our current tax code that have left a lot of money on the table. We must also do more with less at the state level and cut wasteful spending across our state agencies. I know firsthand how to streamline government services to save Michiganders time and money. That's exactly what I did as secretary of state, where we transformed branch offices, cut inefficiencies, and redirected the funds freed up to make the investments we needed. I'll take the same approach as governor to ensure this fits into a budget that works for everyone.

I'll also work to create new revenue streams through encouraging growth in our tourism industry and developing other strategic approaches to grow our economy and generate new sources of economic revenue for our local communities and our state. By thinking creatively, taking a comprehensive view of the budget, and identifying new sources of revenue while cutting wasteful spending, we will invest in our people and our local communities without raising taxes.

James: I support reducing Michigan's property tax burden. Reforming Michigan's property tax structure can be accomplished through a meaningful effort to confront and eliminate waste, fraud and abuse in state government expenditures while protecting critical services. Proposal A of 1994 remains a laudable example of accomplishing property tax relief while protecting education funding and other core functions of state government. Failure to confront property taxes in Michigan will continue the barriers to population growth, resulting in a loss of revenue for critical services over the longer term.

Swanson: I would support a review of Michigan's property tax structure to ensure homeowners and small businesses are treated fairly and are not carrying a disproportionate share of the tax burden. At the same time, local governments depend on property tax revenue to provide critical services. Any reform should be paired with a reliable replacement funding source so communities can continue to meet the needs of their residents.

Q Jobs and population in many Michigan communities are disappearing. Michigan has a long history of focusing resources and policies on urban areas. What will your administration's efforts be to provide revitalization efforts to rural communities as well?

Benson: I am running to make Michigan the best place to live, work and raise a family no matter where you live in our state. As secretary of state, I visited all 130 of our branch offices in my first 100 days—across rural, urban and suburban Michigan—to see firsthand what wasn't working and develop a plan to fix it. Then we built specific solutions for each branch office to address their unique needs. This included ensuring rural communities had the support they needed to withstand challenging times, like the COVID-19 pandemic, and deliver critical services to every county in the state effectively and efficiently.

I will take that same approach of making sure each community has what it needs to thrive as governor. That's why among other things I will invest in expanding access to affordable, quality healthcare in rural Michigan with mobile clinics, address contamination in drinking water from lead, PFAS, agricultural runoff and industrial pollution by accelerating lead service line replacement, invest in water infrastructure upgrades for aging municipal systems across the state, and work with public-private partnerships to invest in a rail system that will connect all our communities.

Michigan has all the resources we need—from our Great Lakes to major cities to vibrant communities with booming small businesses. As a statewide leader who understands the importance of balancing statewide plans with the unique needs of every community, I will ensure we invest in every corner of our state to build wealth and grow our economy.

James: Too many people—especially Michigan's younger residents—are leaving Michigan to find a lower cost of living and better opportunities elsewhere. We must lower the cost of living and increase access to basic services in all our communities, including rural communities. State government must change its approach to economic development, shifting away from a focus on hyperscale projects that have left taxpayers and local communities to clean up the mess after empty promises of jobs and infrastructure improvements have gone unfulfilled. To make Michigan a high-growth state, we need to instead first prioritize retention of the jobs we have, followed by reclaiming the jobs lost, and then recruitment of new jobs from other states.

For too long ideological activists at state agencies such as [the departments of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, and Agriculture and Rural Development] have imposed unnecessary regulatory burdens on residents and businesses in rural communities. This has harmed Michigan's business

climate in everything from agriculture to manufacturing. I am committed to building a culture of customer service and of certainty in interactions with state agencies for residents and business alike, including those in rural as well as urban communities.

I have also proposed targeted tax credits for training and education in occupations requiring critical skills, from manufacturing to education to health care. I also support increasing choices and access for health care in rural communities. I've proposed reforming Certificate of Need laws to increase health care capacity and choices in rural communities. This will provide jobs and increase access to quality health care in rural communities. Finally, I'll renew Michigan's participation in the federal Rural Health Transformation Program, a Trump Administration initiative I supported in Congress to incentivize the recruitment of new health care professionals and providers into rural communities and expanded access to telehealth services.

Swanson: With a significant portion of the county I serve as sheriff living in rural areas, I have seen firsthand the challenges many of these communities face. Improving infrastructure will be a major priority. Roads, utilities and infrastructure are essential to economic growth and safeguarding our public health. I will also expand career and technical education by partnering with unions and employers to introduce students to the skilled trades earlier. Too many young people feel they must leave their communities to find opportunity. My goal is to help create pathways to good-paying jobs that allow them to stay, work and raise families in the communities where they grew up.

Q If elected governor, what will be the hallmarks of your first state budget recommendation?

Benson: My first budget will reflect the three central pillars of our campaign: Lowering costs, raising wages and protecting every community.

To drive down costs, my first budget recommendation will streamline regulations to increase housing supply and affordability, incentivize the development of starter homes and affordable units, and hold accountable investors who buy up properties and drive up rents solely to make a profit. We will lower healthcare costs through the creation of a healthcare affordability board, a \$5,000 caregiver tax credit, support for physicians and nurses, and deploy mobile health clinics to remote corners of the state. I will lower energy costs by ending the unfair rate hikes, investing in a clean energy future, reforming our rate-setting process to make it more transparent, and working with public utilities to modernize our energy grid. And I will make childcare more accessible and affordable through expanding Rx Kids statewide and removing barriers that prevent qualified providers from opening their doors.

We will grow our economy through new initiatives including investing in public education to ensure our schools and educators are equipped with sufficient resources to meet the unique needs of every student. And we will protect every community through working with local leaders to identify revenue sharing opportunities that will enable greater investment in infrastructure and other specific needs.

I will make sure this is done in a fiscally responsible way. As secretary of state, I transformed branch offices, cut inefficiencies, and streamlined our budget to ensure we did more with less and improved our services while cutting costs. I'll do the same as governor.

James: My first-year state budget recommendation will be an immediate fiscal cleanup and comprehensive audit of state expenditures, eliminating as much as \$3.5 billion in waste, fraud and abuse that has already been identified by the House Republican Oversight Committee. As governor, I will not hesitate to use the line-item veto authority to protect taxpayers and stop wasteful spending. State government expenditures have increased over 50% during Gov. Whitmer's administration and debt has increased significantly. Michigan taxpayers should not be forced to bear the burden of Whitmer's reckless spending policies, which have stifled economic growth and increased the cost of living in Michigan. I'll empower the state auditor with more resources and clean up the fiscal mess in Lansing.

Swanson: My first budget will focus on investments that raise both the floor and the ceiling for Michigan families. A top priority would be infrastructure improvements, with a particular emphasis on repairing and modernizing roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure that support economic growth and public safety, such as dams and sewer systems. I will also pursue investments in passenger rail and other transportation networks that connect communities across the state.

Education would be a true cornerstone of my budget. I will prioritize attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, expanding early childhood education opportunities, supporting career exploration and technical training, and protecting K-12 funding so resources are directed toward students and classrooms. By investing in both our infrastructure and our people, we can create stronger, resilient communities, a more competitive and prepared workforce, and greater opportunity for every Michigander.

Q In an increasingly partisan environment, local government issues are often nonpartisan. What actions will you take to ensure problems impacting everyday Michiganders on the local level don't get stuck in partisan gridlock?

Benson: As governor, just as I've done as Michigan's secretary of state, I'll work with anyone to get things done—including building nonpartisan coalitions and developing data-driven goals that aren't partisan, but simply common sense. As the CEO of one of Michigan's largest agencies, I have worked

effectively with leaders on both sides of the aisle to get transformational things done. We have gotten bills through the Legislature where others have fallen short, and the work we did to transform the Department of State's customer service operations was the result of bipartisan support I built working with a Republican-led Legislature.

My record is one of getting different kinds of people into rooms together to hash out common-sense solutions. Local leaders will be depending on me to do that as governor, and I won't let them down.

James: Of course, plenty of politicians promise to overcome the partisan gridlock, only to retreat on their promise once elected. We saw that happen with Gov. Whitmer when she removed local control on energy policy in a series of party-line votes in the Legislature. I'll take a different approach, drawing on my experience in Congress to deliver on nonpartisan projects of importance to Southeast Michigan, from infrastructure upgrades at Selfridge ANG Base to improvements to the heavily traveled Mound Road corridor. I'll build coalitions across party lines in the Legislature, following the example of Gov. John Engler's leadership in passing Proposal A in 1994, when he delivered meaningful property tax relief and closed the funding gap on education with bipartisan support.

I'll also enact my ethics and transparency plan—my Freedom from Corruption Agenda—to clean up Lansing. This starts with full financial disclosure by myself as the governor—something I've already done during my four years representing Oakland and Macomb Counties in Congress. I'll order full financial transparency for all Cabinet directors and appointees in the executive branch. I'll ban the use of non-disclosure agreements to ensure that taxpayers receive full transparency for state government actions and expenditures. I'll push legislation to ban campaign fundraising while the Legislature is convened in session at the Capitol and to end the revolving door of legislators-to-lobbyists, as well as tighten the loopholes in the state's gift ban. Michigan citizens deserve open, honest and transparent government. A John James Administration will clean up Lansing because there is strong support among both Democratic and Republican voters for these reforms; we just need the courage and authentic leadership to get them done.

Swanson: I will always listen to the people closest to the problem and seek solutions that work both statewide and at the local level. One of my first actions as governor will be to create a statewide project delivery and accountability system. This system would bring together information on major projects across all levels of government—federal, state, county and municipal—and establish common benchmarks for measuring progress and performance. By providing public dashboards and transparent reporting, residents and elected officials would be able to track projects based on results rather than politics. When everyone is working from the same information and focused on measurable outcomes, it becomes easier to build consensus and ensure local priorities are addressed efficiently.

MTA's Regional Meetings return this fall

As an MTA member, you belong to the largest community of local government officials in the state. Our **Regional Meetings** are a great opportunity to connect with that community, MTA staff and other municipal experts to discuss the latest issues impacting townships. This full-day event offers practical, real-world insights designed to cut through complexity and bring clarity to what matters most—from navigating legal pitfalls and avoiding costly missteps, to financial fundamentals and staying ahead of legislative changes.

Engaging, relevant and grounded in everyday township challenges, every session is built to help you ask better questions, spot risks sooner and make more informed decisions for your community. Whether you're strengthening your foundation or fine-tuning your approach, this is your one-stop event for sharper thinking, stronger oversight and smarter governance.

Legislative Lowdown: Gain insights into the new fiscal year's budget and the latest laws impacting your township. Hear about the legislative priorities shaping the 103rd session, what lies ahead for the remainder of the session, and how your involvement can help make a difference. *Led by MTA's Government Relations Team*

Financial Forum: A practical look at fiscal best practices, preparing for potential downturns and recognizing financial stress. Learn proactive strategies to maintain stability, respond to red flags and understand the steps to take if your township is already facing financial trouble. *Led by Michigan Department of Treasury's Local Audit & Finance Division*

Municipal Missteps: Sometimes the biggest lessons come from the biggest mistakes. Review legal landmines, unintended consequences and "wait... can we do that?" moments that trip up townships. From well-intentioned decisions to costly oversights, we'll help you spot trouble early and avoid common pitfalls. *Led by MTA Legal Counsel, Bauckham, Thall, Seeber, Kaufman & Koches, PC*

Back to Basics Boot Camp, Where There Are No Silly Questions: Special meeting notices, Freedom of Information Act deadlines, meeting procedures—some questions come up again and again. Join us as we tackle the most frequently asked township questions. You'll get practical answers, useful reminders and a chance to have your own questions addressed by MTA experts. *Led by MTA's Member Information Services Team*

Turning Your Audit into Insights: An audit presentation should be more than flipping through financial statements and nodding along. Get an insider's take on the audit process to learn what questions you should be asking and what details deserve a closer look. Unpack who should be talking to whom and when, and turn your audit into a powerful tool for oversight. *Led by Rehmann Public Sector financial experts*

Bigger Projects, Smaller Tax Base?: Dreaming bigger for your community? Learn how townships can access funding and partnership opportunities to support infrastructure, public facilities and essential services that may otherwise be out of reach through local revenues alone. *Led by USDA Rural Development*

Power of connection

Tap into the trifecta—expert presenters, value-added vendors and your fellow officials, each of whom offer insights into the challenges you face. This learning opportunity includes time to connect with others who can help make your role as a township official more fulfilling. Our Vendor Showcase is a great tool for identifying providers of products and services that can help your township run more efficiently.



Sept. 22: Bay Valley Resort, Bay City

Sept. 23: American 1 Event Center, Jackson

Sept. 29-30: *UP North Summit*
Island Resort & Conference Center, Harris

Oct. 7: Crystal Center at Crystal Mountain Resort,
Thompsonville

Oct. 8: Holiday Inn Grand Haven-Muskegon, Spring Lake

Oct. 13: Treetops Resort Conference Center, Gaylord



Regional Meetings meet our UP North Summit

When MTA's *Regional Meetings* series reaches the U.P., it expands into two days of education, networking and fun! The return of our popular *UP North Summit* offers ample time to connect and explore the issues, bringing more sessions and even more value.

Summit registrants get the same education (and networking) featured at the downstate regional events described at left, PLUS evening activities and the educational sessions described below.

Plot Twists in Planning & Zoning: Explore timely (and complex!) land use issues like renewable energy, data centers and short-term rentals, while gaining practical insight into defensible enforcement. *Led by Michael Bila, MTA Legal Counsel, Bauckham, Thall, Seeber, Kaufman & Koches, PC*

Taxing Matters: A Treasurer's Lightning Round: Packed with practical tax collection tips you can put to work right away. From deadlines and delinquent taxes to legal requirements, common pitfalls and everyday best practices, get insights you need to stay organized, informed and ahead of the game. *Led by Cindy Dodge, Owner, LOR Consulting*

Meetings, Minutes & More with Mike: Meetings don't have to be painful, minutes don't have to be mysterious and the Open Meetings Act doesn't have to keep you up at night. Expect practical guidance, real-world examples and—knowing Mike—probably a story or two along the way. *Led by Michael Selden, MTA's Member Information Services Director*

Hot Topics for Township Fire Departments: Designed to spark ideas and fuel better decision-making—get an update from the state Bureau of Fire Services on the hottest issues facing township fire departments. *Led by State Fire Marshal Thomas Hughes Jr.*

The Future You Fund: Whether intentional or not, every decision tells a story. So what story is your township telling? Move beyond “the way we've always done it” by rethinking whether your resources are reflecting the image you want for your community's future. Get practical strategies for spending with purpose. *Led by Cindy Dodge, Owner, LOR Consulting*

UP North Summit evening event

After that first day of education, you'll be ready to get out of the classroom and into the fun! **Game On!** Keep your eyes on the prize as each activity brings you closer to victory and the chance to walk away a winner. Opportunities abound to earn tickets for our prize drawings. So, grab your lucky charm and join us for an evening of fun, laughter and competition.

Learn more and register for MTA's *Regional Meetings and UP North Summit* at <https://bit.ly/MTARregionals> or scan the QR code below with your phone's camera.

2026 UP North Summit sponsors



upcoming MTA workshops

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Three timely topics over two days in one great location

MTA can help you identify what's **important to the residents you serve**, insights into **enhancing transparency and credibility** and techniques for exploring **elements of strategic planning**. Join us at **Bay Valley Resort in Bay City** this July for one (or all!) of the courses described below:

Creating a Vision for Your Township

July 14 from 9 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. (Includes continental breakfast)

Identifying core community values and expectations is a critical component in serving your community. Learn strategies for evaluating township programs and services, and explore the need for innovation and change. By examining both adversity and opportunities, you can identify how to balance short-term issues with a long-term vision. Rekindle your township's mission by examining your past, present and future. *TGA course B-103; 4 credits*

Linking with the Community

July 14 from 1:30 to 4:45 p.m. (Includes lunch served at 12:30 p.m.)

Enhancing credibility in the public eye begins with your board. Examine ways of being more transparent to your community—a great exercise to increase trust at the local level. Explore techniques for determining what your constituents want and how to keep them informed about your township's activities. Includes discussion on cultivating emerging leaders in your community. *TGA course B-106; 4 credits*

Strategic Planning for Townships

July 15 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (Includes breakfast)

Strategic planning is critical to achieving real results in your township. Yet creating (and maintaining) a strategic plan may be a delicate matter in a politically charged environment. Review what strategic exploration entails, as well as the voices that must be heard, in order to develop a solid plan that aligns the township's resources and creates favorable outcomes. *TGA course B-104; 4 credits*



Excellence in Governance

All are welcome to attend these courses, which are part of MTA's **Township Governance Academy (TGA)** curriculum. You don't have to be enrolled in TGA to attend. If you enroll within six months of class, credit will be applied retroactively.



What's TGA? These confidence-building courses enhance your leadership skills and motivate you to take on the challenges unique to those serving as a local leader. Regardless of your position in the township or amount of experience, TGA will move you to a higher level of performance and make your service to your community more effective—and more rewarding. Learn more about TGA at <https://bit.ly/MTA-TGA>

Summer Academy Registration Form

Township and County _____

Name and Title _____

Email _____

Which class(es) will you attend: Vision Community Strategic

Payment options	
<input type="checkbox"/> Invoice my township (members only)	<input type="checkbox"/> Check enclosed (payable to MTA)
<input type="checkbox"/> Charge to: (circle one)	MasterCard VISA
Card #	Expiration Date
Print Card Holder's Name	CSV (3-digit code)
Signature _____	

Registration Rate*
Effective July 1

Individual course rates

Creating a Vision \$150/attendee
Linking with the Community \$150/attendee
Strategic Planning \$150/attendee

*Rate applies to MTA-member townships. All others, call for rates.

Package discounts—Apply only if same registrant attends multiple courses
Save \$50 when registering for **two courses**; **save \$75** when registering for **all three courses**

Payment worksheet

\$ _____ (Rate*) **Creating a Vision**
\$ _____ (Rate*) **Linking with the Community**
\$ _____ (Rate*) **Strategic Planning**
\$ - _____ Subtract package discount (if applicable)
\$ _____ Total amount due

Visit <https://bit.ly/MTA-TGA> to book hotel rooms at the discounted MTA group rate.



Send completed registration form to MTA, P.O. Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078, fax to: (517) 321-8908 or email rebecca@michigantownships.org Need event registration assistance? Call (517) 321-6467, ext. 226. For other event-related questions, call (517) 321-6467, ext. 234 or email education@michigantownships.org

upcoming MTA workshop

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Hot Topics in Planning & Zoning: What's New, Changing and Challenging

Join MTA for a how-to guide based on real-life practical experiences at the summer's hottest workshop series, **Hot Topics in Planning & Zoning**. This evening class, offered every other year, is a must for your township's planning and zoning team.

As the **renewable energy** landscape evolves, so do the questions surrounding it. Gain a better understanding of where local authority begins—and ends—including the growing impact of state preemption. We'll describe what the process looks like at the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) if a project ends up there. Explore siting trends, legal considerations for approvals and denials, and how to build clear standards. We'll also shed light on decommissioning agreements and financial assurances that can help protect your community long after the project is built.

As **data centers** reshape development conversations, communities are navigating new legal and zoning questions—and many local ordinances weren't built with these developments in mind. Explore where local authority exists, where ordinances need updates, and how infrastructure demands and development agreements factor into decision-making. Learn more about creating conditions around issues like noise, generators, water use and buffering.

The **short-term rental** debate isn't cooling off anytime soon. Across townships, tensions are rising, meetings are becoming more volatile, and legal challenges loom. Explore what your township *can* regulate, where legal vulnerabilities exist, and gain insight into enforcement limitations and restrictions that strengthen defensibility while helping your community strike a workable balance.

Enforcing ordinances is an important but challenging task. When regulations are tested, challenged, or ignored, strong processes matter. From documentation to notices, hearings to appeals and penalties, we'll unpack what it takes to support effective enforcement. Explore the risks of inconsistency, where townships get tripped up and see how unclear ordinance language weaken your legal footing.

Amendments to the **Land Division Act** are paving the way for new development possibilities. Are your township's zoning and land division ordinances ready? Find out what's new and what it means for your township's planning decisions.

Seats fill quickly so don't delay, register today!



Event Details

Dinner is included with registration which begins at 4 p.m.
Class is held from 5 to 8 p.m. on:

- Aug. 18: Bavarian Inn Lodge Conference Center in Frankenmuth
- Aug. 26: Treetops Resort Conference Center in Gaylord
- Aug. 31: Conference Center at Van Buren Intermediate School District in Lawrence

Hot Topics in P&Z Registration Form

Township and County

Name and Title

Name and Title

Name and Title

Choose location:

- August 18: Frankenmuth
- August 26: Gaylord
- August 31: Lawrence

Save time, register online at <https://bit.ly/twptraining>

- Early-bird Rate***: \$100/person
Expires two weeks prior to event date
- Late Rate***: \$150/person
Applies two weeks prior to event date and on-site

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

**Rate applies to MTA-member townships. All others, call for rates.*

Payment options

- Check enclosed (payable to MTA)
- Invoice my township (members only)
- Charge to: (circle one) MasterCard VISA

Card #	CSV (3-digit code)	Expires
Print Card Holder's Name		Signature



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



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