

# Michigan Township Focus

MAY 2016

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION



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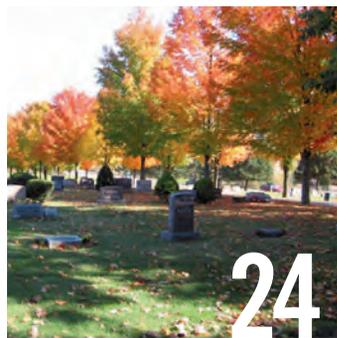
No matter where you are in Michigan, you're no more than six miles away a body of water. The "blue economy" movement is an effort to make the water an even more integral part of Michigan's economy and quality of life, and townships can play a crucial role.

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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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# MTA advocates for townships in the courts

While legislative advocacy for local democracy is thoroughly embedded in the Michigan Townships Association's mission, MTA effectively advocates on behalf of its members in the courts as well.



The MTA Legal Defense Fund, financially supported by more than 90 percent of our member townships, provides the necessary resources for MTA to engage in court cases and regulatory proceedings impacting townships. Voluntary contributions equal to 3 percent of the member township's dues fund MTA intervention in lawsuits and regulatory proceedings where decisions could set precedents of

critical importance to township government.

The fund originated in 1972 to support **Cooper Charter Township's** (Kalamazoo Co.) litigation challenging the authority of the Michigan Tax Tribunal. Recognizing that all townships would benefit from Cooper Charter Township prevailing, the MTA Board of Directors solicited contributions from townships statewide to help underwrite the township's considerable legal expenses. The strong positive response from member townships demonstrated the value of a "war chest" enabling nimble and effective MTA intervention on other cases as well.

The MTA Board's Legal Defense Fund Committee reviews all Legal Defense Fund requests and approves supporting cases demonstrating significant threats or opportunities for township government. The committee also considers whether the objectives of the case are consistent with MTA's core values and relies on MTA Legal Counsel to provide analysis and recommendations as to the reasonable likelihood that the side requesting support will prevail.

MTA support usually consists of filing an *amicus curiae* ("friend of the court") brief to bring to the court's attention additional perspectives and arguments to buttress the township's position, ensure the court is aware of potential unintended consequences, or alert the court to significant public policy implications. Occasionally, MTA Legal Counsel also makes a court appearance for oral argument. In addition to those cases where a township is a litigant, the committee also will authorize MTA Legal Defense Fund involvement in litigation involving other types of governmental entities if there is an impact on townships as well.

In very rare cases, the MTA Legal Defense Fund Committee will authorize funds directly to a township to assist with its litigation expenses, but due to the number of township lawsuits, this type of assistance is awarded only when a township demonstrates that it is incapable of financing its own litigation and the issues of the case are of critical importance to townships statewide. MTA frequently partners on jointly funded briefs with the Michigan Municipal League and other public sector associations on cases that also impact their members. While in most cases court rules require *amicus* parties being granted permission to file a brief, MTA has a standing invitation from the Michigan Supreme Court in recognition of our credibility and helpful perspective of MTA-authored briefs.

Currently, the MTA Legal Defense Fund is involved in approximately 40 active court cases supporting townships with populations as small as 818 and as large as nearly 74,000. Taxation-related issues, such as tax exemption disputes, "big box store" assessing methodology and special assessment procedures, currently generate more cases than other township functions, but zoning and governmental immunity challenges follow closely. Other litigation address township interests related to ordinance and condemnation authority, annexation, collective bargaining and drain code procedures. MTA's Legal Defense Fund supported the multi-association lawsuit that secured an injunction on the so-called "gag order" law that criminalized local leaders using public funds to disseminate ballot question information, and an additional *amicus* brief in support of finding the law unconstitutional. Another recent federal case involves whether an Indian treaty preempts local government zoning and taxation on Indian-owned lands outside of the recognized reservation. The Legal Defense Fund has also supported coalitions challenging a series of electricity rate hikes on street lights and pump systems, and protecting township rights-of-way authority.

The MTA Legal Defense Fund—yet another compelling example of the power of townships working together for the common good.

## TOWNSHIPS HELPING TOWNSHIPS

### Illinois township sends aid to Flint Charter Township

There are 28 “franchise” customers—some 53 residences and businesses, including a 550-unit apartment complex—in **Flint Charter Township** (Genesee Co.) that are supplied by Flint water lines. One Illinois township recently made a big difference to those individuals when it collected and shipped two truckloads of bottled water to the community, which has also been impacted by the tainted water crisis.

When Thornton Township, Ill., officials heard that Michigan townships were also being impacted by the water crisis, the Illinois community sprang into action.



“We chose to bring (water) to Flint Township because we are a township and we believe not only in working with everyone but townships especially,” Thornton Township Assessor **Cassandra Holbert** said. Holbert was among the 20 volunteers, including several fellow municipal officials, who traveled to Michigan with the first truckload of water.

“Thornton Township is much larger than Flint Township and has different functions than townships in Michigan,” said Flint Charter Township Supervisor **Karyn Miller**. “But Thornton Township helping another township is neighbors helping neighbors, which is what it’s all about, and we are very grateful! The residents who received the water appreciated Thornton Township’s kindness and generosity, too.”

The Thornton community immediately began pitching in when it heard about the water drive for Flint Charter Township, bringing cases and jugs of water to drop-off sites. The water drive was publicized on the township’s Facebook page. With help from neighboring schools and communities, the township collected more than 17 pallets of water for its first delivery.

The Illinois volunteers were joined by community members and township officials to help distribute the water on a Saturday afternoon in early February. Flint Charter Township Treasurer **Marcia Binelli**, who helped coordinate the water collection with Thornton Township, was on-site, along with Trustees **Barb Vert** and **Belenda Parker**, Building Director **Tracey Tucker** and several police officers.

A second truckload, with 10 additional volunteers, arrived several days later.

*The photo and portions of this article were excerpted with permission from “Thornton Township, Illinois, donates water to Flint Township” in the Feb. 11, 2016, Flint Township View.*

## HAPPY TO BE HERE

### Township community named one of Michigan’s ‘happiest places’

One mid-Michigan township has been named in the Top 10 “happiest” communities in Michigan, according to an online regional “infotainment” site.

**Delhi Charter Township** (Ingham Co.), which contains an unincorporated community better known as Holt, was ranked eighth on the listing. The Top 10 list was compiled by [www.homesnacks.com](http://www.homesnacks.com), a website that crunches “bite-sized” regional data and shares it online.

In describing the community, the ranking said, “H-Town is one of the only happy places that’s not in the Grand Rapids or Detroit area. This group of smiling, happy people live on the south side of Lansing.

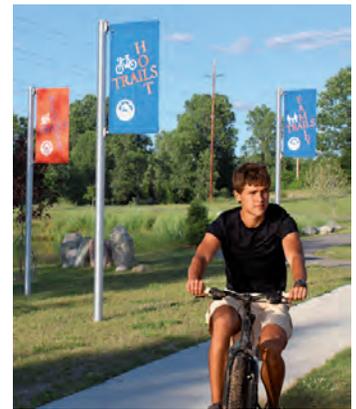
[Fifty-nine] percent are married, 71 percent own a home, and the sun shines there more often than in lots of other places in the state. Plus, Michigan State [University] pulled out that amazing win over [the University of] Michigan earlier this year. They’re probably still smiling about that one up there.”

In recognition of its honor, the township started a social media campaign—complete with a sunny, yellow logo—using the hashtag #HappyinHolt. Residents have used the hashtag on social media sites such as Instagram and Facebook, posting photos and comments showcasing their community pride.

The township, which has a population of just over 25,000, maintains a small-town atmosphere, while offering ample business, residential and recreational opportunities. Officials there say that they have “mastered the art of balancing development and quality of life.”

Said Clerk **Evan Hope**, “I think people are ‘Happy in Holt’ because it’s a great place to live, work and play. Delhi Charter Township/Holt was also named in the top 10 places in Michigan to own a home. We have great parks and trails, lots of fun events, a thriving farmers market, award-winning schools, and a growing business climate. And we’re a ‘green’ community.”

The township has 100 acres of parks and is home to many national and international companies providing a wide range of services and products. Delhi Charter Township is guided by a master plan to ensure that the community continues to develop in a manner that provides the highest quality of life for those who reside there while assuring opportunities for future businesses, residents and visitors.





**AMAR & OMA**

**AG: Audit of a local assessing district is not subject to OMA**

The Michigan attorney general recently issued Opinion No. 7288 stating that an audit of minimum assessing requirements (AMAR) is not subject to the Open Meetings Act (OMA). The request for an opinion was submitted by Rep. Ed McBroom (R-Waucedah Twp.).

An AMAR is an audit of a local assessing district that takes place under the authority of the State Tax Commission (STC). Per the opinion, the STC has “general supervision of the administration of the tax laws of the state” and has the duty to “exercise general supervision over the supervisors and other assessing officers of this state, and to take such measures as will secure the enforcement of the provisions” of the General Property Tax Act. The attorney general opined that the audit of a local assessing district’s assessment roll on behalf of the STC under the General Property Tax Act is not subject to OMA.

However, the opinion further stated that the STC, as a public body, is subject to OMA when it deliberates or decides to assume jurisdiction over a local assessing district’s assessment roll.

*For more about the AMAR, and additional assessing resources, visit MTA’s “Assessing” Web page, on the members-only section of [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org). After logging in via the “Member Website” portal, access via the “Index of Topics” under the “Answer Center” tab.*

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**LOCAL UPDATES FROM ACROSS MICHIGAN**

**Township happenings**

**Georgetown Charter Township** (Ottawa Co.) received positive comments from the community after the board approved implementation of streetscape enhancements along a main thoroughfare in the township, including new landscaping, street lights and a median stone wall.

**Summit Township** (Jackson Co.) and neighboring municipal firefighters recently donated \$7,500 to three local breast cancer patients to help with their medical expenses. The firefighters raised money by selling breast cancer awareness T-shirts and sweatshirts.

**Bloomfield Charter Township** (Oakland Co.) firefighters and police officers took to the court in a charity basketball game raising money for Bloomfield Youth Assistance and Bloomfield Hills High School. The police officers won the game, but fell to the firefighters in a tug-of-war bout.

A flash mob took over Fashion Square Mall in **Saginaw Charter Township** (Saginaw Co.) as part of a worldwide campaign, One Billion Rising, to bring attention to violence against women.

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

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## Database allows members to keep MTA profile up-to-date, access online directory

Ensure that your township's important MTA resources, updates and information are coming to the correct person and address by helping MTA keep its database up-to-date with your current contact information.



MTA-member officials can directly update their profile information via our website, [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org). Simply log in to members-only portion of the website using your username (your email address on file with MTA) and password. After logging in, select "My Profile" under the "My MTA" tab to get started. (*Forgot your password? Select the "Forgot Your*

*Password?" link on the log-in page. Enter your email address on file with MTA, and you'll be sent a link to create a new password.*)

Got a new township board member? The township clerk can make adjustments to the profile information—including adding a new official whenever a new township official joins the board, or marking a former official for removal from the database. (*When adding a new official, be sure not to overwrite the former official's information with the new official's name and information. Contact MTA with questions.*) These efforts will help ensure that the right information goes to the right person.

Keeping up-to-date information—including your email address—on file with MTA is critical to ensure you are getting the most out of your Association membership. If we have the incorrect email address, you are missing out on valuable information found in our electronic newsletters, as well as notices about educational seminars, important legislative action and other opportunities for you!

Changes can also be submitted to MTA at [database@michigantownships.org](mailto:database@michigantownships.org), by calling (517) 321-6467 or faxing to (517) 321-8908.

As another added feature of MTA's database, MTA members also have access to an online directory of townships and township officials, which can be searched by last name, township or even title. To access this networking tool, after logging in to the members-only section of [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org), click on "My MTA," then "Directories."

An updated print version of the *Michigan Township Officials Directory* is now available for purchase. The print *Directory* includes a township listing (by county), as well as separate listings for each township office. Member price is \$30; \$45 for non-members. An order form appears on the inside back cover, or order by visiting the MTA Store on [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org) or calling (517) 321-6467. PDFs of the *Directory* are also posted online for member officials to access, download or print.

## profile



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Advertisorial

## Reminder: MTA's Robinson Scholarship deadline is May 31

Spread the word to students in your township about MTA's Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship. The May 31 application deadline is almost here!

The scholarship is a one-time award determined on a competitive basis by the applicant's academic achievement, community involvement and commitment to a career in local government administration.

Ensure students in your area know about the scholarship! Include information in your township newsletter, or post a link on your township website to MTA's Robinson Scholarship Web page, [www.michigantownships.org/scholarship.asp](http://www.michigantownships.org/scholarship.asp). Need more information? Call (517) 321-6467.



### mta events | May

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MTA Double Header: *Election Tips & Tricks* and *Your Township as a Workplace: Avoiding Employment Mistakes* workshops, Mt. Pleasant

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MTA Double Header: *Election Tips & Tricks* and *Your Township as a Workplace: Avoiding Employment Mistakes* workshops, Gaylord

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Early-bird registration deadline for MTA's *UP North Summit*, June 7-9 in Harris  
MTA Double Header: *Election Tips & Tricks* and *Your Township as a Workplace: Avoiding Employment Mistakes* workshops, Kalamazoo



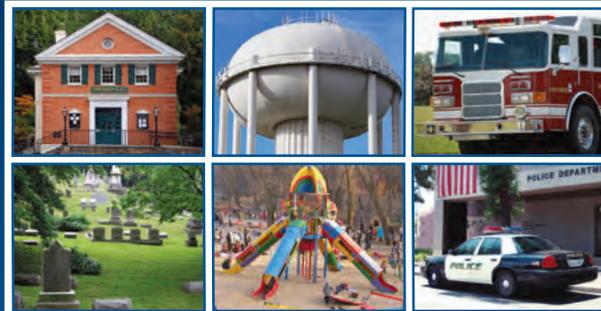
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## MAY

**2** Deadline for filing the Farmland Exemption Affidavit (Form 2599) with the local assessor if the property is NOT classified agricultural or if the assessor asks an owner to file it to determine whether the property includes structures that are not exempt.

*First Monday in May.* Deadline for assessor to file tabulation of taxable valuations for each classification of property with the county equalization director on State Tax Commission (STC) Form L-4025 to be used in "Headlee" calculations. (MCL 211.34d(2))

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

**3** Emergency absentee voting for May 3 election until 4 p.m. (MCL 168.759b)

Election.

**By 9** Boards of county canvassers meet to canvass May 3 election. (MCL 168.821)

**By 10** Ballot wording of local proposals to be presented at Aug. 2 primary certified to county and local clerks; local clerks receiving ballot wording forward to county clerk within two days. (MCL 168.646a)

**13** Deadline for the state to prepare the annual assessment rolls for state-assessed property, such as telephone companies and railroads. (MCL 207.9(1))

**23** *Fourth Monday in May.* Final state equalization order is issued by STC. (MCL 209.4)

**26** *After May 25 and before June 3.* Last day for allocation board hearing (not less than eight days or more than 12 days after issuance of preliminary order). (MCL 211.215)

**27** If, as a result of state equalization, the taxable value of property changes, the equalization director shall revise the millage reduction fractions by the Friday following the fourth Monday in May. (MCL 211.34d(2))

**By 31** Appeals of property classified as commercial real, industrial real, development real, commercial personal, industrial personal or utility personal must be made by filing a written petition with the Michigan Tax Tribunal. (MCL 205.735a(6))

For applicable employers, Affordable Care Act Forms 1094-B, *Transmittal of Health Coverage Information Returns*, 1095-B, *Health Coverage*, 1094-C, *Transmittal of Employer-Provided Health Insurance Offer and Coverage Information Returns*, and 1095-C, *Employer-Provided Health Insurance Offer and Coverage* are due to the IRS by May 31, if filing on paper, or June 30, if filing electronically.

## JUNE

**1** Deadline for filing Principal Residence Exemption Affidavits (Form 2368) for exemption from the 18-mill school operating tax to qualify for a PRE for the summer tax levy. (MCL 211.7cc(2))

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

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

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

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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. Public Acts 154-157 of 2008

**By 2** Post-election campaign statements filed (books closed May 23).

**3** Final date townships can establish, move or abolish a polling place for the Aug. 2 primary. (MCL 168.662)

**By 6** Clerks submit reimbursement requests with verified costs for the conduct of the March 8 presidential primary. (MCL 168.624g)

**6** *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 STC Form L-4028 is filed with the county treasurer and the STC. (MCL 211.34d(3))

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

**15** Deadline for the 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))

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

Deadline for foreclosing governmental units to file petition for tax foreclosure with the circuit court clerk for the March 1, 2016, forfeitures. (MCL 211.78h(1))

**By 18** Delivery of military and overseas absentee voter ballots must begin for the Aug. 2 primary. All requests received since Nov. 4, 2015, from a military or overseas voter must be honored for all 2016 elections. (MCL 168.759a)

County clerks deliver absentee voter ballots for the Aug. 2 primary to local clerks. (MCL 168.714)

**23** through July 12. Precinct inspectors for Aug. 2 primary appointed. (MCL 168.674)

**27** Deadline for equalization directors to file tabulation of final taxable valuations with STC on STC Form L-4046. (MCL 211.27d)

**By 28** Notice of close of registration for Aug. 2 primary published. (MCL 168.498)

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

Deadline for classification appeals to STC. (MCL 211.34c(6)) Boards of review must provide taxpayer with form to appeal their classification.

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The Michigan Fireworks Safety Act (Public Act 256 of 2011, MCL 28.451, *et seq.*) legalized the sale and use of consumer fireworks (1.4G only; it does not pertain to display fireworks)—such as aerials, roman candles, bottle rockets, helicopter/aerial spinners, and other items that leave the ground. The 2012 law also limited some aspects of local fireworks regulations.

## Are townships involved in permitting fireworks displays?

The act refers to fireworks “displays” in two different ways. One relates to the display of fireworks for sale—and townships cannot regulate the display for sale.

But the more commonly understood use of “fireworks display” refers to the ignition, discharge and use of display fireworks (outdoors, July 4-type display) or articles pyrotechnic for proximate display (entertainment pyrotechnics close to an audience, indoors). Townships are responsible for issuing permits for public or private displays of these two types of fireworks. All permits issued for the discharge of display fireworks are obtained from the local jurisdiction where the fireworks will be displayed. Any fees for these permits are charged by and retained by that local jurisdiction.

Fireworks application and permit forms are provided only to the township (the local permitting authority), and are available only from the Bureau of Fire Services, Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA). Each year, the township supervisor or clerk must contact the Bureau of Fire Services via email at [fireworks@michigan.gov](mailto:fireworks@michigan.gov) to request the current permit forms.

MTA staff, in consultation with LARA staff, MTA Legal Counsel and liability insurance carriers, believe that a township may enact an ordinance incorporating standards for the competency and qualifications of operators for “articles pyrotechnic” and “display fireworks,” including time, place and safety aspects of the display (ignition, discharge or use) of articles pyrotechnic or display fireworks, as part of the process of granting permits. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) fireworks standards should be used. (MCL 28.466) Townships should note that such an ordinance will possibly be required by an insurance carrier as a condition of fireworks liability insurance.

The federal Safe Explosives Act (SEA) requires any person who receives explosive materials, including display fireworks, to have a license or permit from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). The SEA mandates inspections of applicants for new display fireworks licenses or permits, as well as inspections of existing licensees or permittees. Townships may be contacted by the ATF investigators during these inspections to determine compliance with state and local requirements. Questions

regarding the federal regulation of display fireworks may be referred to ATF Industry Operations in Detroit at (313) 202-3400, or in Grand Rapids at (616) 301-6100.

In the event that display fireworks or illegally manufactured fireworks are involved in a permit violation, contact your local ATF office for enforcement assistance and safe handling/storage recommendations.

The Michigan State Police Bomb Squad can also assist townships with safe handling/storage recommendations and can be contacted through the MSP Operations Center at (517) 284-3250.

## What can townships regulate?

A township cannot regulate or adopt an ordinance specifically regulating the sale, display for sale, storage, transportation or distribution of fireworks that are regulated by the Michigan Fireworks Safety Act (MFSA)—consumer fireworks and low-impact fireworks. (MCL 28.457) Sellers of consumer fireworks must comply with the NFPA 101 (2009) and NFPA 1124 (2006) Codes (Attorney General Opinion 7266 of 2012). LARA regulates the storage and sale through mandatory registration and fees, and the U.S. Department of Transportation regulates transport.

It is important to consider aspects of existing ordinances, including zoning ordinances, to determine if they prevent the sale of consumer or low-impact fireworks. For example, AGO 7266 states that a generally applicable local ordinance regulating all use of temporary vending facilities (not just those related to fireworks) has only an incidental effect on the sale of fireworks, and is not preempted by the MFSA. Note that items within the Michigan Building Code pertaining to explosives do not apply to consumer fireworks (1.4G). The Bureau of Construction Codes has specific guidelines on how the code and fireworks statutes interact.

A township may enact an ordinance regulating—including prohibiting—the ignition, discharge and use of consumer fireworks, including, but not limited to, an ordinance prescribing the hours of the day or night during which a

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person may ignite, discharge or use consumer fireworks. If a local unit of government enacts an ordinance under this subsection, the ordinance shall not regulate the ignition, discharge or use of consumer fireworks on the day preceding, the day of, or the day after a national holiday except as follows:

(a) A local unit of government with a population of 50,000 or more or a local unit of government located in a county with a population of 750,000 or more may regulate the ignition, discharge or use of consumer fireworks between the hours of 12 midnight and 8 a.m. or, on New Year's Day, between the hours of 1 a.m. and 8 a.m.

(b) A local unit of government with a population of less than 50,000 located in a county with a population of less than 750,000 may regulate the ignition, discharge or use of consumer fireworks between the hours of 1 a.m. and 8 a.m. (MCL 28.457)

“National holidays” are those defined in 5 USC 6103:

- New Year's Day, Jan. 1
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the third Monday in January
- Washington's Birthday, the third Monday in February
- Memorial Day, the last Monday in May
- Independence Day, July 4
- Labor Day, the first Monday in September
- Columbus Day, the second Monday in October
- Veterans Day, November 11
- Thanksgiving Day, the fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day, December 25

## Do townships inspect fireworks facilities?

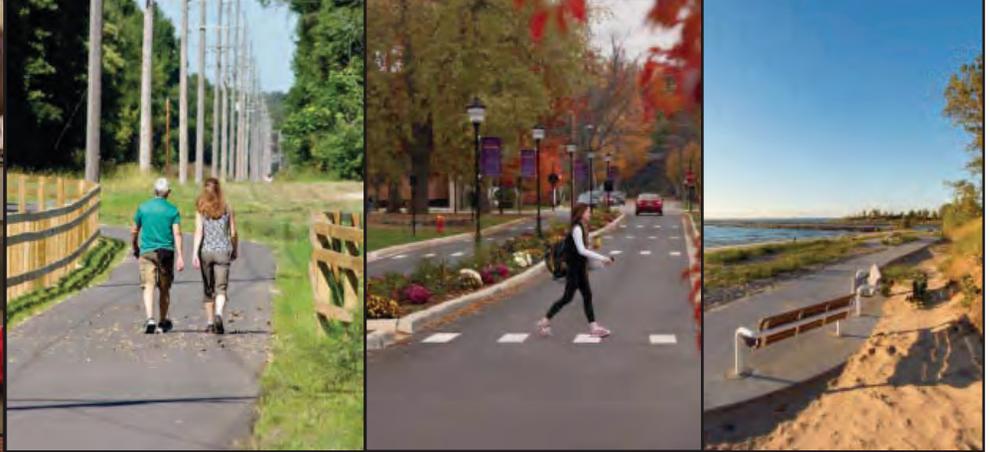
LARA may delegate inspection duties under the MFSA to local units to carry out inspections for approved fireworks facilities within their jurisdiction. Approved local units conduct facility inspections of both permanent and temporary structure types during the specific authorized fireworks season. Compensation for the delegated fireworks inspections is 70 percent of the Consumer Grade Fireworks Certificate Fee for the structure type that was collected at the time of the facility application. (MCL 28.461) Compensation is paid to the township upon completion and submission of a final facility inspection report and if an actual fireworks facility inspection of a structure was completed.

Local units must apply by early November for the following calendar year. If approved, both the township board and the fire chief for the department that would do the township inspections must sign off on a delegation agreement with the state. If a township declines to participate, LARA retains the inspection duties. Information on the program is available at [www.michigan.gov/lara](http://www.michigan.gov/lara); click on “Fire Services,” then “Fireworks.”

*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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## Counties can loan funds for township road projects

Townships can now borrow money from counties to fund road projects, thanks to legislation recently signed into law. MTA supported Public Act 77 of 2016, sponsored by Sen. Wayne Schmidt (R-Traverse City), which is intended to allow townships to save taxpayer dollars and complete needed road projects sooner.

The new law allows a county board of commissioners to loan money to a township within the county to fund a road construction project or provide matching dollars for a joint project between the county and the township. The loan period cannot exceed 10 years. The bills do not require townships or counties to take action. The legislation was introduced at the request of **Norwood Township** (Charlevoix Co.).



## Township projects receive funding from Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund

Numerous township projects will receive funding, after Gov. Snyder signed legislation to fund acquisition and development projects recommended by the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund board for FY 2015-16. PA 61, introduced by Rep. Jon Bumstead (R-Brooks Twp.), includes funding for 26 township conservation and recreation projects. The \$28 million state appropriation for the recommended projects comes from interest earned on funds derived from the development of publicly owned minerals such as oil and gas wells.

## New signage requirements for locals operating rest stops, welcome facilities

Any township that operates a rest stop or welcome center will be required to post human trafficking notices, starting July 4, 2016. PA 62, sponsored by Rep. Kurt Heise (R-Plymouth Chtr. Twp.), creates the Human Trafficking Notification Act. Under the new law, public airports, adult entertainment establishments and properties that have been found to be a public nuisance due to prostitution or human trafficking will also be required to post the notification.

A sample notice, along with the notice size and format, will be posted on the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs website ([www.michigan.gov/lara](http://www.michigan.gov/lara)). The department is also charged with enforcing the new posting requirements.

## New law helps emergency services workers receive counseling

Township emergency services workers will have easier access to counseling, under a new law signed by Gov. Snyder. MTA monitored PA 40, introduced by Sen. Jim Stamas (R-Midland Chtr. Twp.), which creates a new “Critical Incident Stress Management Services” (CISM) section within the Public Health Code. These services will assist an emergency service provider who has experienced psychological stress or trauma in providing emergency services in response to a critical incident. Emergency service providers include law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical services providers, dispatchers or rescue service providers.



PA 40 provides guidelines for services to emergency service providers, makes certain counseling communications confidential and limits liability for CISM providers.

The legislation is intended to codify current practice where emergency service providers can obtain assistance from a group of volunteer peers, who comprise a CISM services team. The new act takes effect June 13, 2016.

## Nonprofit housing exemption signed into law

Legislation clarifying certain tax exemptions for nonprofit housing for the elderly or disabled has been signed into law. PA 78, introduced by Sen. Steve Bieda (D-Warren) and supported by MTA, allows a property owner of such nonprofit housing to claim an exemption by filing a form with both the state Department of Treasury and the local assessor not later than Oct. 31 in any given year. The assessor would have 60 days from receiving the form to approve or disapprove the claim and then notify the owner and the department by Dec. 31.

Treasury can no longer deny an exemption approved by the local assessor, but could grant an exemption in limited cases when a form had not been timely filed in prior years.

The new act also specifies that an exemption begins on Dec. 31 of the year in which the facility was completed and the claim was properly submitted by the property owner to the assessor. PA 78 takes effect on July 11, 2016.

## Complete Streets Council dissolved

The Complete Streets Advisory Council will be dissolved effective June 13, 2016, under legislation recently signed by Gov. Snyder. PA 48, sponsored by Rep. Jim Runestad (R-White Lake Chtr. Twp.), deletes all provisions concerning the council from law. The council had advised the state and local units on “complete streets”—roads designed to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities.

## Legislative lowdown

Here's a quick look at bills that MTA is following as they move through the legislative process. For updated information, look to *Township Insights* and *Township Voice*, MTA's weekly and monthly newsletters sent to all MTA member officials.

**SB 6:** Expands disabled veterans property tax exemption to residential and agricultural real property. *MTA opposes.*

**SB 569:** Allows local units to keep more money in their budget stabilization fund. *MTA supports.*

**SBs 579, 619-624:** Allows public libraries to be excluded from tax captures. *MTA opposes.*

**SBs 651-653:** Creates "Transitional Qualified Forest Property Specific Tax Act" to establish phase-in transfer of commercial forest property to qualified forest property. *MTA neutral.*

**SB 673:** Extends Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act to Dec. 31, 2026. *MTA supports.*

**HB 4004:** Requires charter township board approval before an annexation question can be placed on the ballot. *MTA supports.*

**HB 4209:** Provides for state and local regulation of five types of medical marijuana facilities. *MTA monitoring.*

**HB 4567:** Exempts property owned or leased by public schools from local zoning. *MTA opposes.*

**HB 4580:** Requires written agreement between local unit and eligible Next Michigan business beginning Jan. 1, 2017, to grant specific personal property tax exemption and allows local unit to revoke exemptions if business is in violation of written agreement or is no longer eligible. *MTA supports.*

**HB 4645:** Exempts property transfers between a limited liability company and a closely related party from the taxable value "pop-up." *MTA opposes.*

**HB 4795:** Prescribes penalties for local officials regarding local enactment or enforcement of gun control measures that are preempted by the state. *MTA opposes.*

**HB 5016:** Requires local units to reimburse Internet service providers for cost of relocating their underground facilities when the local unit requested the relocation. *MTA opposes.*

**HB 5077:** Extends required mailing notice for assessment notices to taxpayers from 14 days to 30 days prior to the board of review. *MTA opposes.*

**HB 5169:** Changes disabled veterans property tax exemption to state income tax credit. *MTA supports.*

**HB 5219:** Amends recently enacted PA 269 of 2015 regarding rules for communication on local ballot proposals by local officials. *MTA opposes.*

**HBs 5238-5245:** Creates new requirements for local units of government when contracting for architectural, engineering and land surveying services. *MTA opposes.*

**HB 5493:** Allows townships to set, by resolution, compensation for community center board members. *MTA supports.*

**HBs 5490-5492:** Diverts distribution of civil fines from commercial vehicle citations. *MTA opposes.*

**HBs 5525-5527:** Modifies business filing requirements for personal property tax exemption to May 31, 2016, as well as technical and clarifying changes.

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# Deep dive into the 'blue economy'

For many **Harrison Charter Township** (Macomb Co.) residents, Lake St. Clair was the treasure next door that they never truly appreciated. There were no road signs along the highway promoting it as a destination, and few in surrounding communities seemed to think of it as a great place to spend a Saturday afternoon.

"We found that we had something special in our backyard that we've taken for granted," Supervisor **Kenneth Verkest** said.

Since that "a-ha moment" nearly five years ago, Harrison Charter Township has taken major strides not only to promote its coastal areas, but also to improve the resources it already had. Officials have revised their zoning code to help facilitate future development, and they conducted a study with the help of a Coastal Zone Management Grant from

the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. They're looking for ways to create walkable areas that are more convenient to tourists, as well as how they can increase public access to beaches.

The township's efforts were spurred by a movement that some consider fundamental to Michigan's future. Called the "blue economy," it's an initiative in which lakes, rivers and other waterways are leveraged and used as the assets they truly are to help boost the community—as well as the economy.



**‘It’s a no-brainer. We already have the water. It’s just about having access to the water.’**

**—Harry Burkholder,  
executive director,  
LIAA**

For many communities, this means maximizing the water’s potential for recreation. It could take the shape of increasing public access to beaches, creating water trails, building walkways and bike paths along the water, or placemaking efforts to turn watersides into destinations that attract both residents and tourists. Michigan’s waterways are also a job-generator, in areas such as manufacturing, freight, water research and “smart” technology to improve water efficiency.

Michigan is naturally suited for the blue economy movement, which caught traction in 2014 when a number of statewide reports on the subject were released. With 11,000 inland lakes and more than 3,100 miles of coastline, water is an integral part of the culture and daily life for Michiganders. No matter where you are in Michigan, you’re no more than six miles away from some kind of body of water. The blue economy movement is an effort to make the water an even more integral part of the economy, too.

Townships can take part in this movement without building a factory or constructing a new coastal park. For communities blessed to be located along a lake or river, it’s simply a matter of identifying the assets they have and determining if they’re being used to their maximum potential, and if there are ways that their usage could be improved. Numerous townships—such as those in St. Clair County, which boasts a countywide effort to promote “The Blueways of St. Clair”—are already undertaking efforts to promote this valuable, natural asset. And with 1,240 townships in Michigan, many townships across the state can also play a crucial role in our state’s blue economy.



## Diving into the blue economy

In many ways, Michigan owes its economic history to the Great Lakes. Our state became a world leader in manufacturing largely because of its easy access to fresh water and its ability to ship and receive materials across the lakes. Fisheries and agricultural products developed along the lakeshore. And one of Michigan's largest industries—tourism—is due largely to the natural beauty of the lakes' coastlines.

Though these industries still exist, some communities, as well as residents, stopped looking at the water as an asset over time and took it for granted. Water quality suffered as a result, and some coastal areas even became eyesores.

The more recent blue economy movement is an effort to take back Michigan's most plentiful natural asset. Townships and coastal communities are being asked to invest in and promote their waters while thinking sustainably to protect the shores for future generations.

"Essentially, it's looking at ways to leverage our water resources for community and economic development," said Harry Burkholder, executive director of LIAA, a Traverse City-based nonprofit dedicated to fostering and supporting sustainable, resilient communities across Michigan and around the Great Lakes.

The blue economy can take different shapes, depending on a community's resources. For some, water can be used for more traditional industries, such as shipping, warehousing and manufacturing. It could also be an integral part of farming and agriculture. More recently, emerging technologies have created jobs in the clean technology and "smart water" fields, where companies focus on purifying and sustaining water while finding ways to use it more efficiently. Michigan universities are also becoming leaders in water research, studying fields such as water and ecosystem management, as well as solutions to global water problems.

**The more recent blue economy movement is an effort to take back Michigan's most plentiful natural asset. Townships can invest in and promote their waters while thinking sustainably to protect the shores for future generations.**

For many communities, the blue economy naturally takes the form of placemaking, recreation and tourism. Townships with a shoreline, whether it's a Great Lake, an inland lake or a river, can focus their resources on ensuring the public has easy access to a beach, boat launch or trail to fully enjoy the water. They can study their zoning and look for ways to encourage development that will help create walkable areas, enhance quality of life and foster tourism. They can also maximize the public's use of water resources by advertising and promoting what they have—right in their backyards.

The fact is tourism and placemaking create jobs and generate money. Direct and indirect spending from boaters alone contribute \$3.9 billion and more than 50,000 jobs to Michigan's economy, according to the Michigan Economic Center's report, "Water, Michigan and the Growing Blue Economy." Coastal tourism, which includes everything from birdwatching to beach visits, accounts for 57,000 jobs and \$955 million in earnings. Tourism for inland lakes hasn't been estimated, but is likely comparable, or quite possibly larger, than Great Lakes tourism.

The possibilities are huge, especially for areas around the state that are still reeling from the economic downturn during the recession. The blue economy is a way for them to diversify their local economies simply by taking advantage of what they already have.

## Recognizing what you have

The problem is some communities are so used to their lake or river, they don't even recognize it as a potential strength. Burkholder has witnessed this firsthand many times.

When he conducts a community planning session, he asks those who attend to name their greatest resource. Even for municipalities located along a Great Lake, the water is far down the list—if it's even named at all.

"People take it for granted just because they've grown up in this state," Burkholder said. "They don't recognize it as the asset that it is."

The term "blue economy" was new to Verkest when it was introduced to him a few years ago. At the time, Macomb County was embarking on a countywide effort to maximize the natural resources the communities already had—their beautiful lakeshores. Municipalities were asked to consider how they could contribute to the blue economy within their region.

The initiative opened Verkest's eyes to the gem that Lake St. Clair truly is. He hadn't given much thought to the lake's beautiful beaches, or the world-class bass fishing that its waters boasted. But as a new supervisor at the time, he quickly learned all he could about how this new area of focus could boost Harrison Charter Township's overall economy.

"It isn't necessarily that we're expanding our economy, but we're certainly trying to emphasize what we have, and make sure that a greater number of people are aware of it," Verkest said.

A good place to start is simply identifying the bodies of water in your township, whether it's a Great Lake, inland lake or river. Then, Burkholder suggests looking at the community assets that are tied to those bodies of water, both public and private. Is there access to a beach, boat launch or marina? Does it tie into restaurants, hotels or other commercial businesses? Is it part of the local power supply? Your township can't invest and improve upon its natural resources if you don't know what you have.

**Park Township** (Ottawa Co.) conducted a major study to make sure officials had the most accurate picture possible of every property owned by the township. With the help of its attorney and manager, the township put together a book listing everything from road ends to tax sale properties the township received by default. Then, the board formed a "Spaces and Places" committee to help determine the best use of those properties.

"We've got to do what we can with what we control," said Park Township Supervisor **Jerry Hunsburger**.

## Making recreation accessible

One of the most obvious uses of lakes is recreation. Water getaways are traditionally part of life for Michiganders, and they're increasingly becoming a draw for out-of-state visitors. This can bring a big benefit for townships with a lakefront or riverfront within their boundaries. However, in order for a body of water to draw in visitors, it must have public access.

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## Blue economy fast facts

- Water and water innovation create one in five Michigan jobs and drive economic growth.
- Water-related industries account for nearly 800,000 jobs in Michigan, in industries such as agriculture, mining, forestry, manufacturing and water treatment.
- Michigan is fourth in the nation for percentage of employees in water-related industries, behind Indiana, Wisconsin and Alabama. (*This number doesn't include jobs related to tourism, fisheries and sports fishing—these are considered “downstream” from industries directly related to water.*)
- Estimates of the impact of water-based economic activity in Michigan is \$60 billion annually.
- Several years ago, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation estimated that more than 350 emerging water-related companies in Michigan are beginning to exploit a nearly \$1 trillion growing global market for water cleaning, conservation, restoration, monitoring, infrastructure-building, and engineering work.
- Long-term economic benefits of Great Lakes restoration projects are calculated at anywhere from \$3 to \$1 return (*Brookings Study of Great Lakes Restoration Impacts*), to \$6.60 to \$1 return on investment (*Grand Valley State University Study of the economic impact of Muskegon Harbor clean-up*)

Sources: “Innovating for the Blue Economy,” by the Anderson Economic Group for the University Research Corridor; and “Water, Michigan and the Blue Economy,” by the Michigan Economic Center at Prima Civitas Foundation

That’s something the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is working to improve. Though the Legislature has worked since 1939 to purchase waterfront properties and increase access, many gaps remain. In the DNR’s recent report, “Sustaining Michigan’s Water Heritage,” the department recommends working with local partners to provide public access every five miles on the Great Lakes, on all priority lakes that are larger than 100 acres, and every five miles on navigable water such as rivers.

Improving beach access is a big priority for Park Township. Each summer, the beach is responsible for bringing two million visitors to Park Township alone. Attracting visitors wasn’t a problem—the stretches of sand and iconic red lighthouse of Holland State Park, which is located within the township, take care of that. But the township board recognized that the visiting experience could use some improvements.

Three years ago, the township board held a strategic planning session, where they made it a top priority to increase and improve water access for those who don’t already live along the lake. They focused on streamlining potential issues, such as traffic flow, and improving the beach experience so that more people can enjoy what the township has to offer.

The perfect opportunity came when the Ottawa County Road Commission decided to pave the final few miles of Ottawa Beach Road, a project planned for later this year. Hunsburger and the board decided to take on a nearly \$1 million project to improve the road and encourage more non-motorized transportation. Their plans include installing a bike path on the south side, clearly marking an area for a bike lane, and adding trees and streetscaping along with LED lighting.

Hunsburger hopes the project will help to alleviate the traffic and parking issues that arise each summer. He also wants to improve safety for visitors, especially for pedestrians and serious cyclists who prefer to use bike lanes instead of non-motorized trails.

“We have an obligation to make what we have available to visitors and residents alike,” Hunsburger said.

## Improving existing infrastructure

**Elmwood Charter Township** (Leelanau Co.) was also looking for a way to improve its commercial corridor. With its mile of shoreline and its shared border with popular tourist destination Traverse City, the township was already well-known within the region. But the board saw room for improvement in the worn-down 50-year old township park located on West Grand Traverse Bay.

The beachfront park had the potential to become a major recreational asset, Supervisor **Jack Kelly** said. So in 2010, the township took on a major renovation to turn the deteriorating park into a state-of-the-art facility that would come to be known as Greilickville Harbor Park. It took nearly \$1 million—the majority of which came from grant funding—for new pavilions, restrooms, an improved beachfront, and for a Carter’s Kids Playground, built by a nonprofit dedicated to creating public spaces that help prevent childhood obesity using \$45,000 in local private donations to purchase the playground equipment.

Five years later, the township is looking at other ways to improve its shoreline. The board is considering upgrading Elmwood Charter Township’s aging marina buildings while also connecting more trails along the waterfront.

“We recognized the fact that we’ve got a one-mile stretch of roadway that could be a gathering place of its own, a walkable place that has special potential,” Kelly said. “It’s just a question of building on what has been identified in the past as key opportunities and challenges so we can keep discussions moving forward.”

## Water trails

One rapidly growing area of recreation is the development of water trails along Michigan coastlines. These trails are literally located within the water and are trails for kayaks, canoes and small boats, with access points to launch and possibly rack or lock up the docked vessels. Some of these trails connect to non-motorized pathways as well.

Five years ago, Michigan had seven water trails. Today, there are 33 and counting, Burkholder said. The DNR is working to develop a state water trail program and is securing grants to help communities develop their own water trail system. The state is even working to connect a water trail to trails in other states.

A water trail is a less costly recreational option for townships to consider, since it doesn't require purchasing land or costly paving materials. All it takes is an accessible launch site, and possibly signage.

"It's a no-brainer," Burkholder said. "We already have the water. It's just about having access to the water."

## Not just for large townships

Your township doesn't need a large population or close proximity to a major city to participate in the blue economy.

**Arcadia Township** (Manistee Co.) is home to just 639 people, but its natural resources include Lake Michigan, Arcadia Lake, Arcadia Marsh and the tributaries that feed into the marsh. The little township, which is nestled in a valley surrounded by soaring, scenic sand dunes, has a big vision for what its water can be.

Since 2008, Arcadia Township has taken a big role in a countywide program called Explore the Shores (ETS), which aims to attract one million more people to visit Manistee County's ETS sites. Planning Commission Chair **Brad Hopwood** said the township used funding from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust to develop and restore a universally accessible fishing pier and a launch for canoes and kayaks on Arcadia Lake. Grant funding also allowed the township to develop the Arcadia Beach Natural Area on Lake Michigan, featuring not only beach access but also a picnic area, playground and other facilities for residents and visitors. Additionally, the board partnered with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy to develop access to Arcadia Marsh, known as a wealth of natural resources and a habitat for fish and wildlife, including more than 150 species of birds, several of which are endangered or threatened species.

And the township isn't stopping there. Hopwood said the board has plans for shore-based fishing on Arcadia Lake as well as a non-motorized pathway to connect the water resources, along with signage.

"People who visit Arcadia on foot, in a kayak or canoe, or by other means can explore Lake Michigan, Arcadia Lake and Arcadia Marsh and learn about these magnificent water resources that are concentrated in our community," Hopwood said. "Arcadia is truly a place where life meets water."



Michigan's past is already well-rooted in the beauty and usefulness of its natural water resources. Participating in the blue economy will help to ensure that water continues to be an integral part of our state's future, too.

## Attracting tourists

For tourists, the water isn't just a place where they want to play during the day. They want the opportunity to eat at waterfront restaurants and stay in hotels with a room that overlooks the lake. They want walkable spaces that allow them to shop and eat without hopping in their car between stops. That's not currently possible in Harrison Charter Township, but Verkest is working to encourage development that would turn that idea into a reality.

Thanks to a Coastal Zone Management Grant, the township conducted a study with public input. The study resulted in the establishment of a downtown development authority and tax increment finance district to help fund future developments. The township has also applied for a grant to help pay for a zoning overlay study. Current zoning ordinances don't allow for condensed areas of buildings that more closely resemble a traditional downtown area. The township is looking for a way to change that, but only in certain areas where they want to attract tourists. The point is to create opportunities for residents and tourists alike to spend money within the township.

Elmwood Charter Township has a somewhat similar focus, and it has completed two master plans so far to help move forward future initiatives. In 2013, the township also participated in a community perception survey. Through that survey, the board learned that a majority of respondents supported allowing residential use in the township's commercial corridor. The planning commission chair at the

# cover story

time even spent three months meeting individually with 40 property owners to get their buy-in about a proposed master plan that was under consideration.

The next step is looking for ways to implement the plans and encourage redevelopment of the commercial corridor. For example, the planning commission is proposing to consolidate the commercial corridor's seven zoning districts into four, providing greater flexibility for property owners.

The extensive planning has served as a crucial springboard, Kelly said. "It provided a platform to open up the eyes of people in neighboring communities and potential investors for what that corridor could be, and how it could become a special place of its own with its own particular brand, over time, by working cooperatively with one another," he said.

## Promote your efforts

All the work and investment in the world won't boost your local economy if no one knows it exists. Marketing and promotion must be part of the plan in order for your blue economy efforts to succeed. This can take different forms, depending on the project or your township's needs. For communities with beachfronts, road signs could go a long way toward drawing in those who would otherwise simply pass through your township.

Water trails and other forms of recreation could benefit from both online and hard copies of maps and brochures, serving as a guide to those interested in using them. And if you're trying to attract redevelopment, investors need to know what you've done to roll out the welcome mat for them.

Promoting your efforts will not only let outsiders know what you're doing, but it will also show your residents that their township is working hard to diversify and make the township a better place. The result is an increase in community pride.

Michigan's past is already well-rooted in the beauty and usefulness of its natural water resources. Participating in the blue economy will help to ensure that water continues to be an integral part of our state's future, too.



**Bethany Mauger,**  
MTA Staff Writer

An advertisement for MERS. On the left, three people are shown: a firefighter in a red helmet and black jacket, a woman in a white business suit, and a construction worker in a yellow hard hat and orange safety vest. Above each person is a circular icon with a flag: a yellow flag for the firefighter, a green flag for the woman, and a red flag for the construction worker. To the right of the image, the text reads "RETIREMENT READINESS" in grey, followed by "What Color is Your Flag?" in large green font. Below this, it says "MERS helps your employees prepare for a financially secure retirement." and "With online tools and customizable reports, MERS provides your employees with a clear picture of where they stand on the path towards retirement and suggestions to keep them on target." At the bottom, it says "Contact MERS to learn more. www.mersofmich.com". Logos for MERS (Municipal Employees' Retirement System), Allied Service Provider (MTA), and MTA Webcast Sponsor are also present.



**Q** Our township wants to implement a computerized “point of sale” system, to serve as a cash register and also work directly with various accounting systems. While this may help automate our processes, I am concerned about the treasurer’s role and internal control issues. What should we consider?

The treasurer needs to oversee and supervise the cash receipting system, not only to follow the law (MCL 41.76), but to help provide proper segregation of duties in the cash receipting area. The treasurer’s role should be:

- Ensure numeric sequence/completeness of transactions.
- Reconcile daily reports to actual deposits.
- Supervise employees handling cash.
- Make sure all officials and employees receiving payments are covered by adequate surety bonds. The clerk and treasurer must be bonded. (MCLs 41.69 and 41.77)

Care should be given assigning access to the program or elements of the program. Employees who handle cash receipts should NOT be able to make non-cash adjustment to accounts receivable balances. Employees who maintain the general ledger, reconcile bank statements and accomplish billing functions shouldn’t have access to cash receipting modules.

**Q** Our auditors issued a “reportable condition” that our internal controls for cash receipts and disbursements in the tax collection process are insufficient. As a small township, how can we improve the process?

Many small townships do not have the same controls over the tax collection fund that exist for other township funds. Townships that do not have a local area network, and the clerk and treasurer do not post activities to a centralized accounting system, should consider the following internal controls:

- Treasurer should “batch” deposits, and forward copies to the clerk, for posting to the general ledger system, which produces daily cash receipt postings, and “spreads” the collections, by taxpayer and by taxing authority.
- Clerk posts cash receipts by debiting cash and crediting the appropriate liability account.
- Treasurer forwards copies of checks or check register to clerk. Checks are entered into the general ledger by debiting the appropriate liability account and crediting cash.

- Clerk reconciles the monthly bank statements to the general ledger, examining cancelled checks returned with statement. The clerk should examine date, payee, amounts and endorsement. The clerk and treasurer should follow up on any checks not cleared in an appropriate time frame.
- Clerk and treasurer should reconcile cash balances at month-end.
- Clerk and treasurer should reconcile liability balances due prior to settlement with the county treasurer.

Townships that use “integrated packages” or have local area networks should consider:

- Setting up the tax collection fund formally in the accounting package.
- Using the same check disbursement procedures for tax collections as other funds (although disbursements do not require board audit and approval).
- Set up tax collection fund as a “bank” in the payables system.
- “Map” disbursements to liability accounts set up in the tax collection accounts books in the computerized general ledger package.
- Record cash receipts through a point-of-sale system that works with the tax administration program.
- Reconcile cash accounts to general ledger with the bank balances, and liability account balances on the general ledger to the treasurer’s records, prior to settlement.

To further strengthen internal controls, and directly address the “reportable conditions” comments, we suggest:

- Treasurer maintains numeric control and inventory of unused tax fund checks, assigning checks to clerk to issue.
- Treasurer issues check request to clerk for tax disbursements.
- Clerk reviews request, creates and countersigns the check, and posts the disbursement to the appropriate general ledger liability account, while crediting tax collection cash.

Information provided in *Financial Forum* should not be considered legal advice, and readers are encouraged to contact their township auditor and/or attorney for advice specific to their situation.

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# upcoming MTA workshops

## REGISTRATION INFORMATION

### Introducing MTA's New Double Feature

Townships vary dramatically in size and location, but they have a lot of things in common. Every township runs elections, and every township is an employer. MTA's May "double feature" tackles both issues, exploring these two critical duties in half-day workshops at three locations this month.



### Elections Tips & Tricks

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

You may know the law, but have you mastered the logistics? MTA can help you organize and prioritize your elections. We'll share tried-and-true checklists, as well as time management tips and even help you troubleshoot those nagging Election Day issues! Examine the absentee voter process, tackle ballot issues and streamline precinct setup. Publications and notices will also be addressed. Go beyond the legal requirements for conducting elections and explore effective ways to run an election. Join your fellow clerks as we explore these topics and so much more! Deputy clerks are also encouraged to attend.

### Your Township as a Workplace: Avoiding Employment Mistakes

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

Every Michigan township is an employer, with employment responsibilities, no matter how big or how small you are. Even the smallest township has the township board, deputies, election workers, an assessor and the board of review—all of whom are employees for at least some purposes! No township can afford to make costly mistakes in hiring, firing, discipline or treatment of employees. Learn how to avoid missteps that could sour the workplace environment and create legal liability. From a full-service township to a small township hall (or no hall at all!), this workshop will examine legal requirements, policies and best practices to help any township create a positive workplace.



Register for the full day at a discounted rate, or choose the class that interests you most.

Dates and locations are:

May 12: Comfort Inn, Mt. Pleasant

May 19: Treetops Resort, Gaylord

May 24: Fetzer Center, Kalamazoo

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

Workshop participants can purchase MTA's publication, *Policy Matters! Using Board and Administrative Policies to Manage Your Township*, for a discounted rate. This guide offers policies, commentaries and tips for using a policy approach to board governance and administration. Includes a CD of customizable sample policies and forms. Books will be distributed at check-in.

## Double Feature Registration Form

Township _____		County _____	
Name & Title _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Both Classes	<input type="checkbox"/> Elections	<input type="checkbox"/> Township HR <input type="checkbox"/> Book
Name & Title _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Both Classes	<input type="checkbox"/> Elections	<input type="checkbox"/> Township HR <input type="checkbox"/> Book
Name & Title _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Both Classes	<input type="checkbox"/> Elections	<input type="checkbox"/> Township HR <input type="checkbox"/> Book
Telephone _____	Email Address _____		

### Which location will you attend?

May 12: Mt. Pleasant     May 19: Gaylord     May 24: Kalamazoo

**Both Classes:** Includes all meals, refreshments, both classes and a \$60 savings off regular rates! **Be sure to check which location you wish to attend.**

\_\_\_\_\_ \$101/person if registration is received by April 28 (\$121 as of April 29)

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

\_\_\_\_\_ **Elections ONLY** \$81/person before April 28 (\$91 as of April 29)

\_\_\_\_\_ **Township HR ONLY** \$81/person before April 28 (\$91 as of April 29)

**Book:** Indicate who receives the book(s) onsite using box below names.

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

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL** Rates apply to MTA members; non-members, call 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 \_\_\_\_\_

Save time, register online: [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org)



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](http://www.michigantownships.org). Questions? Call (517) 321-6467.

# upcoming MTA event

## REGISTRATION INFORMATION

# MTA UP North Summit

MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

*Incredible value—only \$199, includes all meals*

Join fellow officials from across the state June 8-9 for MTA's *UP North Summit*. Held at the Island Resort in Harris (west of Escanaba), this event offers excellent networking opportunities and premier educational programming.

### Practical techniques and valuable resources

The program features three informative general sessions on topics relevant to the entire township board, and 10 breakouts offering something of interest for each office. Descriptions appear in registration materials online at [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org) (under "MTA Products & Trainings").

### Mini expo

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

### Pre-Summit class

Kick off your learning experience by participating in the afternoon class, *Fundamentals of Assessment & Taxation* on June 7. Lunch is included!

### Evening activity

Get out of the classroom and into the fun! After a full day of education, we know you'll be ready for some fresh air. MTA teams up with the Island Resort to bring you a tropical dinner party. Hula, anyone?!

### Cancellations & Substitutions

Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office by May 24 will receive a full refund. No refunds will be issued thereafter. You may substitute another individual from your township for your registration at any time without incurring a charge; please notify MTA of the change.



## 2016 Summit Sponsors



As of April 14

## UP North Summit Registration Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Township \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Guest Name \_\_\_\_\_

*Please copy this form for additional registrants.*

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

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

Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Expires \_\_\_\_\_

Print Card Holder's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### Full Program: (June 8-9)

Includes all meals, refreshments, activities, workshops and materials.  
 \$199 per person (\$229 after May 24)

### Pre-Summit Class: (June 7) Fundamentals of Assessment & Taxation

Includes lunch, refreshments, workshop and materials.  
 \$79 per person, if registered for the Summit (\$99 after May 24)  
 \$89 per person, if NOT registered for the Summit (\$109 after May 24)

### Single Day: Check the day you wish to attend.

Includes that day's meals, refreshments, activities, workshops and materials.  
 June 8     June 9    \$119 per person (\$139 after May 24)

### Single Session(s): Indicate which workshop(s) you wish to attend. Includes selected workshop and materials (no meals included).

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$35/person (\$45 after May 24)

### Guest Package:

Includes that day's meals, refreshments and activities; guests cannot attend classes.  
 Full Program    \$100/person  
 Day One ONLY    \$65/person  
 Day Two ONLY    \$35/person

TOTAL DUE: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ *Non-members, call MTA for rates.*



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



# Cemetery management goes high-tech

**T**ownship cemeteries provide an important connection to the past for township residents. And **Delta Charter Township** (Eaton Co.) has made recent efforts to strengthen that connection.

Last spring, the township—which operates two cemeteries, Delta Center and Delta Hillside—launched an online cemetery records search and Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping system, accessible from its website, [www.deltami.gov](http://www.deltami.gov). Through the portal, family members, local historians and genealogy enthusiasts can access all of the township’s cemetery records—dating back to the 1800s—searchable by name, burial date, veteran status or cemetery name.

Genealogical information can even be submitted via the online portal, for inclusion in the official township records.

## **New technologies available**

There is no shortage of advances in technologies to help communities operating municipal cemeteries. Most officials whose townships have cemeteries will agree they are being challenged to do more with less. Rising demand by their communities for burial and genealogical information are also increasing pressure to provide easy, self-service access to

burial records and cemetery maps by offering an online burial search from their website.

In addition to online record searches, remote access and cloud hosting can make accessing data from the cemetery grounds or a home office much easier. Larger cemeteries often choose GIS mapping, which makes location data available to cemetery-specific mobile apps. Another online tool allows townships to tag and showcase available cemetery plots. The public can search, access additional information, and submit purchase inquiries directly to the township.

## **‘Improving our ability to serve’**

In Delta Charter Township, the elected officials, cemetery sexton and information technology (IT) staff each know the important role cemeteries can play in residents’ lives, often during a very difficult time, and wanted to ensure excellence in service for this critical function. Officials there knew that a system that was easily accessible was a must when the township first began considering an online records system.

"We needed a cemetery software program that could be accessed in the clerk's office and in the cemeteries by our cemetery sexton," noted clerk **Mary Clark**. "Having the ability to look at all the data on one screen was also very appealing from a customer service perspective. In addition, being able to look at live data to know what plots are available for purchase greatly improves our ability to serve a family—and is especially critical when working with a newly grieving family."

With the rise in popularity of people turning to online resources to trace their ancestry, online cemetery records are becoming more and more vital, not only for residents locally, but for people across the nation and even around the world.

"Genealogy is so important—it is our family history," Clark said. "Our township's online search allows anyone to search the data to find out the location of their deceased family members. We hope to eventually have actual pictures of family grave markers online."

Delta Charter Township is phasing in GIS mapping for its cemeteries, allowing residents to pinpoint most burial plot locations. Said Clark, "The online search and mapping portals are formatted for display on all sized screens, so those visiting our cemeteries can search the database on their smartphones, map the results and navigate directly to the specific plot."

## What to consider

With the variety of technological advances for township cemeteries, township officials must carefully weigh their options when considering expanding their offerings. One important consideration is that such new cemetery tools each require some sort of data management system or database—and someone within the township to be in charge of the ongoing maintenance and oversight of the database.

Selecting the appropriate software can a major decision for many townships. Here are some additional tips to consider when selecting cemetery software:

**Realistic budgeting**—Be realistic about what the software will cost and how much the township can afford. Keep in mind, just like when you purchase a new vehicle, maintenance is required. Technology changes rapidly, and software as well as computer equipment have ongoing costs to stay up to date.

**You get what you pay for**—Consider software that meets your township's top needs, maximizes its resources, and offers the best price. In other words, evaluate your options based on "return on investment" (ROI). Consider features the township might want someday and plan for those costs as well. Then, look at the project as a whole to determine the true cost to factor into your ROI calculations.

**It's not all about bells and whistles**—The best features in the world are worth nothing if the system is not user-friendly for both the administrators within the township, and for the residents and other users as well, or if the software's customer service is lacking. Talk with colleagues in other townships that offer certain technology or enhancements, and learn from their experiences.

**Involve users in the process**—While involving any township IT staff or consultants is critical, equally as important

is engaging those who will use and rely on the software on a regular, or even daily, basis, to accomplish critical management tasks.

**Be committed**—Any new software is only as good as the township's commitment to training and implementing the technology for the good of the community, and the residents you serve. There may be a learning curve, but with the proper resources and assistance, such upgrades will benefit the township, its officials and employees, and residents.

**Look to the future**—New technologies can be added upon as your township, its needs and its budget evolve. Perhaps your township board would be most comfortable starting with the basics, then adding more features, which could include integrated standard or GIS mapping, public-facing online burial search, cash receipting and contract management, as well as tools to automate property sales and promotion.

## A source of comfort, and pride

Township cemeteries have long been a source of comfort, and pride, for many communities. The advances of software and technologies can help to increase the value and importance of these places for generations to come.



**Karina Kimpell**, Vice President  
Pontem Software, Eaton Rapids

For more information, including details on Pontem's Cemetery Management System, call (888) 742-2378 or visit [www.pontem.com](http://www.pontem.com).

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# Part of the plan

## MTA Academy inspires strategic plan for township fire department

**G**ordon Pickerd knows firsthand that when it comes to township fire departments, response time matters. Six years ago, his life depended on it.

The **Algoma Township** (Kent Co.) trustee was rescued by a firefighter when he had a heart attack. To this day, each year, Pickerd thanks the man who saved his life. He's also dedicated to making sure that no matter how much the township grows, or how the population changes, the fire department has the manpower and equipment to keep up.

"They give of themselves to serve our township," Pickerd said. "That's why I have this personal drive to help them be as great as they can possibly be, to be everything they can possibly be. They gave me six more great years to be there for my township, my family, my kids and my grandkids."

Pickerd learned all about how to create a strategic plan that will help prepare the fire department for the future as a

student in MTA's Township Governance Academy (TGA). Through this rigorous—and rewarding—credentialing program, he took courses that provided him with an in-depth knowledge of the strategic planning process as well as the components of a successful plan. He also spent time talking with other township officials and learning from their experience.

### Looking toward the future

The more Pickerd learned about the concept of strategic planning, the more it intrigued him. Now, as a 2016 TGA graduate, Pickerd is hopeful that he can work with the fire department and the township board to complete a strategic

plan in the coming months. He's also already in talks with the parks and recreation department about working to create a strategic plan for them, too.

Algoma Township's changing demographics spurred Pickerd to look toward the future for the fire department. The township is in what Pickerd describes as a growth spurt, and recently, it added its first elder care facility with more than 150 beds. Pickerd could see that the new facility had the potential to increase the department's medical calls. And with only one full-time employee—the fire chief—those calls could possibly outpace the department's manpower. Meanwhile, the department also needed a new fire engine, and other equipment was scheduled to be replaced on a rotating basis.

"At what point do we say, let's have a plan in place for when we add another person, and then for how we pay for it?" Pickerd said.

Pickerd's first step was to develop a deeper understanding of strategic planning through his TGA courses. Then, he met with his fellow board members to make sure they were in agreement. Next he discussed the idea of a strategic plan with the fire chief, encouraging him to think further down the road and plan for potential what-ifs.

### **'All part of good management'**

Generally speaking, the strategic planning process involves thinking through many possibilities that may face your township in the coming years, then planning for how your township will handle those situations if and when they occur.

"The process takes many meetings," Pickerd said. "It doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen easily. There's continuous talking about planning."

Pickerd's priority was to ensure that the Algoma Township Fire Department's plan didn't hinge entirely on increasing the future budget. Though the money currently coming into the fire department isn't enough to purchase the equipment needed in the future, he made it his goal to avoid asking for a millage to boost funding. Instead, the strategic plan takes a two-pronged approach of setting aside dollars from the township through a capital planning process while also purchasing used equipment when possible. For example, the township found a used fire truck in good condition from a nearby township that will cost significantly less than a new one. And the best part is, the fire department already has the money to purchase it.

"The process is already working," Pickerd said. "Sometimes when you want a Cadillac, you have to settle for a Buick. Maybe you don't get the Cadillac you'd like to have, but maybe you have the equipment that takes care of your needs and does everything you want it to do. It's all part of good management in your township."

Pickerd hopes that the strategic plan will be part of his legacy he leaves behind from serving his township. His ultimate goal has always been to leave Algoma Township as a better place.



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## Lyon Charter Township

**L**yon Charter Township (Oakland Co.) held its first meeting on April 7, 1837. Since that time, the township has morphed from a farming and horse breeding community to primarily a bedroom community.



The township has been the fastest-growing residential community in Oakland County for three straight years. The award-winning school system, availability of hundreds of acres of farmland, and a centralized location between two major freeways and intersected by a third have contributed to the rapid growth. Following the 2000 Census, the township saw a 31 percent increase before the 2010 census, which reported 14,417 residents. The township continues to grow, boasting a current population of 17,714.

As residential growth continues, new commercial and industrial developers are also locating in the township, bringing jobs to the community. Industrial companies, commercial businesses and several restaurants have all located here in the past 10 years.

The developing downtown is known as New Hudson, which is one of the post offices serving Lyon Charter Township. It is home to the New Hudson Inn, the oldest continually operating business in Oakland County, which has been in business since 1831.



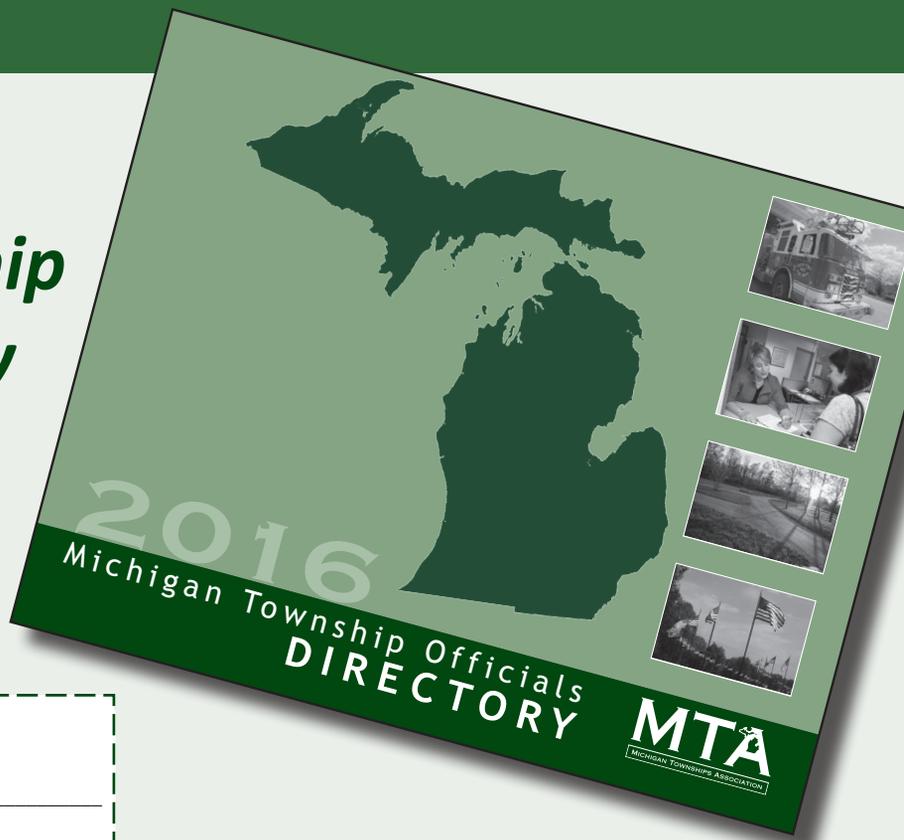
To accommodate the recent community growth, the township building department began an expansion project that will soon be completed. The township water and wastewater systems are also being updated to address the additional demand. As the township population approaches 18,000, there is no sign of a slowdown.

The community has no shortage of recreation opportunities at their disposal. The township hall has a 102-acre public park with a multipurpose field, basketball court, toddler park, ice skating rink, bike path, pavilions and playscape. There are six golf courses and a new disc golf course. The Huron Valley Trail System spans through the township, linking southeast Michigan communities. Families from around the area come to watch the kites soar through the sky at the annual Kite Festival held in early June. Recreation is priority in the township, and plans to expand recreational opportunities include 64 acres used primarily as a sports park.



The township is home to the Michigan War Dog Memorial Cemetery—one of just two in the country—for active war and service dogs. Funerals for the war dogs are conducted with full military honors and are very well attended.

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