

Michigan Township Focus

JUNE 2015

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

Connecting with your community



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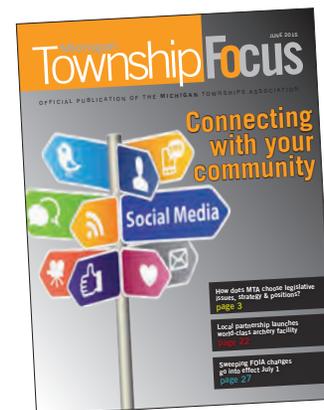
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June 2015 | Volume 3, Number 5



MTA Official Publication of the Michigan Townships Association
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mission statement

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



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Michigan Township Focus, Issue 5 June 2015 (ISSN 2330-9652), is published monthly, except for a combined January/February issue. MTA membership provides a subscription to township board members, the manager/superintendent, planning commission chairperson and township attorney. Member counties also receive subscriptions for elected officials, the equalization director and road commission chairperson. Annual membership dues include \$30 for a one-year subscription to *Michigan Township Focus*. Additional member subscriptions are available for \$30 per year. Subscription rate for residents and firms in member townships is \$40 per year (schools and libraries may subscribe for \$30 a year).

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

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president's round table

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So much legislation ... How does MTA choose issues, positions and strategies?

In a typical two-year Michigan legislative session, more than 4,000 bills are introduced, and hundreds of other ideas are informally shopped around for support, opposition or further refinement. How does the Michigan Townships Association decide on which issues to engage, determine the appropriate position, and devise strategies to achieve legislative success?



MTA subjects legislation to the following analysis:

1. Is the position included in our policy platform?

Each year, at the MTA Annual Meeting, the membership adopts a policy platform—a “wish list” and guidance principles for legislation that are suggested by members and staff to the MTA Board of Directors, who analyze, debate and reach a consensus in the best interest of township government.

The Board is further guided by the principle that MTA should focus on issues specifically impacting townships. Consequently, MTA typically does not engage on broad issues such as adjustments to the minimum wage or environmental issues that do not uniquely impact township operations.

While members at the Annual Meeting usually approve most of the Board’s proposed policies, each year a few policies may generate some debate or adjustment prior to final adoption.

When a bill is introduced and an appropriate position can be inferred from the policy platform, MTA marches on accordingly. But if the issue is not sufficiently addressed by the policy platform, determining our position and strategy requires some further analysis.

2. Does the legislation impact townships to any special degree?

It is pretty unusual for legislation to impact townships specifically unless it is initiated by MTA, but it is very common for legislation to impact local governments generally, including townships. On these issues, we will very likely engage. The MTA Board of Directors has legislative policy committees specializing in Assessment and Taxation, Elections, Environment and Land Use, Intergovernmental Relations, Township Operations, and Transportation. These committees resolve any doubt or ambiguity as to the appropriate position for MTA.

Factors that might trigger the scrutiny of an MTA legislative policy committee include the degree to which the legislation presents unique elements not previously confronted, if the bill disparately impacts various segments of the MTA membership, or if there are unusual political implications.

3. What position will MTA take?

The potential positions MTA can take range from outright opposition, neutrality, enthusiastic support, and every increment in between. Outright opposition is reserved for legislation that fundamentally violates basic MTA policy tenets, such as removing township authority and duties, or imposes egregious costs on townships with little or no public benefit. We would generally enthusiastically support legislation that is permissive in nature and expands township authority to better serve constituents.

Most legislation falls somewhere between the extremes. MTA’s most common initial legislative position is to work with the bill sponsor and committees of jurisdiction to make legislation as township-friendly as possible. Because legislation can be suddenly amended or substituted, we may not take a firm position until the legislation’s final form is clear.

4. What strategies will we employ?

Extensive legislative experience guides MTA staff in selecting appropriate strategies, depending on the political dynamics specific to an issue. Sometimes, a low-key conversation with a key lawmaker is all that is needed. Working with other interest groups might be appropriate. Sometimes, we appeal to MTA members to express a position to their lawmakers, or we may need to initiate a media campaign to alert the public of a bill’s impact.

The likelihood a bill will move through the legislative process is critical to determining our strategy. Legislative leaders might not “green light” a bill that has little chance of final adoption, and nothing will be gained by wasting political capital and resources on these non-starters.

MTA’s legislative processes instill essential discipline such that personal political, ideological or policy preferences are disregarded. Instead, it is the collective voice of our membership and fidelity to the MTA mission that illuminates our advocacy on behalf of township government.



LOOKING UP

Numbers show positive trend for job growth, state tourism

Recent reports indicate a positive trend for Michigan's economy, including an increase in private sector jobs and in tourism dollars spent in the state.

Recent figures from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that Michigan has gained more private sector jobs than any other Midwestern state since the end of 2010. The state has gained nearly 400,000 private sector jobs since December 2010, including 105,000 in manufacturing. In the past year, there have been nearly 100,000 private sector jobs created overall in Michigan.

Michigan has created the fifth-most private sector jobs in the country, trailing only California, Texas, Florida and New York, according to the most recent data available.

According to reports released in March from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), visitor spending in Michigan hit \$22.8 billion last year, and the state's Pure Michigan tourism campaign generated \$6.87 for each dollar spent on Pure Michigan advertising in 2014.

New data showed that visitor spending in the state reached record levels in 2014. Michigan hosted more than 113 million visitors who spent \$22.8 billion in the state, the MEDC said. Domestic and overseas travelers spent \$21.3 billion and \$1.5 billion, respectively.

The report also showed visitor spending directly supports more than 214,000 Michigan jobs.

Retirement

George Dickinson, Lincoln Township (Newaygo Co.) treasurer for 53 years.

BY THE NUMBERS

Census figures show overall population increase for Michigan

New estimates released by the U.S. Census Bureau this spring showed an increase in population for 35 of Michigan's 83 counties.

Kent County saw the largest growth between July 2013 and 2014, with 7,851 new residents, while the state's most populous county—Wayne County—had the largest numeric decline in population.

Wayne County lost 10,899 residents between 2013 and 2014, a 0.6% drop. The county with the highest percentage growth in population was Keweenaw, which had a 1.65 percent increase in population.

Overall, in the past year, Michigan's population grew an estimated 11,684 to 9,909,877 residents. This is the third consecutive year of growth. Prior to that, Michigan's population dropped annually since 2004.

Michigan, however, has slipped to the 10th most populous state in the nation, being passed by North Carolina.

The initial Census data release for 2013-2014 was at the county level; additional data at the local level is expected to be released later this year.



GET MOVING

Host a 'Labor Day community walk'

For more than five decades, Michigan residents have gathered in St. Ignace for the Mackinac Bridge Labor Day Walk. Not all Michigan residents, however, are able to attend the Bridge Walk. Townships can give every Michigander an opportunity to participate in this walking tradition by hosting their own Labor Day community walk.

Last year, **Ironwood Charter Township** (Gogebic Co.) and **Champion Township** (Marquette Co.) were among the communities that organized community Labor Day walks.

Organizers who register their event with the Michigan Fitness Foundation can have their walk endorsed by the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Sports & Health. Event information will be posted on the Governor's Council website and promoted to citizens and the media. Organizers of registered walks will receive free support materials to help make their community walk a success.

Visit www.michiganfitness.org/labor-day-community-walks to find out how your township can get involved.

DELAY IN PAYMENTS

2015 METRO Act payments delayed

Under Public Act 48 of 2002, the Metropolitan Extension Telecommunications Rights-of-Way Oversight (METRO) Act, all telecommunications providers must pay an annual permit fee to operate within municipal rights-of-way. Those fees assessed on providers are then distributed to municipalities. These right-of-way payments are usually sent to townships in June.



The 2015 METRO Act payments may be delayed by approximately 15 to 30 days, due to a change in state law transitioning the functions and responsibilities of the METRO Authority to the new Local Community Stabilization Authority (LCSA).

The transition process will have minimal impact on municipalities as all the provisions of the METRO Act, except for the administration of functions and responsibilities of the former METRO Authority, remain

unchanged. The primary changes under the LCSA include:

1. Maintenance fee payments from telecommunication providers will be paid to the LCSA and deposited into an LCSA account maintained by Comerica Bank. Payments will not be deposited with the State of Michigan.
2. Comerica Bank will distribute METRO Act payments to municipalities on behalf of the LCSA.
3. **Please note:** Municipalities will no longer receive METRO Act payments via State of Michigan warrants or electronic transfer. Payments by check or electronic transfer will be processed by Comerica Bank on behalf of the LCSA with a notation that payment is a METRO Act payment.

To ensure prompt and secure METRO Act payments, it is strongly recommended that townships set up electronic fund transfer (EFT) arrangements with Comerica Bank through the LCSA. To be set up for EFT payments, email the following information to the LCSA staff at metroinfo@michigan.gov:

1. Your township's full and legal name
2. Your township's federal ID number
3. Your township's financial institution
4. Routing and transit numbers
5. The account number for deposits

Questions? Contact LCSA Chief Administrative Officer Melvin Farmer at (517) 373-0194, or Assistant Kathy Simon at (517) 241-3064. For more information, visit www.michigan.gov/lcsa, or MTA's "METRO Act Franchises" Web page, on the members-only section of www.michigantownships.org.

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MTA members, staff meet with congressional delegation

MTA Board members, township officials and staff spent a busy day on Capitol Hill this spring, meeting with members of Michigan's congressional delegation. The meetings were part of the National Association of Towns and Townships' fly-in event.

MTA Executive Director Larry Merrill and Director of Government Relations Judy Allen were joined by MTA President **Linda Preston, Pokagon Township** (Cass Co.) supervisor, MTA Second Vice President **Diane Randall, Roscommon Township** (Roscommon Co.) supervisor, MTA District 11 Director **Connie Cargill, Golden Township** (Oceana Co.) treasurer, MTA District 14 Director **Larry Krohn, Oliver Township** (Huron Co.) supervisor, **Phil LaJoy, Canton Charter Township** (Wayne Co.) supervisor, and **Mandy Grewal, Pittsfield Charter Township** (Washtenaw Co.) supervisor.

The MTA delegation met with U.S. Reps. David Trott, Bill Huizenga, Debbie Dingell, John Moolenaar and Candice Miller. They also met with U.S. Sen. Gary Peters (*pictured above*) and staff for U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow. Throughout the day, they discussed federal issues important to townships, including transportation reauthorization, tax credits for volunteer fire and emergency medical services, protecting local governments in tax reform, and marketplace fairness legislation.

FOR SALE

Kimball Township (St. Clair Co.) Fire Department is selling a Fast Attack drop-in skid unit. The unit fits a 6-foot bed, has a 250-gallon poly tank, 10-gallon foam tank, inline foam percentage adjustment, electric booster hose reel and electric start. The engine is a Briggs & Stratton 13 hp Vanguard and is capable of drafting. For more information, call (810) 982-9461. The asking price is \$6,000 or best offer.



profile



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Helping build vibrant communities is at the heart of what Wightman & Associates, Inc. does. With a 70-year company history of expertise in engineering, surveying, and architectural design, the firm says that its award-winning team consistently delivers on a promise of quality, timeliness and true project partnership.

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In addition to a wide range of traditional services, Wightman & Associates, Inc. also provides landscape architecture, GIS mapping, interior design, park plans, and project planning coordination services.

"As a Michigan Townships Association Allied Service Provider, we see ourselves as partners alongside of our municipal clients in promoting education, legislation and common goals regarding the challenges municipalities face," stated Matt Davis, president, Wightman & Associates, Inc.

Wightman & Associates believes people flourish when they partner with a dynamic team of problem-solvers. That is why its municipal, tribal and private industry partners turn to the firm time and again for their engineering, surveying and architectural needs.



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Advertorial

Proposed policy changes being accepted for MTA's 2016 Annual Meeting

MTA's Legislative Policy and Resolutions Committee is now accepting recommendations for proposed policy changes from member townships for presentation at the 2016 MTA Annual Meeting, which will be held Friday, Jan. 22, in conjunction with the 63rd Annual MTA Educational Conference & Expo in Detroit.

The adopted policies form the basis for MTA's legislative focus in 2016. You can view MTA's 2015 Policy Platform on www.michigantownships.org, under the "Advocacy" tab.

Under the rules adopted by MTA's Board of Directors, advance proposed legislative policy changes or additions

must be submitted to MTA 150 days prior to the Annual Meeting—by Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2015. These proposed changes are reviewed by the committee for word selection and legality, and to ensure they conform with the Association's overall goals and objectives. The proposals are printed in the January/February 2016 issue of *Township Focus* and will also be available at Conference.

Amendments at the Annual Meeting are permitted, provided the purpose and substance of the original resolution remain unaltered. Resolutions may also be submitted from the floor at the Conference if they are first submitted to MTA Conference Headquarters by noon on Thursday, Jan. 21, 2016, the day before the Annual Meeting.

For additional information, contact the MTA Government Relations Department at (517) 321-6467 or email legislation@michigantownships.org.

mta events | june

- 2 MTA On The Road regional meeting, Midland

- 3 MTA On The Road regional meeting, Port Huron

- 4 MTA On The Road regional meeting, Chelsea

- 12 Managing Your Township Team workshop, Kalamazoo

- 16 MTA On The Road regional meeting, Big Rapids

- 17 MTA On The Road regional meeting, Lowell

- 18 MTA On The Road regional meeting, Kalamazoo



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JUNE

1 Deadline for filing principal residence exemption affidavits (Form 2368) for exemption from the 18-mill school operating tax to qualify for a principal residence exemption for the summer tax levy. (MCL 211.7cc(2))

Deadline for filing the initial request of a Conditional Rescission of a Principal Residence Exemption (Form 4640) for the summer tax levy. (MCL 211.7cc(5))

Deadline for filing for Foreclosure Entity Conditional Rescission of a Principal Residence Exemption (Form 4983) to qualify for the summer tax levy. (MCL 211.7cc(5))

Assessment roll due to county treasurer if township is not collecting summer taxes. (MCL 211.905b(6)(a))

Not later than June 1. Requests are due from a brownfield redevelopment authority, tax increment finance authority, local development financing authority or downtown development authority for state reimbursements of tax increment revenue decreases as a result of the Michigan Business Tax reduction in personal property taxes. (Form 4650) (Public Acts 154-157 of 2008)

By the first Monday in June. Deadline for notifying protesting taxpayers in writing of board of review action. (MCL 211.30(4))

On or before the first Monday in June. County equalization director calculates current year millage reduction fractions including those for inter-county taxing jurisdictions. The completed, verified State Tax Commission (STC) Form L-4028 is filed with the county treasurer and the STC. (MCL 211.34d(3))

Assessor is required to transmit to the Department of Treasury a copy of the 2015 personal property statement, which identifies eligible manufacturing personal property or the information on the statement. (MCL 211.19(9))

Appeals of the property classified as commercial real, industrial real, developmental real, commercial personal, industrial personal or utility personal must be made by filing a written petition with the Michigan Tax Tribunal (MTT) on or before May 31 of the tax year involved. (*May 31 is a Sunday.*) (MCL 205.735a(6))

By 4 Post-election campaign statements filed (books closed May 25).

8 Allocation board must issue final order not later than the second Monday in June. (MCL 211.216)

15 Deadline for assessor's report to the STC on the status of each neighborhood "homestead" exemption granted under the Neighborhood Enterprise Zone Act. (MCL 207.786(2))

Form 4626 *Assessing Officers Report of Taxable Values as of State Equalization* due to STC.

Each municipality that is a tax increment finance authority shall calculate and report to the Department of Treasury that municipality's tax increment small taxpayer loss for the current year. (MCL 123.1356a)

By 20

Absentee voter ballots must be available for issuance to voters for the Aug. 4 election. (MCL 168.714)

Clerks shall electronically transmit or mail (as requested) an absentee voter ballot to each uniformed services or overseas voter who applied for an absentee voter ballot 45 days or more before the Aug. 4 election (MOVE deadline). (MCL 168.759a)

25 *through July 14.* Precinct inspectors appointed for Aug. 4 election. (MCL 168.674)

By 29

Notice of close of registration for Aug. 4 election published. (MCL 168.498)

By 30

On or before June 30. Deadline for classification appeals to STC. (MCL 211.34c(6)) A classification appeal must be filed with the STC in writing on Form 2167. Boards of review must provide the taxpayer with the form to appeal their classification.

Supervisor shall prepare and furnish the summer tax roll before June 30 to the township treasurer with supervisor's collection warrant attached if summer school taxes are to be collected. (MCL 380.1612(1))

JULY

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

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3 Deadline for governmental agencies to exercise the right of refusal for 2014 tax foreclosure parcels. (MCL 211.78m(1))

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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The township has covered all elected officials under an “employee dishonesty coverage form” from our insurer, in the amounts of \$99,000 for treasurer and deputy treasurer, and \$10,000 for all others. Is this sufficient compliance with the statutes?

The complete answer will depend on what that insurance coverage actually includes, so be sure to check with your insurance provider for an explanation of what your policy covers. And this subject can be confusing, so a little explanation is in order.

When we talk about bonds required for township officials, we are actually talking about two different bonds: 1) the bond required when certain officers take the oath of office and 2) the bond required of the treasurer when collecting taxes.

To comply with the statutory requirements, both types of bonds must meet the definition of a “surety bond.” A surety bond is a performance bond that guarantees that the bonded officials will act in compliance with certain laws. If an official fails to do so, the bond covers resulting damages or losses.

1) Surety bond upon taking office: Michigan law requires a township clerk, treasurer and deputy treasurer, and constable, if the township has one, to file a bond upon taking the oath of office.

MCL 41.69 requires that, “Each township clerk, within the time limited for filing the oath of office and before entering upon the duties of the office, shall give a bond to the township in the sum and with sureties that the township board requires and approves, conditioned for the faithful discharge of the duties of the office according to law, including the safekeeping of the records, books, and papers of the township in the manner required by law, and for their delivery on demand to the township clerk’s successor in office. The bond shall be filed in the office of the supervisor.”

MCL 41.77 requires that, “A township treasurer, within the time limited for filing the oath of office and before entering upon the duties of the office, shall give a bond to the township in the sum and with the sureties as the township board shall require and approve, conditioned on the faithful discharge of the duties of the office and that the treasurer will account for and pay over according to law, all money that comes into the treasurer’s hands as treasurer, and the supervisor shall indorse approval on the bond. The treasurer shall file, within the time above mentioned, the bond with the township clerk of the township, who shall record the

bond in a book to be provided for that purpose. The township clerk, after recording the bond, shall deliver it to the supervisor, who shall file it in the supervisor’s office.”

MCL 41.77(5) also requires the deputy treasurer to “give a bond to the township as required by the township board.”

And as required by MCL 41.80, a constable “before taking office and within the time prescribed by law for filing the official oath, shall execute, with sufficient sureties to be approved by the township board, an instrument in writing by which the constable and his or her sureties jointly and severally agree to pay to each person who may be entitled money that the constable becomes liable to pay on account of the neglect or default of the constable in the service or return of process that may be delivered to him or her for service or collection or on account of misfeasance of the constable in the discharge of, or failure of the constable to faithfully perform, the duties of his or her office.”

It is not required by law, but general practice is to also have the supervisor and deputy clerk bonded. This bond is to cover the township funds these officers may deal with on a day-to-day basis. The township should consult with its auditor to determine an appropriate amount for the bond for each of the offices that are required to be bonded.

Note that a “blanket bond” would not meet the requirement for a surety bond. A blanket bond is a form of fidelity bond, which, according to *Black’s Law Dictionary*, is a bond to indemnify the township for losses “due to embezzlement, larceny, or gross negligence by an employee or other person holding a position of trust.” Typically, a blanket bond would cover all other employees or officers of the township and may also provide additional coverage for the previously named offices.

In the case of a treasurer, the surety bond provided upon taking office is to cover the township funds the treasurer deals with on a day-to-day basis, as well as the township portion of the taxes collected. There is not a specified amount because the coverage depends on how much money that a particular treasurer will be handling. Some property and

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liability insurance providers provide bonds automatically every four years (for a new term). We are aware, for example, of one insurance provider that provides a \$25,000 bond for the treasurer. It's our understanding that the \$25,000 is an aggregate amount for the four-year term. That is probably low for many townships. The township could discuss the appropriate amount with its auditor. Additional coverage can be purchased.

However, this first type of bond does not eliminate the need for a tax collection surety bond.

2) Tax collection surety bond: The treasurer is required by MCL 211.43 to also provide a tax collection bond to the county treasurer to cover the amount of taxes the township treasurer will collect for the other tax jurisdictions (not the township), including the county, schools, intermediate school district, and a transportation authority, if there is one in the township.

MCL 211.43 provides three options for obtaining this bond:

Option 1: The treasurer provides a bond to the county treasurer for the actual amount of state, county and school taxes. The bond may be issued by anyone (not a surety bond). The township pays the cost of the bond.

Option 2: If the treasurer provides a corporate surety bond issued by a surety company authorized to do business in Michigan, and the bond is for 40 percent of the total of the state, county and school taxes, then the county pays the

cost of the bond. The county may bill the school districts a prorated portion of the premium.

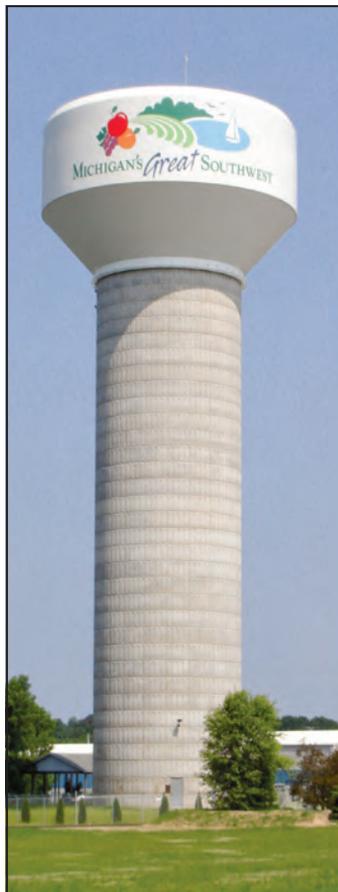
Option 3: If the county treasurer and township supervisor determine that the surety bond the treasurer filed with the township clerk upon taking office is sufficient enough to also cover the tax collections of the other jurisdictions, then no additional bond is necessary.

The second option probably makes the most sense for townships. It requires bonding up to 40 percent of the collections, and it also requires the county to pay the cost. The county can in turn bill each school district for its proportionate share.

Whether or not to use option one or two is the choice of the township treasurer.

In many counties, the county treasurer obtains the bond on behalf of all the units in the county. Likely they do this anticipating that most treasurers would choose option two, which would require the county to pay the cost any way. When the county treasurer obtains the bond, it ensures that all the units have a bond in place.

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



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A township firefighter asked us to commence voluntary withholdings from his paycheck to pay his dues in the local firefighters association. Is this permissible?

MCL 408.477 appears to allow an employer—including a public employer—to make payroll deductions that are unrelated to standard federal, state and local deductions and employee benefit deductions, as long as the employee requests in writing that a deduction be made. The employee, at any time, can rescind in writing his authorization to have the withholdings deducted from his paycheck.

Such withholdings cannot be made for a political action committee or other political association. Townships and other public bodies are specifically forbidden from withholding and remitting to any political campaigns—whether for local, state or federal elections.

Additional requirements include:

1. The cumulative amount of the deductions shall not reduce the gross wages paid to a rate less than minimum wage.
2. Each deduction from an employee's wages shall be substantiated in the records of the employer and shall be identified as pertaining to an individual employee. Prorating deductions between two or more employees is not permitted.
3. The employer shall furnish each employee, at the time of payment of wages, a statement of the hours worked by the employee, the gross wages paid, identification of the pay period for which payment is being made, and a separate itemization of deductions.



What about wage garnishments from tax authorities and creditors?

A wage garnishment is any legal or equitable procedure through which some portion of a person's earnings is required to be withheld by an employer for the payment of a debt. Most garnishments are made by court order, or levies by the Internal Revenue Service or the State of Michigan. Federal law—Title II of the Consumer Credit Protection Act—limits the amount that can be withheld, and protects workers from being terminated for such actions.

The amount of pay subject to garnishment is typically based on an employee's "disposable income" or the amount left after legally required deductions are made. The law sets a maximum amount that may be garnished in any workweek or pay period, regardless of the number of garnishments received by the employer.

Interpreting the proper course of action for any garnishment orders can be complex. Townships should refer any such orders to their labor counsel or township attorney for guidance. The U.S. Department of Labor "Fact Sheet #30" is also a useful resources on the topic. Visit www.dol.gov and search for "Fact Sheet #30."

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.

Learn more at MTA's July 'Financial Double Feature'

Get your township finance questions answered in person, when *Financial Forum* author David Williamson hits the road for MTA's "Financial Double Feature" at four locations around the state this July.

Joined by MTA Member Information Services Liaison Jim Beelen, this financial dynamic duo will offer a full day of township fiscal topics. Choose from a morning session on "Money Matters," take in an afternoon session on "Better Budgeting," or attend both! Turn to page 21 for a registration form.

When registering for the July workshops, you may also purchase MTA's "Building a Better Budget" publication, which addresses issues from budgeting basics to projecting future financial trends, and includes a CD of samples to customize for your township's use. You may also purchase the book, which includes 2004 updates by Williamson, at www.michigantownships.org/mta_store.asp or by calling (517) 321-6467.





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Public acts streamline wage garnishment

Two new laws will streamline the wage garnishment process and increase protections and compensation for employers, including townships.

Public Act 14, sponsored by Rep. Daniela Garcia (R-Holland), and PA 15, sponsored by Rep. Michael McCready (R-Bloomfield Hills), were recently signed by Gov. Rick Snyder. They eliminate the requirement that wage garnishments be reissued every six months. Garnishments will now remain in effect until the entire judgment is paid.

The fee to help cover the administrative cost of garnishment was increased from \$6 to \$35. Employers could also deduct an employee's wages without written consent, as long as certain conditions are met.

The laws also make a major change to the previous system, in which an employer that didn't respond to a legal writ within 14 days could be held liable for the employee's entire debt. Now, a person seeking payment cannot enter a default against an employer unless both conditions apply:

- The employer fails to file a disclosure within 14 days after service of the garnishment or fails to perform any other required act after receiving a notice of failure, AND
- The employer has failed, within 28 days after the service date of the notice of failure, to fix any mistakes by mailing to the person seeking payment and the defendant a disclosure certifying that the employer will immediately begin withholding any available funds under statute or court rule.

Weapons bills signed

Gov. Rick Snyder recently signed multiple bills addressing a variety of weapon issues.

Two public acts—PA 27, sponsored by Rep. Joel Johnson (R-Clare), and PA 28, sponsored by Rep. Holly Hughes (R-White River Twp.)—deal with brandishing a weapon and were monitored by MTA. PA 27 prohibits people from willfully and knowingly brandishing a firearm in public. It also eliminates exceptions for people who are engaged in hunting, target practice, or selling, purchasing or transferring the weapon. However, the exception for a peace officer is retained, and another exception is added for those lawfully acting in self-defense or in defense of another person. PA 28 defines “brandish” to mean point, wave about or display in a threatening manner with the intent to induce fear. Both are effective 90 days after enactment.

Another law—PA 29, sponsored by Sen. Dave Hildenbrand (R-Lowell Chtr. Twp.)—amends regulating pneumatic weapons, meaning any gun that expels a BB or pellet by spring, air or gas, as well as paintball guns. Previously, pneumatic weapons were included in the definition of a firearm, and townships and other local units could not tax or regulate the ownership, registration, purchase, sale, transportation or possession of them.

Another package of bills had removed pneumatic weapons from the definition of a firearm. PA 29 instead adds pneumatic guns to the list of weapons upon which local governments can't place restrictions. The only exceptions are for regulating possession by minors below 16 years old, as well as prohibiting the brandishing of a pneumatic weapon.

PA 29 also allows charter townships to ban discharging pneumatic guns in heavily populated areas, excluding authorized locations or on private property. MTA opposed the law due to its preemption of local authority.

Legislative lowdown

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

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

HB 4522: Would allow certain Michigan Senate and House committees to subpoena any records or files of local units with a two-thirds vote. MTA is working with the bill's sponsor to obtain changes.

HB 4553-4558: Would clarify and close loopholes in personal property tax reform. MTA is working with bill sponsors to address concerns.

HB 4516: Would allow disabled veterans who missed the filing period to retroactively receive a property tax exemption. MTA will continue to work with legislators to minimize the negative impacts to locals.

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

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

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Connecting with your community



Just two years ago, **Hayes Township** (Charlevoix Co.) still relied on a yearly printed newsletter to communicate with residents.

The northern Michigan township had a website, but it was far from user-friendly. There was only one surefire way to reach every resident—inserting a print newsletter along with each annual assessment notice.

Everything changed when Hayes Township got an extreme website makeover. Today, residents can see board meeting agendas in advance, either by checking the township website or subscribing to receive blog entries, meeting notices and other posts directly in their email. When township officials need help with a new park they're getting off the ground, they use the website to issue a callout. Board members spend time at each meeting encouraging residents to visit the website and subscribe to get the most up-to-date information.

Technology is allowing townships to reach beyond the walls of their township hall and communicate instantly with their residents. Websites, social media, government-specific technology and streaming digital videos give citizens greater access to information than ever before. Tasks that used to require a trip to the township hall can now be completed with a few clicks online.

These developments are not only more effective for townships. They're also resulting in a more informed, engaged population that is comfortable interacting with their elected officials.

Some still hesitate to take the plunge into the world of technology for fear it's too expensive or too complicated for them. While not every type of technology will work for all townships, these challenges can be overcome with a little research and creativity. Plus, experts agree that if townships don't take advantage of the technology available to them, they're missing out on a major opportunity to engage with their residents.

"Technology is here to stay, whether it's our generation's forte or not," said **Marlene Golovich**, Hayes Township clerk. "We need to try to keep up."

Why should townships care about technology?

In 2013, more than 74 percent of all households reported at least some Internet usage, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The Pew Research Center found that 64 percent of adults used smartphones in 2014. People are accustomed to searching for information online, and chances are, families and businesses are using Google or other search engines to search for your township.

For prospective residents and businesses, your township's website will be their first impression of your township. A dynamic, well-designed website could tell them that your township has great parks and trails, a high-functioning



government and an attractive community. At the same time, a stagnant or poorly designed website—or even no website at all—might leave the impression that your township is behind the times.

To **Dave Marquette, Delta Charter Township** (Eaton Co.) technology director, a strong Web presence could mean the difference between a business choosing to locate in the township and deciding to look elsewhere. A website requires initial funding and time, but Marquette looks at that as an investment. If you invest wisely, you'll see a return by way of businesses and families deciding to call your township home.

Marquette also believes townships can't afford to ignore social media. According to the Pew Research Center, 74 percent of Internet-using adults use some kind of social networking site. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter are where the community conversations are taking place. Chances are, that's where residents are talking about your township. If your township is not on social media, you're missing the conversation and a chance to reflect your township in a positive light.

Though township news and upcoming events can be distributed in paper newsletters, the reality is most people who receive them will throw them away and forget the information. Technology allows your township to spread the word in real time through your website and social media. Once you get the information out, it can easily be shared among the community.

Townships don't just use technology to spread information—they also use it to listen. Residents have the opportunity to communicate with their elected officials without picking up the phone, heading to the township hall or attending a meeting. Officials will have a better idea of what their residents want and which issues are perceived as problems among the community.

Not just for larger townships

When critics accused Hayes Township of being stuck in the last century, Golovich had a sinking feeling they were right. The township was still using a free, basic website provided by the county. It wasn't that officials didn't wish they had something better. Officials in the township, with fewer than 2,000 residents, just had limited knowledge of technology, not to mention concerns about the money they believed it would cost to upgrade.

"I saw other townships with these really nice websites," Golovich said. "I thought, wow, no wonder people say we're in the last century."

The issue came up at a township board meeting, and new resident Omar Feliciano just happened to be in the audience. He had experience designing websites in Detroit and told the board he was willing to help. He created an attractive site complete with a blog, calendar, newsletter and photos of the township. For a small monthly fee, Feliciano takes care of all website posting.

Instead of complaints, Golovich now gets calls from other communities wanting to know who designed Hayes Township's website. Today, the board is exploring social media and even crowdfunding to amp up engagement in an ongoing park project. Thanks to help from a willing resident, Hayes Township has opportunities Golovich never would have imagined.

"Omar stepped into our lives at just the right time," she said. "We're just not tech savvy. Without someone who understands all this, we couldn't do it."

Other townships might find themselves in a similar situation. Many townships likely don't have a technology employee on staff, and may not have the budget to pay for an expensive site. But if you only look within your township government, you might be limiting yourself unnecessarily.

Most communities have people who are proficient in the latest and greatest technology, said Andy Wolber, a consultant who has presented at MTA's Annual Conference on technology and social media for local governments. Teachers, librarians and business professionals are trained and often work with technology every day. Township officials who aren't comfortable with social media or Web applications should reach out to those residents and ask for help in becoming more proficient.

Putting bill payment, registrations and other functions online saves the township time as well. Everything is sent directly into the township system, and staff members don't need to shuffle as many stacks of paper.

Northfield Township (Washtenaw Co.) officials focused on the township's most frequently asked questions. They knew their most common calls were from residents asking about what's on the board meeting agenda that month, why their property was assessed a certain way and how they can pay their bills. Those issues were placed front and center on the township's website, Manager **Howard Fink** said.

Hayes Township officials wanted their residents to feel more included so that they would be more likely to get involved. They wanted a mechanism to post the board's agenda, and focused on finding a way to send that information directly to residents, instead of counting on them visiting the website frequently.

No tech team necessary

While creating a dynamic website takes time and effort, it's not the massive undertaking it was in years past. Gone are the days when municipalities were forced to build their own websites with HTML code. Local government websites have generally shifted to content management systems to easily manage the design and updating of website content.

Townships can choose to create their design with free programs such as WordPress, or they can have them professionally designed with a hired company. Some website companies tailor packages specifically for municipalities. Costs vary widely, depending on the package you select.

Design matters

You may not be able to judge a book by its cover, but people will judge your township by its website. If it's clean and sleek, with pictures that illustrate your township, you give the impression of a professional township. A cluttered, clunky site could leave visitors thinking your township is disorganized and behind the times. Choose a template—or design your own site—with clean lines, photos and concise text.

If possible, organize your website based on services, not departments. Township staff might know that the clerk's office handles cemetery-related issues, but residents might not guess that. Think about common questions or frequently used services and make sure they can be found within a few clicks.

Keep it simple

"Your website is only as good as your ability to update content," Fink said. If no one understands how to use the content management system, your website will be updated infrequently at best.

Simplicity was a priority at Northfield Township for that reason. Fink wanted the software to be easy enough to use that any employee could do it, if needed, and he kept that in mind as he helped select a company to rebuild the website.

Marquette always recommends using a content management system such as WordPress. Generally, anyone who knows how to use basic programs such as Microsoft Word can successfully operate it, and information is widely available on the Internet.

OMA and FOIA Web requirements

If your township directly or indirectly administers or maintains an official Internet presence, it must adhere to a few requirements in the Open Meetings Act (OMA) and that will be added to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) July 1, 2015:

OMA:

- If the township directly or indirectly maintains an official Internet presence that includes monthly or more frequent updates of public meeting agendas or minutes, then when the township reschedules a regular meeting or schedules a special meeting, the notice of the date, time and place of that meeting must be placed on the township's website, on a portion of the website that is fully accessible to the public, at least 18 hours in advance of the meeting time (in the same way that the notice must be posted on the township's notice board or window in a way that the public can see it at any time during the 18 hours). The notice must be placed either on the homepage, or on another page with a conspicuous link on the homepage.

FOIA:

- A written public summary of the township's FOIA procedures and guidelines for submitting requests, fee calculations, how to challenge and appeal, etc., must be posted on the township website.
- A person who requests public record already available on the township website must be notified of its location on the website, where they may download it directly. If the person wants a hard copy of the record, the township may charge the FOIA authorized fee.
- A township must respond to verbal requests for records on the website by informing the requestor of the location on the website.

Don't re-invent the wheel—or pay for it

Tools like online newsletters and bill payment were available when Northfield Township redesigned its website, but at an additional cost. To save money, Northfield Township decided to use a few free online platforms, such as MailChimp for its newsletters. Fink also opted to forgo the company's package that include online bill payment. Instead, the township upgraded its existing account with BS&A Software to receive online payments for property taxes and utilities.

There's no need to pay for a service you could get for free, or cheaper from a service you already have. Do some research before signing on the dotted line and make sure you can't get a Web application for free first.

No such thing as too much information

When Northfield Township wanted to be more transparent, the website was a natural place to look. Not only can residents find their elected officials, meeting agendas and community calendars, they can also find board meeting packets, streaming videos of meetings and even the entire code of ordinances.

"Really, the effort is to make sure that we get as much information online for the residents as possible," Fink said. "We're trying to promote transparency. And I think we've done a great job of it."

cover story



Technology is allowing townships to reach beyond the walls of their township hall and communicate instantly with their residents.

At a base level, anyone who visits your website should be able to find key information—contact information, meeting dates and times, park locations, community events and any other relevant data. Anything beyond the basic—such as board packets, meeting agendas, ordinances, meeting videos, and newsletters—will further help residents stay informed. Hayes Township uses a blog to post updates almost daily.

Other government-specific software, such as AccessMyGov through BS&A Software, Inc., can provide detailed financial information that give an even greater appearance of openness and transparency.

Delving in to social media

While most townships likely have some kind of Web presence, social media may be viewed as optional, or something to tackle when the staff has time. Wolber believes the issue isn't really time—it's whether social media is being made a priority.

"A lot of times, 'I don't find time' can actually be interpreted as 'I don't find value,'" Wolber said. "If I don't find value in something, I'm not going to spend time on it."

Social media is more than a passing fad. In 2014, according to the Pew Research Center, 64 percent of all online adults used Facebook, and more than half used two or more social media sites. This isn't limited to young adults. Also in 2014, more than half of online adults ages 65 and older use Facebook.

Your township can use social media to effectively get information out to all of its followers. Officials can spread the word about an event or meeting, and in times of emergencies, they can provide updates about power outages, snow emergencies and street closures. They can also dispel rumors and make sure residents are getting accurate information.

"People might want to discount Facebook as something the kids do," Marquette said. "Really, you should understand and realize this is how people are getting their information. It's also how they're talking about you. If you have a bad park, people are going to talk about it on Facebook. If you have bad customer service, people will talk about it on Facebook."

Start with a strategy

Thoughtful, interesting social media posts do take time to craft. Marquette recommends spending some time looking at the social media pages of other local governments and businesses. Look for the kinds of posts that you like to see and keep that in mind as you move forward with your township's page.

When you begin posting, think about including a mix of topics, Wolber said. If you post about only fire runs or arrests, someone who visits your page might think that's all that happens in your township. Celebrate the positive happenings in your community, post pictures of events and highlight residents who receive awards. Let residents know about upcoming meetings and weather alerts. Though there will always be a promotional aspect, think about social media beyond making announcements.

Marquette can summarize Delta Charter Township's social media strategy in two rules—post every day if possible, and

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everything that's posted has a picture on it. He also tries to share posts from related organizations, such as the county road commission. With each post, he thinks about what impression it would give a potential resident or business about the township.

Just as you would with your website, make sure a few employees are tasked with making social media a priority. The posting shouldn't be left up to just one person, but it also shouldn't be an afterthought for every township employee.

At Delta Charter Township, Marquette and another employee handle the social media. Other staff will send them information they want posted, and Marquette crafts the posts according to his strategy.

Not a one-way conversation

Social media is a conversation, and your township isn't the only one who's allowed to speak. With each post, you're inviting others in your community and beyond to respond. That can be unnerving to some township officials. Most of your conversations are likely to be positive, but there are times when angry residents might air their grievances. When this happens, react as if the person is standing in front of you, and listen carefully before you respond. Focus on the positive as much as you can.

"People tend to remember the negative. That's just how we're wired," Wolber said.

Marquette recommends avoiding the instinct to remove negative posts from your township's page. Unless the post is

profane, leave it alone—you don't want to give the impression that the township is trying to hide anything. Don't be defensive when you respond, but instead correct any false information, and offer to answer questions or correct mistakes.

There may be times when a post contains foul or discriminatory language and must be removed. Your township can take a proactive approach by clearly stating its comment policy on the page. (*Visit MTA's Social Media Policies Web page on the members-only section of www.michigantownships.org for sample social media policies.*)

Worth the time

Your township's online presence will admittedly take time and effort to cultivate and maintain. It won't happen by accident—it must become a priority for your best chance at success. In some cases, it might take an initial financial investment.

For townships with a well-established website or social media activity, every minute and dollar they've spent is well worth it. They have no doubt that they're making life easier for residents and connecting with them more than ever. Every township can have the same experience.



Bethany Mauger, MTA Staff Writer

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MTA is coming to your neighborhood

There's still time to take part in the remainder of our *MTA On The Road* regional meeting series! Connect with colleagues, get the inside scoop on issues impacting townships, and visit with MTA staff and vendors—all in one day, at one location, near you! Remaining dates are:

- June 2:** Great Hall at Valley Plaza, Midland
- June 3:** DoubleTree by Hilton, Port Huron
- June 4:** Comfort Inn Conference Center, Chelsea
- June 16:** Holiday Inn, Big Rapids
- June 17:** Grand Volute Ballroom, Lowell
- June 18:** Fetzer Center at WMU, Kalamazoo

Learn about how the failure of Proposal 1 impacts townships, the state's Audit of Minimum Assessing Requirements, changes to the Freedom of Information Act, what your board needs from you, setting board salaries, and "fracking."

Don't miss this opportunity to solve your township's thorniest issues. Download the registration brochure or register online at www.michigantownships.org.



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2015

Professional Development Retreats

Take part in intensive learning, networking—and fun—in the splendor of Northern Michigan at Boyne Highlands Resort.

Supervisors' Retreat	Sept. 10 & 11
Trustees' Retreat	Sept. 12 & 13
Clerks' Retreat	Sept. 23 & 24
Treasurers' Retreat	Sept. 29 & 30

Watch *Township Focus* or visit www.michigantownships.org for updated information, including registration details and session descriptions.

June workshop helps townships craft effective personnel policies

Every township has employees, and every township—large and small—needs to be prepared to address human resource issues. Hiring, firing, discipline, compensation, and recruiting and managing volunteers are just a few areas where all township officials must be knowledgeable.

MTA is teaming up with labor law expert Stephen Schultz, from the law firm Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes, PLC, to bring you real-life practical application. Preparing and implementing appropriate personnel policies can improve morale around your township hall, help you retain quality people and help your township avoid employment-related risks. Get the tools you need to better manage employees and volunteers.



Join us at the Holiday Inn West in **Kalamazoo** on **June 12** when we'll tackle the unique challenges township officials face when it comes to managing people. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. Class is held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

A registration form appeared in the May issue of *Township Focus*. Download a brochure or register online at www.michigantownships.org.



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upcoming MTA workshops

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Introducing MTA's New *Financial Double Feature*

Regardless of your position on the township board, being a responsible fiduciary is a critical component of your role as an elected official. MTA's new summer series is relevant to townships of all sizes and provides the proper practices to use when handling public money. Join financial experts David Williamson, CPA, author of *Township Focus*' popular "Financial Forum" column, and Jim Beelen, MTA Member Information Services liaison, as they walk you through the minefield of financial challenges unique to townships.

Money Matters

9 a.m. to Noon (inc. continental breakfast)

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

Better Budgeting

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

Gain a solid understanding of the budgeting process, from developing and adopting, all the way through monitoring actual budget performance. Review the budgeting cycle and identify important elements of the public hearing. Explore areas that can create confusion and misunderstanding, including the General Appropriations Act, along with using and amending the budget. Learn how to determine whether your budget is on target and what adjustments can be made to keep it in compliance.

Cancellations & Substitutions:

Written cancellation requests received at MTA by June 30 will receive a full refund. No refunds will be issued thereafter. You may switch meeting locations at no charge if you notify MTA at least one week prior to the meeting; otherwise a \$25/person fee will be assessed. Substitutions (from your township) may be made at any time without incurring a charge; please notify MTA of the change.



VALUE MTA's *Building a Better Budget* and *Policy Matters* books are available to workshop participants at a discounted rate. *Building a Better Budget* addresses issues from budgeting basics to projecting future financial trends, while *Policy Matters* offers policies, commentaries and tips to help your township use a policy approach to board governance and administration. Both books include a CD of sample policies, forms and appendices to customize for your township's use. Books will be distributed at check-in.

Financial Double Feature Registration Form

Which location will you attend?

- July 14: Little Bear East Arena, St. Ignace
- July 15: Evergreen Resort, Cadillac
- July 28: Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth
- July 29: Radisson Plaza, Kalamazoo

Township _____ County _____

Daytime Telephone _____ Email Address _____

Name & Title Both Classes Money Matters Budgeting Book(s)

Name & Title Both Classes Money Matters Budgeting Book(s)

Name & Title Both Classes Money Matters Budgeting Book(s)

Name & Title Both Classes Money Matters Budgeting Book(s)

Both Classes: Includes all meals, refreshments, both classes and a \$29 savings off regular rates! **Be sure to check which location you wish to attend.**

_____ \$149/person if registration is received by June 30. (\$169 as of July 1.)

Single Class: Includes that session's meals, refreshments and one class. **Check the class AND location you wish to attend.**

_____ **Money Matters ONLY** \$89/person before June 30 (\$99 as of July 1.)

_____ **Budgeting ONLY** \$89/person before June 30 (\$99 as of July 1.)

Books: Indicate who gets the book(s) onsite using box at left.

_____ \$28.80/book *Building a Better Budget* (includes CD).

_____ \$31.50/book *Policy Matters* (includes CD).

_____ **TOTAL** Rates apply to MTA members; non-members, call MTA for rates.

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

Check enclosed (payable to MTA)

Charge to: (circle one) MasterCard VISA

_____ - - - _____ / _____

Card # _____ Expires _____

Print Card Holder's Name _____ Signature _____



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

Ready, aim, fire!

Partnership launches world-class archery facility

Algoma Township (Kent Co.) officials saw more than an archery range when they were approached to help the West Michigan Archery Center with a grant.

Then-supervisor **Dennis Hoemke**, who has since retired, knew the proposed archery center had the potential to be a major draw to the West Michigan region. Getting involved with the project would take time, money and resources, but Hoemke was confident Algoma Township would see a major benefit as a result.

“You’ve got to have a vision,” Hoemke said. “You’ve got to look beyond your own interests, and be willing to be flexible and work with other people. I think there’s lots to gain through that process, but you have to look outside your own little tunnel and have a vision for something bigger than yourself.”

Algoma Township and **Plainfield Charter Township** (Kent Co.) joined forces with the West Michigan Archery Center to turn the center’s much-anticipated project into a reality. With the backing of private donations and a \$500,000 Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant from the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the first phase of the new facility opened last summer.

Today, the archery center is home to education and training for everyone from casual bowmen to Olympic-level archers. The 10,000-square-foot center features a 3-D indoor range and a 90-meter outdoor range with an area for special needs shooters. Other assets, such as additional outdoor ranges, are still in the works and expected to be completed in the near future. It attracts visitors throughout the region and beyond to its special events and community programs.

Local leaders believe the archery center will serve as a key element in enhancing the recreational opportunities available in West Michigan.



The West Michigan Archery Center, located in Plainfield Charter Township (Kent Co.), is home to archery education and training for everyone from casual bowmen to Olympic-level archers.

Current Algoma Township Supervisor **Nancy Clary** is thrilled with the result of their hard work.

“As supervisor, I am pleased that Algoma Township and its partners in this project can serve the growing community of youth and adult archers in the region by providing them with a state-of-the-art shooting facility, where new archers can learn, competitive archers can practice and receive coaching, and where local, regional and statewide tournaments can take place,” she said.

The facility, and even the grant itself, would not have been possible without the partnership among local government and the private sector, Hoemke said.

“This is a tremendous example of government cooperation and private cooperation,” Hoemke said. “It’s typical of what goes on in West Michigan. We looked beyond our narrow world and thought about the whole region and how it would be impacted. The archery center is a great asset.”

The archery center was encouraged to apply for a trust fund grant, but it could not do so on its own. The DNR said it needed a local government sponsor to qualify for the money.

That’s where Algoma Township came in. After a board vote, the township essentially became the grant vehicle, providing legal work, accepting private donations for matching funds and securing property leases.

Initially, the project was planned for an Algoma Township property, but officials later learned that the site would not work after all. The search for a new location led to a Plainfield Charter Township property adjacent to Algoma Township, a former landfill owned by the Kent County Department of Public Works that was leased by the township for recreation. Already, the West Michigan Sports Commission had plans to use part of this property for a 300-acre park.

And so a five-way partnership began—two townships, a county, a state agency and a private entity. Each local unit of government spent hours working with the DNR grant staff as well as attorneys and other local government staff to complete leases, operating agreements and land transfers. By the end of December, Algoma Township approved the final project agreement with the DNR Trust Fund so that construction could begin.



Local leaders believe the West Michigan Archery Center is a key element in enhancing the recreational opportunities available in the region.

As neighbors, working together was natural for Algoma and Plainfield Charter Townships. Both saw the value in the project, and both boards supported the plans. It was just a matter of talking and communicating with one another.

Plainfield Charter Township Supervisor **Jay Spencer** said this kind of cooperative planning is just part of the region’s mindset. “I think West Michigan as a whole looks for these types of opportunities and what we can do in order to facilitate good growth, good planning and good opportunities for our residents,” he said. “If that means cooperating with other units of government or businesses, that’s what we do.”



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Advocating for townships at MTA Legislative Day

Some traveled from as far as Houghton County, leaving their homes hours before the sun rose. Some gave up their day off for a day of official business. Some put aside the nerves they felt at the very thought of speaking with a state lawmaker.

As the nearly 200 officials gathered for MTA's 2015 Township Legislative Advocacy Day, these sacrifices were far from their minds. They were instead focused on one goal: reminding their lawmakers how their decisions at the state level impact local government.

The annual event, held April 16 in Lansing, was an opportunity not only for officials to enhance their relationships with lawmakers, but also to learn more about current issues in Lansing and advocacy.

As the form of government closest to the people, townships have the greatest impact on many issues close to the hearts of Michiganders, said MTA President **Linda Preston, Pokagon Township** (Cass Co.) supervisor.

"Townships are more than just a provider of services. They serve more than half of our state's population, and they truly are a driving force in Michigan," Preston said. "MTA's Township Legislative Advocacy Day is our chance to share with our representatives and senators the importance of township government. It's crucial that they have that perspective in mind as they make decisions for our state's residents."

Lt. Gov. Brian Calley was a featured speaker at the event, providing an in-depth look at the condition of Michigan's roads and bridges and exploring how our state's transportation system is funded.

"Our roads have gone beyond an inconvenience," Calley said. "They've become very expensive—and dangerous."

House Majority Floor Leader Aric Nesbitt (R-Porter Twp.) and Rep. Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield) outlined this year's priorities for their respective caucuses. They offered advocacy advice, such as asking state representatives and senators for their cell phone numbers and email addresses, and encouraged members to keep reaching out to their state officials.

"You need to see yourselves as a critical liaison between your citizens and those of us in Lansing," Moss said. "We truly rely on you.

"If we don't hear from you, we don't know what's on your mind," Nesbitt added. "Having you talk to us personally goes a long way."

This year's expanded event included morning breakout sessions on important issues being discussed in Lansing.

An expert from the State Tax Commission outlined the state's Audit of Minimum Assessing Requirements program to a packed room of officials, while James Johnson from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Catherine Mullhaupt, MTA director of Member Information Services, updated attendees on recommendations from the Urban Livestock Workgroup.

After being briefed by MTA staff on pending legislative issues, township officials headed to the House and Senate offices for more than 75 appointments. They discussed everything from revenue sharing and straight party voting to public notice requirements and preemption of local control, sharing the township perspective with their state leaders or their staff. Some officials met their senators inside the capital building just outside of Senate chambers, with their lawmakers speaking with them in between votes.

Addison Township (Oakland Co.) Clerk **Pauline Bennett**, who is also MTA District 21 director, enjoyed listening to other township officials as they spoke to state legislators. Hearing their points of view was not only helpful, but it also gave her a deeper appreciation for their knowledge and drive. She was glad lawmakers got a chance to see that side of township officials as well.

"Advocacy Day promotes MTA's strong membership," Bennett said. "The honorable state legislators get to experience firsthand the high involvement, the concern and the passion from MTA members."

The experience helped **Sparta Township** (Kent Co.) Treasurer **Rachel Shangle** to realize that many legislators aren't aware of how bills will impact townships, and that they truly value the input of township officials. The face-to-face meetings inspired her to continue the rapport established at Advocacy Day by calling or emailing her lawmakers in the future, she said.

Salem Township (Allegan Co.) Supervisor **Jim Pitsch** is hopeful that Advocacy Day will inspire even more township officials to become an advocate and regularly communicate with their legislators.

"[MTA's Advocacy Day] may be the most important day of the year for township officials," he said. "It gives us the time that we need in having that conversation with our representatives, and the masses do make a difference."

Joel Hondorp, **Byron Township** (Kent Co.) clerk and MTA District 15 director, already had extensive experience talking with his legislators when he came to Advocacy Day. But he says there's just something about going to Lansing that creates an even more positive advocacy experience. It's an opportunity to focus on township concerns while meeting with legislators on their home turf.

"When you attend an Advocacy Day, you are going to Lansing with a purpose," Hondorp said. "You become energized because you are hitting the Capitol with a couple hundred other kindred spirits. It empowers you when you are talking to legislators."

Mark your calendars for MTA's 2016 Township Legislative Advocacy Day, being held April 12-13, in Lansing.



House Majority Floor Leader Rep. Aric Neshitt (R-Porter Twp.), left, and Rep. Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield) kicked off the event with a discussion of their caucuses' legislative priorities for 2015.



Lt. Gov. Brian Calley, a featured speaker, told the audience that, "Years of neglect have created a public safety crisis" with Michigan's roads.



Sen. Geoff Hansen (R-Hart) took a break from legislative session to talk with township officials in the halls of the state Capitol building.



THANK YOU 2015 MTA-PAC CONTRIBUTORS!*

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Larry Merrill
Richard Stauffer

Silver

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Edward Hak
Penny Haney
Harold Koviak
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Earl Arnold
Kevin Beeson
Joanne Boehler
Dennis Bragiel
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Platinum	\$1,000+
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Member	\$1-99

A photograph of a white file drawer filled with numerous white file folders, with some folders slightly open, creating a sense of organized data.

2015 FOIA changes

What your township needs to do now

Sweeping changes to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) go into effect on July 1, 2015. Yes, in just a few weeks! These amendments focus on achieving a more uniform and well-defined FOIA request process, requiring detailed fee itemizations and increasing penalties on public bodies for noncompliance.

While the new requirements impose a greater burden on townships in responding to FOIA requests, some amendments also address a few long-standing township concerns. The following article provides an overview of the key FOIA changes about to go in effect.

Mandatory township procedures and guidelines

Township officials have long debated whether the FOIA actually required a FOIA policy. That debate has been put to rest by the 2015 FOIA amendments. Now it's clear that *every* township must have written procedures and guidelines in place for FOIA requests.

The required procedures and guidelines must describe the procedure for submitting a FOIA request, any potential fees for a request, any required deposits, and the process for a requester to appeal a response or the fee charged. A

summary of the procedures and guidelines must also be created. Additionally, the FOIA procedures and guidelines must include a form that provides an itemized breakdown of the fees for a request. This allows requestors to know exactly what they are being charged for, and may also be helpful to townships, particularly if they must defend a claim of excessive fees.

Townships must provide a copy of the procedures and guidelines and the summary of the procedures and guidelines with any response to a FOIA request. These documents must also be published on the township's website, if it has one. The township must provide free copies of its procedures and guidelines and the summary at anyone's request. The Legislature wants all citizens to be well-informed about the mechanics of the FOIA, and wants all procedures and guidelines to be readily available.

business solutions

MTA has created model procedures and guidelines for adoption by townships, which are available on www.michigantownships.org. *These must be adopted and in place for each township by July 1, 2015.*

Permissible charges for township costs

A township may charge labor costs for searching, reviewing and examining records, including redacting exempt information if necessary, plus labor costs for duplicating and publishing requested records. The amendments require that labor costs must be charged in 15-minute increments—but the time must be rounded down to the nearest 15 minutes, so any labor less than 15 minutes would be free.

For duplication and publication, a township can establish time increments in its procedures and guidelines, but these must also be rounded down. The required itemization of fees must provide a breakdown of the fees charged.

Labor costs for searching, reviewing and examining records, including separating exempt from non-exempt information, can be charged only if they would result in unreasonably high costs for the township. The burden is on the township to establish that unreasonably high costs would occur. Be certain that your township has justification for charging such costs, or you may be exposed to a claim for recovery of excessive fees.

Overtime wage rates cannot be charged for a FOIA request, unless specifically agreed to by the requestor. But townships may charge up to 50 percent of the labor cost to cover fringe benefits of the employees performing the labor for a FOIA a request.

In addition to labor costs, the new FOIA amendments place a limit on actual costs for responding to requests, such as mailing and paper copy costs. The amendments set a limit of 10 cents per page for any copy on a standard or legal-sized paper. Mailing must be done in the most economical way possible, so any type of special mailing service must be approved by the requestor.

Indigency waivers

The previous version of the FOIA required that the first \$20 of any fee for a FOIA request be waived if the requester is indigent. The amendments provide that a person can only claim two indigency fee waivers in the same calendar year. Indigency is established by the requester submitting an affidavit showing that the individual receives some form of public assistance or some other justification for his/her inability to pay the fee.

Fee deposits

The previous version of the FOIA allowed a township to require a deposit of one-half of the total estimated fee, if the fee is in excess of \$50. The amendments retain the ability of townships to require a deposit, but require that the request for any deposit must include a detailed itemization of costs described earlier, a copy of the township's FOIA procedures and guidelines, the summary of the procedures and guidelines, and an estimate of how long the township will take to produce the records.

One small victory for townships in the FOIA amendments allows townships, in certain very limited instances, to charge a 100 percent deposit. The 100 percent deposit requirement attempts to address frequent and abusive requesters who don't pick up the provided documents or pay the fee. The amendments allow a township to charge a 100 percent deposit to a requester who has not paid for a previous FOIA request fee if the township can demonstrate *all* of the following:

- The prior, unpaid fee did not exceed 105 percent of the fee that was originally estimated by the township; *and*
- The disclosed records from the previous request actually provide all of the records requested, and they are still in the township's possession; *and*
- The township actually made the requested records available to the requester, with their receipt contingent on payment of the fee; *and*
- The outstanding fee has been unpaid for at least 90 days; *and*
- The requester is not able to show proof that he or she actually paid for the request and refuses to do so; *and*

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- The request for which the 100 percent deposit is being requested includes the detailed itemization of fees; *and*
- Not more than 365 days have elapsed since the request was made for the documents that remain in the township's possession, awaiting payment.

Therefore, failure to pay for a request by an individual does not automatically trigger a situation in which a 100 percent deposit may be charged for subsequent requests. There are many factors that must be met and the township has the burden of establishing them.

Fee reductions for late responses

The FOIA amendments require townships to reduce any fee by 5 percent per day for each day that the township is late in responding to a request, as long as the request was filed correctly.

Fees for contract labor

Townships may now recover extra costs for contract labor for the necessary review for separation and deletion of exempt information from nonexempt information. Although the amendments still require that the wage of lowest-paid employee of the township capable of completing the review must be used for the fee calculation, the township will now be able to recover the costs of contract labor (such as attorneys and other professionals used to respond to FOIA requests), up to an hourly fee cap of six times the state minimum wage, if the township does not employ a person capable of separating exempt from nonexempt information. Although the fee cap will not fully cover most professional costs, it at least allows townships to, for the first time, recover a portion of the needed professional services for responding to FOIA requests.

Appeal procedures

Under the 2015 amendments, the head of a public body now has 10 *business* days (not just 10 days) to respond to an FOIA appeal. A requestor also can now appeal the fee charged by a township to the head of the public body. If the appeal is not granted by the head of the public body, the requestor can file a court action claiming that the fee is excessive.

Penalties for violations

The 2015 FOIA amendments allow requestors to challenge the fees charged by a township by petitioning a court to lower the fee. If the court lowers the fee and also determines that the township “arbitrarily and capriciously” charged an unreasonable fee, the court can also assess a civil fine and damages up to \$1,000 against the township. If the court reduces the township’s fee by at least 50 percent, the court can award the requester attorney fees.

The former FOIA allowed damages up to \$500 if a township “arbitrarily and capriciously” violated the FOIA by refusing or delaying disclosure of requested records. The 2015 amendments increase these damages to \$2,000. The amendments also allow fines from \$2,500 to \$7,500 if

a township “willfully and intentionally” fails to follow the FOIA.

Websites and electronic records

The FOIA amendments require a township to inform a requestor if any of the requested records are available on the township’s website. In responding to written requests, a township must advise the requestor of the online availability and provide a link to the Web location of the records. The township must also advise the requestor whether a fee will apply, if the records are requested in a different format. If a township fails to inform the requestor that the records are available online, the township cannot charge a fee for providing the records in physical or different form.

The FOIA amendments require townships to comply with requests for documents to be provided in electronic or other non-physical form, to the extent that it is as economical as possible and the township has the capabilities. The township cannot be forced to provide records in a form for which it does not possess the requisite capabilities or technology.

Further information

Be sure to visit www.michigantownships.org for more information about the FOIA amendments. MTA’s “FOIA Compliance” Web page on the members-only section of the website has model forms and policies to help you develop your own FOIA procedures and guidelines to comply with the FOIA amendments.



William K. Fahey and Steven L. Koski, Township Attorneys, Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes PLC, Okemos.

For more information, visit www.fsbrlaw.com or call (517) 381-0100.

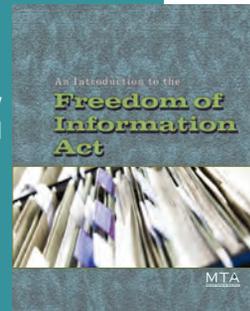


Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes PLC is an MTA Allied Service Provider at the Leadership Circle level. Turn to page 2 for more information on Township Allied Service Providers.

MTA resources on upcoming FOIA changes

MTA has developed a “FOIA Survival Kit,” which includes sample forms, policies and procedures, as well as a written public summary. Download it from the members-only section of www.michigantownships.org, or call (517) 321-6467 to have one sent to you.

MTA’s *Introduction to the Freedom of Information Act* book is also being updated, and will include a CD with the samples. You can also learn more at a FOIA breakout session at the remaining MTA *On The Road* regional meetings this month.





Firefighters, overtime and the Fair Labor Standards Act

This article will explore options for paying part-time and full-time firefighters who work hours that exceed Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) overtime requirements.

Note: This article is written from the perspective of the FLSA, which uses the term “on call” to apply to firefighters who have set, paid hours that they are expected to be on duty, and during which they must be available to respond even while “on call” (on paid duty but away from the station). For the purposes of the FLSA, this is not the same thing as what is commonly referred to as “on-call” firefighters who do not have set hours in which they are paid to be on duty, but respond to calls if they are available, and are paid only when and if they do respond for duty.

Many FLSA rules, such as those governing compensable time, minimum wage and overtime, apply to fire protection employees the same way they apply to other township employees. But recognizing that firefighters schedules may not fit the “9 to 5” model, there are some special rules for when overtime is considered compensable, and how to calculate overtime payments.

Paying by shifts

Full-time and part-time firefighters usually work a “tour of duty” (an official, paid work schedule), made up of “shifts” that may or may not be contiguous, during the department’s work period (pay period, such as 14 days). The length of a shift is determined by the employer, and can be any number of hours, including 24 hours. The advantage of working shifts is that the firefighters are available at the station or on-call for callouts. A shift may include time on runs or being available for runs, performing maintenance or other station duties, receiving training, and sleeping. Shifts may be “scheduled” (assigned in advance) or unscheduled. When a 24-hour shift is used in larger fire departments, a firefighter’s entire shift, both work and sleep, may be served at the station.

Smaller paid fire departments, however, may not have the facilities to house the firefighters, but might still require them to be on-call for a full 24-hour shift, even during the eight hours or so that they are not at the station. The FLSA generally allows an employer to pay a different hourly rate for on-call time than for regular work time as long as firefighters are paid an average that equals at least minimum wage for the entire work period and have defined their working hours and rate by agreement. The agreement can either be part of a collective bargaining agreement or an expressed agreement where the employee accepts a position knowing the terms of the agreement. So a firefighter can sleep off-premises and still be compensated and available for the entire 24-hour shift.

For example: A firefighter works two-day tours of duty on and three days off, repeated through a 14-day work period.

Each 48-hour tour of duty has two 24-hour shifts for a total of 144 hours. Each 24-hour shift consists of 16 hours regular work at the rate of \$10 per hour, and eight hours on-call off-premises at \$5 per hour. The firefighter’s pay totals \$160 for regular work (16 hours x \$10/hour), plus \$40 for on-call time (8 hours x \$5/hour) for each shift for a total of \$200 per 24-hour shift. The average hourly rate of pay is \$8.33, which is above the current minimum wage of \$8.15 per hour. **See Figure 1.**

Figure 1

Two days on & three days off: 24-hour shifts @ \$10/hr for 16 hrs of station work & \$5/hr for 8 hours of on-call time over a 14-day period.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
\$10/hr @ 16 hrs. \$5/hr @ 8 hr.	\$10/hr @ 16 hrs. \$5/hr @ 8 hr.	Off	Off	Off	\$10/hr @ 16 hrs. \$5/hr @ 8 hr.	\$10/hr @ 16 hrs. \$5/hr @ 8 hr.
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Off	Off	Off	\$10/hr @ 16 hrs. \$5/hr @ 8 hr.	\$10/hr @ 16 hrs. \$5/hr @ 8 hr.	Off	Off

Using the regular, 40-hour per week FLSA overtime threshold, how would the firefighter who worked the schedule in Figure 1 be paid? When you have a shift worker who is paid different rates of pay for different activities (work and sleep time), there are several steps used to calculate a total gross wage:

1. Determine if overtime is due

- a. **Week 1:** He worked 96 hours, so 56 hours of overtime is due.
- b. **Week 2:** He worked 48 hours, so 8 hours of overtime is due.

2. Determine an hourly base pay amount by dividing the total compensation by the total hours per week

- a. **Week 1:** \$800/96 = \$8.33/hour base pay rate (Gross wage/total hours = hourly rate).
- b. **Week 2:** \$400/48 = \$8.33/hour base pay rate.

3. Calculate regular pay

- a. **Week 1:** \$8.33 x 40 regular hours equals \$333.20 in regular pay.
- b. **Week 2:** \$8.33 x 40 regular hours equals \$333.20 in regular pay.

4. Calculate overtime pay

- a. **Week 1:** \$8.33 x 1.5 equals \$12.50/hour. \$12.50 x 56 hours of overtime equals \$700 in overtime pay.
- b. **Week 2:** \$8.33 x 1.5 equals \$12.50/hour. \$12.50 x 8 hours of overtime equals \$100 in overtime pay.

5. Add regular pay to overtime pay for a total gross wage for the pay period

- a. **Week 1:** \$333.20 regular pay, plus \$700 overtime pay, equals a total gross wage of \$1,033.20.
- b. **Week 2:** \$333.20 regular pay, plus \$100 overtime pay, equals a total gross wage of \$433.20.

The total pay that the firefighter is legally entitled to for the 14-day pay period comes to 1,466.40.

Overtime and the 7(k) rule

Under 29 U.S.C. §207(k), commonly known as the “7(k) rule” in the FLSA, public sector fire departments may increase the FLSA overtime thresholds beyond 40 hours per week to the thresholds established by the U.S. Department of Labor for fire department personnel who perform fire protection activities. **See Figure 2.**

Establishing a 7(k) work period can minimize overtime burdens. Instead of being paid overtime for hours over 40 hours per week, if a firefighter works tours of duty that total more than 212 hours in a 28-day work period, then he/she must be paid overtime at one and one-half times his/her regular rate for the hours over 212 hours. In seven-day or 14-day work periods, firefighters could work up to 53 or 106 hours, respectively, without incurring overtime costs.

Although the 7(k) exemption allows you to set any work period between seven to 28 days, the longer the work period, the more flexibility you have in scheduling. Using a work period that is the same as your payroll cycle will also make payroll administration easier.

7(k) qualifications

To qualify for the 7(k) rule, a firefighter, paramedic, emergency medical technician, rescue worker, ambulance personnel, or other hazardous materials worker must:

- 1) Be employed by an organized fire department or fire department district.
- 2) Be trained in fire suppression.
- 3) Have the legal authority and responsibility to engage in fire suppression.
- 4) Be engaged in the prevention, control and extinguishment of fires or response to emergency medical situations where life, property or the environment is at risk.

Performing fire protection activities includes incidental non-firefighting functions such as housekeeping, equipment maintenance, lecturing, attending community fire drills, and inspecting homes and schools for fire hazards.

Figure 2

Work Period (days)	Maximum Hours Worked Before Overtime Must Be Paid
28	212
27	204
26	197
25	189
24	182
23	174
22	167
21	159
20	151
19	144
18	136
17	129
16	121
15	114
14	106
13	98
12	91
11	83
10	76
9	68
8	61
7	53

Employees who satisfy the above criteria are considered fire protection employees regardless of their status as trainees, probationary or permanent employees, or their particular specialty or job title. This includes part-time or full-time employees or temporary workers employed for a particular fire or time period. The exemption does not cover department personnel who do not fight fires on a regular basis, or who are paid a salary.

Firefighters who hold multiple work positions within a township may also be eligible for the 7(k) exemption as long as 80 percent or more of their work time is spent on fire protection activities. For example, if a firefighter is also the building inspector, she is eligible for the 7(k) exemption if at least 80 percent of her total township work hours are served as a firefighter, and no more than 20 percent of her total hours are worked for the building department in the total work period. (29 CFR 553.212(a))

Calculating overtime under the 7(k) rule

Under the 7(k) rule, you do not calculate overtime per a 40-hour week. You calculate it over the full work period (and it works best if that is the same as the pay period).

So, would the firefighter who worked the hours in Figure 1 still be eligible for overtime under the 7(k) rule?

Yes, because he worked 144 hours when only 106 hours are allowed in a 14-day work period before overtime must be calculated. Here’s how the final pay is calculated:

1. Determine if overtime is due

He worked 144 total hours in the 14-day work period. The 7(k) threshold for a 14-day period would allow the firefighter to work 106 hours. So 38 hours of overtime is due for the work period.

2. Determine an hourly base pay amount by dividing the total compensation by the total hours per work period

$\$1,200/144 = \$8.33/\text{hour}$ base pay rate

3. Calculate regular pay

$\$8.33 \times 106$ regular hours equals \$882.98 in regular pay.

4. Calculate overtime pay

$\$8.33 \times 1.5 = \12.50 . $\$12.50 \times 38$ overtime hours equals \$475 in overtime pay.

5. Add regular pay to overtime pay for total gross wage for the pay period

$\$882.99$ (regular hours) plus \$475 (overtime hours) equals a total gross wage of \$1,357.99.

Using the 7(k) exemption reduces the employer’s overtime liability by \$108.41 compared to the 40-hour week calculation.

Fair compensation for an invaluable service

Township firefighters provide an invaluable service to their community. Township officials must ensure that these hometown heroes are fairly compensated, including paying overtime compliant with federal law, for the duties performed when protecting township residents. But townships may use the 7(k) exemption to better reflect the unique nature of firefighters’ shifts while moderating overtime costs.

This is the final article in a three-part series about township firefighter compensation. For Parts 1 & 2, visit MTA’s “Fire Departments and Fire Protection” Web page on the members-only section of www.michigantownships.org.

aroundthestate

townships in the spotlight



Photo credit: George Thomas hz536n/George Thomas

Plainfield Township

The first **Plainfield Township** (Iosco Co.) meeting was held in April 1868. At the time, the township was actually three contiguous 36-square-mile townships. In the early 1870s, portions of the township detached to form **Wilber Township**. Pioneers first settled in the area due to the vast lumber supply and farmland.

The township's first hall was built in the early 1890s. In 1941, a second hall was dedicated. Made possible by the federal Works Progress Administration grant, the hall was completed using 78,000 board feet of logs donated by the U.S. Forest Service, which were locally sawed into lumber. After a fire destroyed the hall in 1959, a third hall was built and used until recently when offices were moved into the new community center, housed in the former Hale High School.

The township purchased the school in 2013 for \$1 after holding several meetings to gauge community interest and discuss the uses and funding for the building. After a deep cleaning, some repairs and a little paint, the school was transformed into the new community center. The center, which includes township offices, a gym for community use, retail space, a meeting room, Special Olympics Area 31 training center and storage, is a valuable new asset for the community.

The Huron National Forest covers large portions of the township—approximately 75 percent of the land in the southeast part of the township and 50 percent in the northern portion are part of the national forest. The township also boasts numerous parks, camps and trails, and works to preserve the natural features of the township, including the woodlands, rivers and lakes within its borders.

For the past six years, the township has been involved with the Hale Area Association's Hot Air Balloon Festival, held on the Iosco County Fairgrounds each September. This event brings community members together to enjoy a balloon flights throughout the weekend, including one at dusk with the balloons lighting up the sky.



Information

when you need it.

Three ways to connect with MTA

1 Log on to www.michigantownships.org

MTA's website provides access to a wealth of members-only information, including hundreds of pages of township information, sample documents and resources, covering topics from assessing to zoning, and so much more. If you're not logging in to the members-only section of www.michigantownships.org, you are missing out! Click on "Member Login" in the right-hand corner of MTA's home page, and log in with your username (your email address on file with MTA) and password.

2 Join Community Connection

Community Connection, our exclusive social networking site *only* for MTA members, is a great way for township officials to come together to discuss best practices, share ideas and ask questions of your peers. MTA event participants can network with fellow attendees and find handouts at the conclusion of the workshop series. Access on the member login page of www.michigantownships.org, or by clicking on the  logo on the MTA member home page.

3 Follow @MiTownships on Twitter

Stay up-to-date on legislative issues and other important topics when following MTA on Twitter. Find the Association on www.twitter.com by searching for @MiTownships.



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