

# Township Focus

JANUARY 2023

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

## Public involvement in township decision-making



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legislative lame-duck  
session

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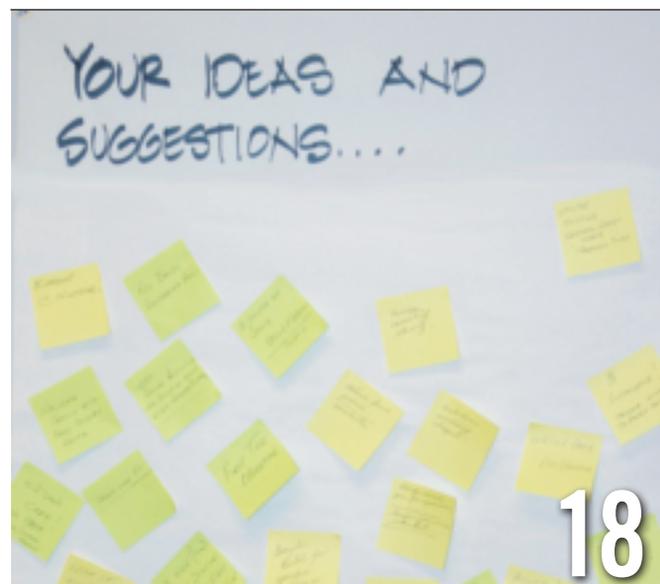


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### Public involvement in township decision-making

Public involvement in government decision-making is a fundamental element of democracy—and this is especially true at the local level. American Rescue Plan Act funding provides a key opportunity to engage with residents and stakeholders on how best to use these dollars, and there are numerous strategies to consider as local officials plan these community investments.

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### Budgeting and planning reminders and updates for 2023

As we head into a new year, we share an overview of updates, changes and considerations that could impact township administrative and budgeting planning in the year ahead.

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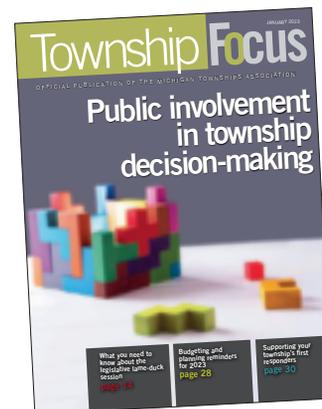
### Supporting your first responders

First responders will experience many difficult events in their career; townships can help prepare them with the right tools to deal with the aftermath.

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*Michigan Township Focus*, Issue 1 January 2023 (ISSN 2330-9652), is published monthly, except for one combined spring issue. MTA membership provides a subscription to township board members, the manager/superintendent, planning commission chairperson and township attorney. Member counties also receive subscriptions for elected officials, the equalization director and road commission chairperson. Annual membership dues include \$33 for a one-year subscription to *Michigan Township Focus*. Additional member subscriptions are available for \$33 per year. Subscription rate for residents and firms in member townships is \$44 per year (schools and libraries may subscribe for \$33 a year).

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

Direct all display and classified advertising inquiries to Ashley Maher at (517) 321-6467. Member rate for a classified ad in either the magazine or on the MTA website on a monthly basis is \$1 per word. Call MTA for non-member rates. Deadlines for display and classified ads in the magazine are five weeks preceding the publication date. Send ads to: PO Box 80078, Lansing, MI 48908-0078; phone: (517) 321-6467, ext. 254; fax: (517) 321-8908; or email: [ashley@michigantownships.org](mailto:ashley@michigantownships.org).

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# news&notes

a compendium of noteworthy items



## REQUIRED TRAINING

### Reminder: All township board of review members must meet state training mandate

The new board of review term of office began Jan. 1, and all board of review members—regardless if they are brand new to the board or have served for years—must receive state-required training every two years. Under Public Act 660 of 2018, board of review members—including alternates—must complete State Tax Commission (STC)-approved training “to acquire relevant knowledge and information related to current information that is necessary to accurately and uniformly carry out the duties and responsibilities of an appointed board of review member.” The township board is responsible for seeing that board of review members receive the required training, and proof that your township’s board of review members completed the training and a completed Form 5731, *Assessing District Required Board of Review Training Report* must be attached to the board of review’s certification of the assessment roll and also maintained with your township’s records.

This requirement is a subject of the state audit of the assessment roll. Failure of board of review members to complete the training will result in a deficiency on your township’s state audit.

MTA worked with the STC to develop the required training, and our *Board of Review Training*, being held in February across the state, as well as online options, qualifies for this requirement. Turn to page 25 for more details on our February trainings, including dates, locations and registration details. For additional resources, purchase MTA’s *Board of Review Manual* at [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org), by calling (517) 321-6467, ext. 221 or emailing [elsa@michigantownships.org](mailto:elsa@michigantownships.org). Purchase at a discounted price when registering for our February trainings or on-site.

## REPORTING REMINDER

### All NEU townships must file annual ARPA report by April 30

All non-entitlement units of government (NEUs—all but eight of Michigan’s largest townships)—that accepted American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds must complete their annual “Project and Expenditure Report” by the April 30 deadline.

**Every NEU must complete the report,** even if your township has not obligated

any funds or determined how you will put them to use. (Turn to page 23 to see how some townships are using their ARPA funds.)

There are many helpful resources to help you navigate this process, which can be found on MTA’s “Federal COVID Relief” webpage, [www.michigantownships.org/covidrelief.asp](http://www.michigantownships.org/covidrelief.asp). In addition, the new “Self-Service Resources” page on U.S. Treasury’s State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF, through ARPA) website includes guidance and frequently asked questions, based on topic, including reporting and accessing Treasury’s portals. You can access the Self-Service page at <https://home.treasury.gov/> (search for “SLFRF Self-Service Resources”). ARPA funds can also be used to hire a consultant—such as your township’s auditor—to assist with or complete your ARPA reporting.

As a reminder, townships that did not select the \$10 million standard allowance option—which allows townships to use up to that amount on “government services”—still have the opportunity to do so. U.S. Treasury’s *Project and Expenditure Report User Guide* released this summer noted that local governments that missed the deadline to select the standard allowance may change to the standard deduction in their next federal ARPA report.

In addition, your township’s SAM.gov registration must be active for the reporting, and must be renewed annually. This is free of charge. Your township does not have to pay, or go through a third party, to renew your registration. (Note: Sam.gov now uses a Unique Entity ID instead of a DUNS number. Visit [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov) or refer to your October *Township Focus* for more information.) MTA-member officials can reach out to MTA’s Member Information Services Department for assistance or with ARPA questions at (517) 321-6467 (press option 1). State Treasury can also assist townships continuing to have issues completing reporting or accessing U.S. Treasury’s reporting system; email them at [treas-arpa@michigan.gov](mailto:treas-arpa@michigan.gov).



NEW LETTER

## Numbered letter revises Qualifying Statement, creates single source for info

Under the Revised Municipal Finance Act (Public Act 34 of 2001), townships must annually file a Qualifying Statement—which is an assessment of the township’s fiscal health—with the Michigan Department of Treasury within six months of the end of their fiscal year. If a municipality’s Qualifying Statement is approved—it “passed” its fiscal test—it can issue debt such as bonds or notes in the upcoming year without first needing to obtain Treasury’s prior approval to do so.

The department has released Numbered Letter 2022-1, which provides a revised Qualifying Statement (Form 5047) and creates a single source of information. The department’s goals with the revision include increasing transparency, eliminating common errors, improving the overall user experience, educating filers, and reducing staff effort. The number letter details how to file the statement, which will continue to be done online, at [www.michigan.gov/municipal-finance](http://www.michigan.gov/municipal-finance). The letter also outlines details on filing a reconsideration request, Qualifying Statement reviews, resources and more.

The department also noted that any previously saved information will be lost for Qualifying Statements started, but not submitted, before Dec. 1, 2022. Questions? Email [Treas\\_MunicipalFinance@michigan.gov](mailto:Treas_MunicipalFinance@michigan.gov), with the subject line “QS New Numbered Letter and Form Revisions.”

MTA’s lunchtime learning series, *Now You Know*, offers timely updates, insights from our experts and a chance to get your questions answered all in just one hour! Don’t miss our next episode coming: **Wednesday, Jan. 11 from noon to 1 p.m.**

### Planning for a Millage Question

Is a millage ballot question in your township’s future? As townships grow and revenue sources become more limited, an understanding of voted millages can help township officials finance much-needed programs and services. Join MTA Staff Attorney Catherine Mullhaupt as she explores the nuances between a new millage and different types of renewals, mandated elements of a millage ballot question, tips for scheduling millage questions, and how far a township board can go to promote a ballot question.

Cost is just \$25. Register now at <https://bit.ly/NYKmta>

If your township subscribes to *MTA Online* at the *Premium* level, you get FREE access to EVERY session! Visit <https://learn.michigantownships.org/nyk> for details.



GO GREEN

## Become a Michigan Green Community

Receive support in your township’s sustainability journey by joining the Michigan Green Communities network. The Michigan Green Communities (MGC) program is a collaboration among MTA, the Michigan Association of Counties, Michigan Municipal League, and state Departments of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, and Health and Human Services, and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. It is designed to support communities in their efforts to adapt to climate change, reduce energy use, improve the resilience of their infrastructure, and save money and resources. All Michigan townships are eligible to join the MGC network and take the MGC Challenge.



**The MGC Challenge is open now!** Join the dozens of townships that are part of this statewide network, which allows local government officials to collaborate with one another, through peer learning and information sharing, and to promote innovative sustainability solutions at the local, regional and state level. The annual challenge is a key part of the program and allows participants to track and benchmark their sustainability progress, see how their efforts compare to other Michigan communities, and earn certification as a bronze, silver or gold community. Challenge participants earn a logo to display on their website and in print materials, are publicized at the annual awards conference and on the MGC website, and included in a press release.

Visit <http://migreencommunities.com> to learn more and sign up for the MGC Challenge and network today. Questions? Contact [info@migreencommunities.com](mailto:info@migreencommunities.com)

RECORD-SETTING

## November election saw highest-ever midterm voter turnout

The Nov. 8 election saw the highest voter turnout for a midterm election in the state’s history, beating the record previously set in 2018.

According to the Michigan Department of State, just over 4.5 million Michiganders cast ballots in the November election—with 1.8 million doing so by absentee voting. In 2018, more than 4.3 million voters participated in the midterm election. Congratulations and thank you to all townships, clerks, election workers and others who helped make this record-breaking election a success.



**SURVEY SAYS**

## Local leaders give high marks on the state of local democracy; federal outlook grim

Michigan local leaders are generally optimistic about how democracy is functioning in their jurisdictions, but are far less praiseworthy about the national picture, according to a new Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) report.

When asked to rate the functioning of democracy in their own community on a 10-point scale—where one means a "total breakdown of democracy" and 10 means "a perfectly functioning democracy"—84% rate it at seven or higher, unchanged from assessments in 2020 and 2021. Just 3% feel democracy in their local jurisdiction is functioning poorly. Township respondents reported similar numbers, with 85% rating their local democracy at a seven or higher, and 4% scoring it at a four or less.

By contrast, 63% of Michigan local officials—65% for township leaders, specifically—rate democracy in the United States as a whole poorly, at four or lower on the scale. This is a slight improvement from the 66% who gave such poor ratings in 2021. Only 10% of Michigan local officials (9% for townships) currently rate the functioning of democracy at the federal level as relatively strong, at seven or above—essentially unchanged from last year.

On the state level, 32% of the state's local leaders, and 37% of township respondents, rate democracy in the state of Michigan poorly, at four or lower. This is a significant improvement from the 43% (47% for townships) who felt this way a year ago, but still represents widespread concern. Slightly more than a quarter (27%) rate Michigan democracy as relatively strong, at seven or above on the scale, up from 20% who said the same in 2021. Township-specific responses were similar.

MTA is a partner in the MPPS, conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan's Ford School of Public Policy. The survey is an ongoing census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted since 2009 by CLOSUP.

## Retirement

**Paul Bigford, Sweetwater Township** (Lake Co.) supervisor for 43 years—the longest tenure of any previous supervisors in the township. Bigford has also served as township assessor and on the township board of review, along with many other community and local government organizations.

Noted the township newsletter article honoring Bigford, "Paul can be found in the spring collecting sap for maple syrup and tending to his food plots through the summer and fall. His family legacy goes back more than 90-plus years in Sweetwater Township. The township will be planting a sugar maple tree with a plaque for Paul at the township hall."



Share your officials' retirement, memoriams or milestones with us to include in *Township Focus*! Email information to [jenn@michigantownships.org](mailto:jenn@michigantownships.org).

**LOCAL UPDATES FROM ACROSS MICHIGAN**

## Township happenings

A Little Free Pantry and Little Free General Store, along with a Seed Library and Little Free Fridge, are welcome additions at the **Delta Charter Township** (Eaton Co.) District Library, helping to facilitate growing, harvesting and sharing as a community. As the library notes, "How it works is simple: Take what you need. Give what you can." Donations are accepted throughout the year, even including garden vegetables and fresh herbs, as well as shelf-stable food items and hygiene-type products.



**Macomb Township** (Macomb Co.) and MTA Allied Service Provider Carlisle Wortman Associates, Inc. were recognized for "Outstanding Planning Project: Implementation" at the Planning Michigan Awards for the Macomb Town Center. The mixed-use development, which aims to serve as a "downtown," has roughly 1,000 residential units either built or being built, with thousands more in the planning and engineering process. American Planning Association's Michigan Chapter Jurors said, "It seems that forward-minded thinking in the 1990s set the foundation for future efforts in the Cultivate Macomb! Master Plan and Town Center vision."

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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## ATTENTION TREASURERS

### Reminder for tax collection office hours



The township treasurer, or their designee, must be in his or her office from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to receive tax payments on the last day taxes are due and payable before being returned as delinquent under MCL 211.55. (MCL 211.44(2)(b)) MCL 211.55 refers to the last day of February as the last day that taxes are due and payable before being returned as delinquent to the county treasurer, and provides for the unpaid taxes to be returned as

delinquent to the county treasurer the next day.

The last day to pay 2022\* property taxes without incurring any interest or penalty is **Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2023**. Treasurers **may** choose to hold office hours.

The last day to pay 2022\* property taxes before they are returned as delinquent is **Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2023** (the last day of February). (MCL 211.45) Treasurers **must** hold office hours.

The treasurer also must be in his or her office from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to receive tax payments for the collection of a summer tax levy, on **Thursday, Sept. 14, 2023** (the last day taxes are due and payable before interest is added under MCL 211.44a(5)).

Under Public Act 129 of 2019, a designee for the township treasurer can act on his or her behalf for tax collection purposes. The law allows the treasurer to appoint a designee, approved by the township board, to take the treasurer's place and accept tax payments during these designated times. The designee can be the deputy treasurer, an elected official or another individual acting on behalf of the treasurer.

*\*Correction: We got ahead of ourselves in tax collection hours articles in recent issues of Township Focus and inadvertently stated 2023 for December tax collecting hours and property taxes, rather than 2022. We apologize for the error and any confusion that it may have caused.*

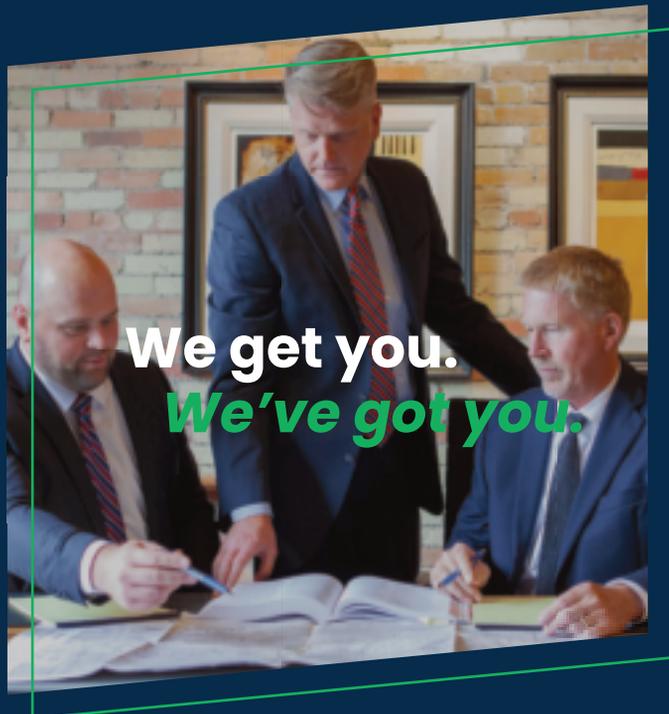
*Missed our Treasurer's Guide to Tax Collection workshops or "Tax Collection and Your Township" Now You Know webinar in November? Recorded versions are available in MTA's Online Learning Center! Watch, rewatch, pause and review on your own schedule. Visit [learning.michigantownships.org](http://learning.michigantownships.org) for details or to purchase.*

*Looking for more tax collecting resources? Purchase MTA's Treasurer's Guide to Township Government (order on [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org), by calling 517-321-6467, ext. 221 or emailing [elsa@michigantownships.org](mailto:elsa@michigantownships.org)), and visit the "Tax Collecting" webpages on the members-only portion of MTA's website (log into the "Answer Center" under the "Member" tab).*



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# MTA's *Now You Know* webinar series provides expertise, insights

Check out MTA's monthly **live** webinars, held over the lunch hour from noon to 1 p.m., on current and key issues that matter to townships. Experts answer your questions in real time and you walk away with helpful insights into topics that help you serve your township. You provide the lunch and we'll provide the learning in our ***Now You Know*** lunchtime learning sessions!



Now You Know

## Here's what's in store for 2023

- Jan. 11:** Planning for a Millage Question
- Feb. 9:** Special Assessments for Public Safety
- March 10:** Legislative Update
- April 5:** What the Board Needs to Know about Compensation and Classification
- May 10:** Meeting Requirements
- June 14:** Who Can Talk to the Township Attorney ... and When
- July 12:** Legislative Update
- Aug. 9:** Spending Public Money
- Sept. 13:** The Art of the Agenda
- Oct. 18:** Elections Update
- Nov. 8:** Financial Reporting
- Dec. 1:** Legislative Wrap-up

Watch MTA emails, website and social media, and upcoming issues of *Township Focus* for all the details. We don't want you to miss an episode!

**WATCH AND LEARN:** Members pay just \$25/person to participate and registration is simple at <https://bit.ly/NYKmta>. You can even choose to have your township invoiced! Can't join us live? Watch it (and previous episodes) on demand in our Online Learning Center later, at your convenience.

**ATTEND FOR FREE:** If your township has an *MTA Online* subscription at the **Premium** level, you can attend EVERY *Now You Know* session AND watch past episodes for FREE (registration fee is removed at checkout.) Learn more at <https://learn.michigantownships.org/mtaonline> or call 517.321.6467 with any questions.

## Scholarships available for MTA's Township Governance Academy

MTA's Township Governance Academy (TGA) gives township board members and other local leaders the knowledge and skills needed to make even more effective decisions for the benefit of their township. TGA offers new ideas, shares "best practices" in township government and provides a hands-on approach to help leaders deal more effectively with everyday issues that townships face.



But don't just take our word for it! Here's what recent TGA graduate **Theresa Chenier, Escanaba Township** (Delta Co.) clerk, had to say: "Thanks to the program, I can put into practice the skills I have learned to enhance and enrich our community. This important education will serve our community, and our board, by [helping us make] good, informed decisions."

The program consists of 70 required credits, obtained by attending 11 courses and earning electives credits. (Classes are offered in person AND are available on our Online Learning Center to watch at your convenience.) A limited number of scholarships, up to \$1,000 each, are available to assist you or your township with program costs associated with this unique, valuable learning experience. **Applications are due Wednesday, March 1.**

Download the scholarship application at [www.michigan townships.org/learning/tga](http://www.michigan townships.org/learning/tga), or call (517) 321-6467, ext. 227, to have an application sent to you.

April 17-20, 2023  
Grand Traverse Resort,  
Acme Township

**one Voice**  
MTA Educational Conference & Expo

The Conference registration brochure  
appears in **THIS** issue of  
*Township Focus!*

## profile



Advertorial

### ITC Holdings Corp.

### Delivering electricity safely and reliably



ITC's high-voltage energy transmission system—composed of towers, poles, lines and substations—is designed to deliver electricity to your Michigan community safely and reliably.

Across its eight-state footprint, ITC works closely with local communities to build, operate and maintain its transmission systems, from siting and constructing new projects, to rebuilding aging infrastructure, managing vegetation in transmission corridors, and performing routine inspections and preventative maintenance.

ITC also partners with communities and local law enforcement agencies to create greater awareness about ITC substations and point more eyes toward protecting these assets from damage or theft in order to maintain the safe and reliable delivery of electrical power. Anyone witnessing a hazard should contact ITC at one of the phone numbers provided below.

Emergency responders must gain authorization from ITC to enter any substation or fenced areas containing ITC equipment—even during emergency situations—to be provided safe, escorted access. It's difficult to recognize the difference between energized and de-energized equipment, so everything inside a substation should be considered energized.

ITC would like to thank you for supporting the delivery of safe and reliable power in your communities!

#### EMERGENCIES—Call 911

- Fire in or near substations
- Downed transmission lines
- Injured person in a substation requiring immediate medical attention

#### NON-EMERGENCIES—(877) 482-4829

- Resident concerns
- Vegetation questions

#### SECURITY CONCERNS—(248) 380-2920

- Theft or damage to ITC property
- Trespassing issues

Opinions expressed within do not represent the views of MTA, its Board or members. Participation in the Allied Service Provider program does not constitute or imply MTA's endorsement of the company or its products/services. For more information, turn to page 2 or visit the Allied Service Provider Directory and program webpages at [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org).

## MTA county chapters: Reserve your Conference hospitality suite now

Is your MTA county chapter interested in hosting a hospitality suite during MTA's Annual Conference, being held April 17-20, 2023, at the Grand Traverse Resort in **Acme Township** (Grand Traverse Co.)? Hospitality suites can provide an ideal



spot to network with fellow township officials after a long day of classes. A limited number of hospitality suites are available to rent at the resort, which serves as our host hotel.

Don't wait to make your reservations! Suites are also available to sponsors and exhibitors, and availability is not guaranteed. The resort offers several different types of suites, each with different amenities and rates. Visit [www.michigantownships.org/conference](http://www.michigantownships.org/conference) and click on "Housing" under the "General Information" tab to learn more or to download the reservation form. For more details, call Kristin Kratky at (517) 321-6467, ext. 230 or email [kristin@michigantownships.org](mailto:kristin@michigantownships.org).

*NOTE: All suite reservations must be made through MTA. Do not contact the host hotel directly, as the hotel staff will be unable to assist you.*

## Volunteers needed for 2023 Conference

Would you like to get more involved in MTA's 2023 Annual Educational Conference, while also providing a service to your colleagues? If so, consider serving as a sergeant-at-arms (SAA) volunteer or ambassador during the Conference. All MTA members attending Conference may volunteer. SAA duties include distributing handouts and evaluation forms for educational sessions, monitoring session rooms, and collecting evaluation forms. Ambassadors may sign up to assist with welcoming and directing attendees to registration upon arrival.

For more information or to volunteer, visit [www.michigantownships.org/conference](http://www.michigantownships.org/conference) and click on the "Volunteer" link. Please let us know of your interest as soon as possible; additional details will be sent to interested parties next month.



## Stay connected with federal updates—sign up for NATaT e-newsletters

As members of the Michigan Townships Association, township officials, board/commission members and employees are also members of our national organization, the National Association of Towns and Townships (NATaT). Along with advocating on behalf of our nation's towns and townships, NATaT has number regular e-newsletters providing guidance and updates useful for Michigan townships. You can sign up to receive these resources directly in your inbox!

Stay up to date with NATaT's:

- **Weekly Legislative Report**, a weekly update bringing officials details on federal happenings in Washington, D.C.
- **The NATaT Interconnect**, a bimonthly update of federal actions related to broadband, cyber and tech innovation.
- **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Update**, biweekly information and resources on the implementation of the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.
- **Weekly Grants Update**, with timely information on grants for local governments, from The Ferguson Group, which oversees NATaT.

Find sign-up links on the "NATaT Weekly Legislative Update" webpage on [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org) (click on "Advocacy Resources" under the "Member" tab. Log-in is required.)

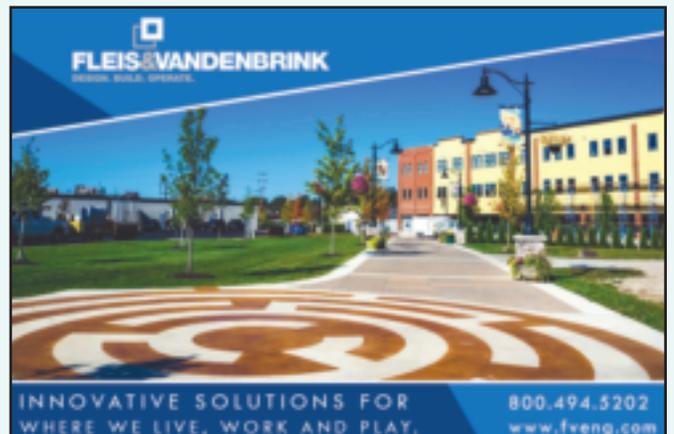
## key mta dates | January

4

Registration opens for MTA's 2023 Annual Educational Conference & Expo, being held April 17-20 at the Grand Traverse Resort. Registration materials appear in **THIS** issue of *Township Focus* and on MTA's website, [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org).

25

Housing opens in hotels with MTA room blocks for MTA's Annual Conference & Expo. (*Must be registered for the Conference as an attendee to receive housing code to make reservations at discounted rates in MTA room blocks.*)



## JANUARY

**3** Dec. 31 is a Saturday, Jan. 1 is a Sunday, and Jan. 2 is a state holiday. Deadline for counties to file 2022 equalization studies for 2023 starting bases with the State Tax Commission (STC) for all classifications in all units on Form 602 (L-4018P) *State Tax Commission Analysis for Equalized Valuation of Personal Property* and Form 603 (L-4018R) *State Tax Commission Analysis for Equalized Valuation of Real Property*. [R 209.41(5)]

**10** Except as otherwise provided in section 9m (bank or trust), 9n (farm products) or 9o (sugar from sugar beets), assessors and/or supervisors are required to annually send a *Personal Property Statement* to any taxpayer they believe has personal property in their possession in their local unit. Form 632 (L-4175) *Personal Property Statements* must be sent or delivered no later than Jan. 10 each year. (MCL 211.19(2)(c))

**25** Local units with a state equalized value (SEV) of \$15 million or less: 2022 taxes collected by Jan. 10 must be distributed within 10 business days of Jan. 10. (MCL 211.43(5)) All other local units must distribute 2022 taxes collected within 10 business days after the 1st and 15th of each month except in March. (MCL 211.43(3)(a))

## FEBRUARY

**By 1** Not later than Feb. 1. Deadline to submit STC Form 2699

(L-4143) *Statement of Qualified Personal Property by a Qualified Business* with the assessor. (MCL 211.8a(2))

**14** The township may waive the penalty for the homestead property of a senior citizen, paraplegic, quadriplegic, hemiplegic, eligible service person, eligible veteran, eligible widow, or widower, totally and permanently disabled or blind persons, if that person has filed a claim for a homestead property tax credit with the state treasurer before Feb. 15. Also applies to a person whose property is subject to a farmland/development rights agreement or verification that the property is subject to the development rights agreement before Feb. 15. If statements are not mailed by Dec. 31, the township may not impose the 3% late penalty charge. (MCL 211.44(3))

Last day to pay property taxes without the imposition of a late penalty charge equal to 3% of the tax in addition to the property tax administration fee, if any. (MCL 211.44(3))

**15** STC reports assessed valuations for state Department of Natural Resources lands to assessors. (MCL 324.2153(2))

Townships that collect summer property tax shall defer the collection until this date for property that qualifies. (MCL 211.51(3))

Last day of deferral period for summer property tax levies, if the deferral for qualified taxpayers. (MCL 211.51(7))

**17** On or before the third Monday in February. Feb. 20 is a state holiday, Feb. 19 is a Sunday and Feb. 18 is a Saturday. Deadline for county equalization director to publish in a newspaper, the tentative equalization ratios and estimated SEV multipliers for 2023, and to provide a copy to each assessor and board of review in the county. All notices of meetings of the boards of review must give the tentative ratios and estimated multipliers pertaining to their jurisdiction. (MCL 211.34a(1))

**By 20** Not later than Feb. 20. Deadline for payments to municipalities from the Local Community Stabilization Authority: Local Community Stabilization Share revenue for county extra-voted millage, township millage, and other millages levied 100% in December. (MCL 123.1357(8)(b))

**21** Feb. 20 is a state holiday. Form 5278 *Eligible Manufacturing Personal Property Tax Exemption Claim, Personal Property Statement, and Report of Fair Market Value of Qualified New and Previously Existing Personal Property (Combined Document)* must be completed and delivered to the assessor of the local unit not later than Feb. 20 (postmark is acceptable) for each personal property parcel for which the eligible manufacturing personal property exemption is being claimed for 2023. (MCL 211.9m(2)(c))

Feb. 20 is a state holiday. Form 5819 *Qualified Heavy Equipment Rental Personal*

*Property Exemption Claim* must be completed and delivered to the assessor of the local unit not later than Feb. 20 (postmark is acceptable) for each personal property parcel for which the qualified heavy equipment personal property exemption is being claimed for 2023. (MCL 211.9p(2)(e))

Feb. 20 is a state holiday. Form 632 *2023 Personal Property Statement* must be completed and delivered to the assessor of the local unit not later than Feb. 20 (postmark is acceptable). (MCL 211.19(2))

Feb. 20 is a state holiday. Deadline for taxpayer to file Form 3711 *Report of Heavy Earth Moving Equipment Claimed as Exempt Inventory* if a claim of exemption is being made for heavy earth-moving equipment. (MCL 211.19(2))

**28** By Feb. 28. Deadline for municipalities to report inaccurate 2022 commercial personal property and industrial personal property taxable values on Form 5651 *Correction of 2022 Personal Property Taxable Values Used for 2022 Personal Property Tax Reimbursement Calculations* to the county equalization director. (MCL 123.1358(5)(e))

The STC shall publish the inflation rate multiplier before March 1. (MCL 211.34d)(15).

Last day for local treasurers to collect 2022 property taxes. (MCL 211.78a)



### What are the 2023 updates for retirement plans?

The Internal Revenue Service recently issued its annual cost-of-living adjustments for the 2023 tax year for retirement plans, as well as health and welfare benefit plans. These cost-of-living adjustments reflect significant increases in the consumer price index. In Notice 2022-55, the IRS set forth cost-of-living adjustments for many retirement plan limits, including significantly increased contribution limits:

- The 2023 limit on annual additions (contributions) to defined contribution plans will increase to \$66,000 (up from \$61,000).
- The 2023 annual limit on compensation that can be taken into account for contributions and deductions will increase to \$330,000 (up from \$305,000).
- The 2023 annual limit on elective deferrals increased to \$22,500 (up from \$20,500) for 403(b) and 457(b) plans. The catch-up contribution value in 2023 has increased from \$6,500 in 2022 to \$7,500. In total, employees above the age of 50 can contribute up to \$30,000.



### What is the difference between a defined benefit plan and a defined contribution plan?

A **defined benefit plan** promises a specified monthly benefit at retirement. The plan may state this promised benefit as an exact dollar amount, such as \$100 per month at retirement. More commonly, it may calculate a benefit through a plan formula that considers such factors as salary and service, for example, 1% of average salary for the final five years of employment multiplied by every year of service with an employer.

A **defined contribution plan** does not promise a specific benefit amount at retirement. In these plans, the employee or the employer (or both) contribute to the employee’s individual account under the plan, sometimes at a set rate, such as 5% of earnings annually. These contributions generally are invested on the employee’s behalf. The employee will ultimately receive the balance in their account, which is based on contributions, plus or minus investment gains or losses. The value of the account will fluctuate due to the changes in the value of the investments.



### What are the requirements for Form 5572?

Form No. 5572, *Local Government Retirement System Annual Report*, must be filed for any local government that offers a retirement pension benefit

plan and/or a retirement health benefit plan. A “retirement pension benefit plan” means an allowance, right, accrued right, or other pension benefit payable under a defined benefit pension plan to a participant in the plan or a beneficiary of the participant. Defined contribution plans, such as a 403(b) or 457(b) plan, do not need to be reported.

This report is due no later than six months after the end of the township’s fiscal year. Failure to file within six months after the end of the township fiscal year may result in the State of Michigan issuing a determination of underfunded status, which means that there are not enough assets to meet payout obligations to employees. If this occurs, the state will undertake an internal review of the township’s retirement system, discuss changes or reforms that have been made with designated officials, and review actuarial projections including trends and forecasts.



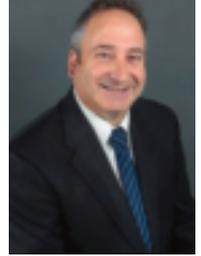
### Are there any other 2023 updates we should know about?

Yes. The limitation on voluntary employee salary reductions for contributions to a health flexible spending arrangement is \$3,050 in 2023, while the maximum annual contribution that can be made to a health savings account (HSA) is \$3,850 for an individual, and \$7,750 for a family. The \$1,000 HSA catch-up contributions that individuals 55 and older can make until they are enrolled in Medicare remains unchanged.

If an employee is subject to Social Security taxes: 1) the Medicare portion of Social Security taxes is not capped; all covered employees’ wages are subject to this tax, and 2) the Social Security portion is limited to the first \$60,200 wages paid in calendar year 2023 (this limit is adjusted annually and published in IRS Circular E). The employee and employer match remains 6.2%. There is no limit to the wages subject to the Medicare tax; all covered wages are still subject to the 1.45% tax.

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.





**Q** Our rural township has zoned for utility-scale solar as a special land use. We have a pending application for a utility-scale solar energy system with battery storage on an 800-acre agricultural parcel. We are concerned that we cannot adequately provide fire protection to the site because of lack of appropriate equipment and training. Can we deny the application on this basis?

The answer depends on your zoning ordinance special land use provisions. If the application meets the terms of your zoning ordinance provisions, then you must grant the special land use. However, most well-drafted zoning ordinances have provisions that can be used to address this situation. Typically, a township would not permit a special land use that presents a fire hazard that the township is incapable of handling.

An example of special land use language to handle this type of consideration might be as follows: The use shall be adequately served by essential public facilities and services, or, in the alternative, it must be demonstrated that the person responsible for the proposed special land use will be able to continually provide adequately for the services and facilities deemed essential to the special land use under consideration. The special land use shall not place demands on public services and facilities in excess of available capacity.

If you have this type of language in your ordinance, you would have the ability to deny the application if the township lacks the fire-fighting capabilities to extinguish a utility-scale solar energy system or battery storage fire and the operator does not have some sort of on-site fire suppression system.

The impact of an 800-acre solar energy system fire can be immense. Not only does it have the ability to burn a large area of the township and the company's property, but it impacts future use of the property, neighboring properties, the safety of firefighters, and can put toxins in the air. Fire-fighting ability is a major concern and we have had solar utility developers offer to provide townships with equipment and training needed to adequately provide fire protection to the project. In some cases, we have had the company offer to pay for annual firefighter training and fire-fighting apparatus that could include a specialized fire truck or brush unit. If the company, as part of their application, is willing to provide the township the necessary training or equipment, then that might satisfy the township's special land use requirements regarding adequate public services.

**Q** How does the township address the issue of a utility-scale solar energy system that ceases operation?

The last thing a township wants to have happen is to allow a large solar project on hundreds of acres of land and then be stuck with a solar graveyard if operations cease and the panels and structures remain. This potential situation is handled by requiring a decommissioning agreement to be in place with regard to any utility-scale solar energy system approval. No approval should ever be granted without a decommissioning agreement. Ideally, the decommissioning agreement requirements will be spelled out in your zoning ordinance. Even where it is not specifically spelled out in your ordinance, you can typically require a decommissioning agreement as a reasonable condition to the special land use or site plan approval.

The basic purpose of the decommissioning agreement is to require removal of all equipment upon cession of operations. The agreement will require a bond to be in place to allow the township to collect funds for the removal of the equipment and reclamation of the property, if the company fails to do so. The bond needs to be in place once construction begins.

One major issue of contention in negotiating the terms of a decommissioning agreement is whether the company may reduce the bond amount by the salvage value of the solar equipment. We vigorously contend that salvage value should not be used. In this regard, the township is not in a position of trying to find a market for the scrap. This should not be a township responsibility. If the company operates properly, they will take care of their own decommissioning without the township forcing the matter or collecting on the bond. If the township has to take care of the decommissioning, then the township should not have to find a market for the scrap. If the decommissioning agreement does not include the salvage value, then the company has an incentive to properly handle the decommissioning themselves. They can get salvage value themselves and are much more likely to know the market. The township should not include the salvage value reduction since it just encourages the company to walk away from an abandoned site and leave the decommissioning to the township.

Another issue that should be addressed in the decommissioning agreement is periodic review of the bond amount to make sure that the amount continues to provide proper security over the many years that the project may be in operation. The cost of removal 20 years from now will most likely be much higher than the present cost; so there should be analysis/adjustments every few years.



Our township doesn't have any provisions in our zoning ordinance for solar energy systems (SES). Should we be concerned?

Yes. There are a number of potential issues that may arise by not specifically handling solar energy systems in your zoning ordinance. Zoning ordinances are prohibitive, so if not mentioned, the SES would be prohibited unless interpreted to fall under another specified item. Not providing for SES leaves the township open to unintended interpretations or claims of unlawful exclusionary zoning. The state has a goal that 60% of its electricity will be from renewable energy sources by 2030. As such, utility-scale SES projects are being pursued throughout the state. Solar energy use in Michigan is on the rise and the township's lack of regulation in this regard will leave it ill-equipped and unprepared for handling SES requests.

Suggested zoning regulations could provide for accessory SES (used to power on-site residential or commercial business uses); principal-use small SES (less than 2 megawatts for primary purpose off-site use); and principal-use utility-scale SES (2 megawatts or more for primary purpose off-site use).

With regard to accessory SES, the ordinance could provide regulations concerning: roof-mounted, ground-mounted and building-integrated SES; height; setback; lot coverage; visibility; locations; and applications. With regard to principal-use utility-scale SES and principal-use small SES, the ordinance could provide regulations concerning: special land use application; fencing; screening/landscaping; height; setback; minimum lot area; ground cover; lot coverage; minimal land clearing; access drive; wiring; lighting; signage; sound; repowering; and decommissioning.

Ultimately, your zoning ordinance regulations should reflect implementation of your master plan with regard to your community and the desires of your township board. One size does not fit all and what might work for one community may not work in yours.

*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.

Prein & Newhof  
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Townships deserve engineers who understand.

**Want more resources on renewable energy, and how your township can prepare? MTA has the information you need!**

- Visit MTA's "Solar Energy" and "Wind Energy" webpages, which include links to sample ordinances, articles and more (access via the "Answer Center" under the "Member" tab on [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org). Log-in required.).
- Turn to the April/May 2022 *Township Focus* cover story, "Renewable Energy on the Horizon" (look on MTA's website under the "News" tab for digital magazine archives).
- Attend MTA's 2023 Annual Conference to take part in several sessions on solar energy:



**On Tuesday, April 18:** "Solar Energy Regulation: Why Your Township Needs a Solar Ordinance" Business Solution Session, held from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and "Here Comes the Sun: What Your Township Needs to Do to Prepare for Solar Energy," from 2:45 to 4 p.m.

**On Wednesday, April 19:** "Dual-Use Solar Energy Projects," from 1 to 2:15 p.m.

The Conference registration brochure appears in THIS issue of *Township Focus* and on MTA's website.



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## Inside the lame-duck legislative session

**A**s we look back on the wrap-up for the 101st legislative session in December, the 2022 lame-duck session was much shorter with fewer bills passed compared to previous lame-duck sessions (the period between the November election and the end of a two-year legislative session). And while there are several issues that will require action in the next session, this session was successful for local units of government.

Townships and other local governments will benefit from the billions of dollars appropriated in 2022 for infrastructure purposes, including water and sewer, parks and recreation grants, increased statutory revenue sharing (both in the base and a one-time increase), affordable housing and economic development. And we were able to secure \$75 million for local units in 2023 for the loss of anticipated revenue due to the increase in the small taxpayer exemption from \$80,000 to \$180,000—with more work to be completed for a permanent revenue replacement mechanism in the upcoming session.

We were also successful, through member engagement, to prevent efforts to circumvent local authority on short-term rentals and sand and gravel mining operations. Both of packages have been at the forefront for the past six years and would preempt your township's ability to regulate these uses, creating a one-size-fits-all approach for every community in the state. While we anticipate similar legislation will be introduced in the upcoming session, we are hopeful compromises can be reached.

In terms of election issues, one of the accomplishments in the fall was passage of a bill that included the option for some communities to pre-process absentee voter ballots. The measure also included the ability for county clerks to remove deceased individuals from the qualified voter file. We anticipate several election issues in the upcoming session with the implementation of Proposal 2022-2, which was approved by voters in November.

Another major package achieved passage after seven years of work. The Legislature adopted holistic changes to Michigan's solid waste management laws, which had not been updated since the 1990s. Despite a last-minute push by the waste industry to preempt local governments of regulatory powers, MTA was able to protect local control over disposal and recycling facilities. Changes include creating a regulatory program to prevent bad actors in the composting industry and refocusing state policy to look at waste diversion, giving local governments tools to make choices that are right for their community. Watch MTA updates for more information on the implementation and timelines in the coming months.

**We were successful, through member engagement, to prevent efforts to circumvent local authority on short-term rentals and sand and gravel operations. While we anticipate similar legislation will be introduced in the upcoming session, we are hopeful compromises can be reached.**

A series of three bills, supported by MTA, also made significant changes to the State Revolving Fund programs for clean water and drinking water. These new laws streamline the two programs making it easier for local governments to apply for these fund sources for infrastructure projects. By updating requirements, both revolving funds now have similar application requirements and allow local governments to use existing infrastructure planning documents—making these funds more accessible than ever, just as more federal dollars become available.

There are several other measures enacted impacting township government that we have previously shared in 2022; a complete list will appear in the February issue of *Township Focus*.

MTA will continue to work in the new session toward items that we had hoped would have made it across the finish line in December, but did not—these include reimbursement to local units for revenue lost due to both the disabled

veterans property tax exemption and the increase in small taxpayer personal property tax exemption. The bills to reimburse local units for the disabled veterans property tax exemption came the closest to passage since the exemption was created. However, the bills were expanded to increase the exemption benefit, thereby increasing the cost to the state. On the reimbursement for the increase in the personal property tax exemption, the bills passed the Senate but did not receive final passage in House due to other issues that were being negotiated in the lame-duck session.

As we begin 2023, there are significant changes in the Legislature as both the House and the Senate change control—with the Democrats having a two-member majority in both chambers. All committee chairs will change as will the membership on all committees. We look forward to the ability to build on the successes of the last session, protect local authority and address funding issues.

Thank you to all our members who acted on MTA's action alerts this session—your voice and advocacy is very impactful and greatly appreciated.

Learn more from MTA's Government Relations staff at the breakout session, "Insights from Inside the Capitol," held Tuesday, April 18, from 10:15 to 11 a.m. at MTA's 2023 Annual Educational Conference. The Conference registration brochure appears in this issue of *Township Focus*, and details also appear online at [www.michigantownships.org/conference.asp](http://www.michigantownships.org/conference.asp).



**Township Insights**, MTA's weekly e-newsletter sent each Friday, offers timely information and updates about legislative happenings, as well as news, programs and resources that can help you better serve your community. Look for the latest on what's happening in Lansing, grant opportunities—and more!

Not receiving *Township Insights* in your inbox? Check your spam or junk mail folder, and contact [database@michigantownships.org](mailto:database@michigantownships.org) to ensure we have your correct email address on file.



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# 2023 MTA Capital Conference

March 1, 2023 | Lansing Center

Register online at [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org)



## Be here.

### Let's Learn Together

Township officials have a lot going on, and MTA wants to make it easier for you to know what is happening at the state Capitol that may affect your township and your role as a local leader. From ongoing debates regarding local authority to new issues driven by changing winds based on election results, **MTA's Capital Conference** gives you a direct line to lawmakers—including 73 newly elected legislators—as well as state departments and MTA policy experts to help you best serve your constituents. Spend time with your fellow township officials, meet with your legislators and learn about new policy issues from experts at our 2023 Capital Conference.

### What's Planned for the 2023 Capital Conference?

The 2022 elections led to many changes in the state Legislature for the new 102nd legislative session. New leaders mean a different focus and a different agenda. From our keynote speaker to panels that include legislators, department experts and MTA staff, you will **learn the latest on issues affecting your township**—including implementation of the election changes the voters approved in Proposal 2. We are also

## Be heard.

planning six breakout sessions on topics including renewable energy, funding for roads, and the new Office of Rural Development.

You'll also be able to meet with your legislators. Upon registration, your legislators will be invited to join us during the networking luncheon. With so many new legislators taking office in 2023, building relationships with your state elected officials is vitally important. Attending the Capital Conference enables you to discuss issues affecting your community, and townships as a whole, directly with your state representative and senator.

Join us on **Wednesday, March 1** in downtown Lansing for this important event.

Visit [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org) (click on "Capital Conference" under the "Advocacy" tab) for driving directions, parking and overnight lodging information.



## Be engaged.

### Agenda

8 a.m.

Welcome & Keynote Speaker  
*Gov. Gretchen Whitmer invited*

9 a.m.

Capitol Update

9:45 a.m.

Proposal 2—Now What?  
*State Bureau of Elections invited*

10:45 a.m.

Breakout Sessions

11:45 a.m.

Networking Luncheon with Legislators

1 p.m.

State Department Expo

2 p.m.

Breakout Sessions

3 p.m.

Breakout Sessions

4 p.m.

From Township Office to  
the State Legislature

## MTA Capital Conference Registration Form

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

Name & Title \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Name & Title \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Name & Title \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCOUNTED** rate: \$55 For paid registrations received **by** Jan. 31.

**REGULAR** rate: \$75 For paid registrations received **after** Jan. 31.

**ON-SITE** rate: \$95 For paid registrations received **after** Feb. 22.

**# of Persons** \_\_\_\_\_ **Registration Fee** \_\_\_\_\_ **Total** \_\_\_\_\_  
x =

### 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 \_\_\_\_\_ CSV (3-digit code) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### Cancellations & Substitutions

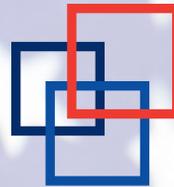
Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office by Feb. 22 will receive a full refund. No refunds will be issued thereafter. You may substitute another individual from your township for your registration at any time without incurring a charge; please notify MTA of the change.

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, ext. 236.

# Thank you

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Contributions made Jan. 1, 2022 - Dec. 14, 2022



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Established in 1982, Friends of MTA (MTA's PAC) is an important resource that allows MTA to assist township-friendly candidates running for the Legislature. Your contribution to Friends of MTA provides the financial resources that are necessary to help elect legislative candidates who will fight for township government.

To donate, visit [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org) (click "Friends of MTA" under the "Advocacy" tab) or call (517) 321-6467!

# Public involvement in township decision-making

**P**ublic involvement in government decision-making is a fundamental element of democracy—and this is especially true at the local level. As township boards deliberate certain decisions and projects, an engaged and informed public can provide valuable input and insights on community values and priorities. Involving diverse public interests allows a variety of perspectives to be shared, contributing additional ideas and viewpoints.

And, while township officials have no shortage of data at their fingertips, the varied experiences of community members can constitute another valuable “dataset” that is not available without providing the people an opportunity to participate and share their ideas. Regular dialogue between township officials and those they represent helps to build trust in communications and decision-making. Improved trust between the public and local government can, in turn, reduce conflict. Public involvement opportunities also allow community groups and other stakeholders to interact to help identify and share norms and values, which can build a foundation for cooperation, rather than confrontation.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) included \$362 billion in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF). These funds, along with additional funds included in the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, represent significant opportunities for improvements in Michigan communities. Public engagement is critical in making plans and decisions for the use of this federal stimulus, and there are numerous strategies for local officials to consider as they plan these township investments.

## **Evolving roles of the public in local decisions**

Since the early 20th Century, the public hearing has been the most common means of involving the public in government policy development. State law requires public hearings in many instances, including before adoption of certain ordinances or when adopting the annual budget. This opportunity for public review and input allows community members and those impacted to review what is being proposed and to speak directly to the body considering the decision. Ironically, the public hearing often comes at the end of the policy development process. Among the many ways to involve the public, the public hearing may be the least effective. State statutes requiring public hearings establish the legal minimums for public participation. There is ample opportunity for townships to utilize other means of public engagement throughout their planning or policy development processes.

Effective citizen engagement obviously does not—and cannot—circumvent statutorily required public hearings. It can, however, supplement these hearings by engaging citizens more intentionally and much earlier in the decision-making process.



The goal is to empower people during policy development and garner input throughout the process, so that by the time of adoption of a plan, policy or regulation, when a hearing must be held, understanding already exists and comments offered at the hearing are constructive and not adversarial. Many communities today design their public participation with the explicit goal to minimize or eliminate contention and avoid major new issues being raised at the final required public hearing.

While there are many ways the public can participate in local government decisions, and many things that townships can do to encourage (or discourage) public participation, one of the most important aspects of any interaction between the township and its constituents is clear expectations. Townships and township officials, when soliciting public input, must be clear on how that input will be used.

If a resident gives input on an issue with the expectation that it will be used to help guide decisions, but then feels their input is disregarded, they will be less likely to participate in the future. However, if the township explains clearly how input will be used, or what the individual's role is in the process, then whether they are helping to make recommendations or simply giving feedback on a decision that has been made, at least they know their place in the process and are more likely to continue to participate.

One helpful framework in planning public engagement is the International Association of Public Participation's Public Participation Spectrum ([www.iap2.org/page/pillars](http://www.iap2.org/page/pillars)).

This framework defines the public's role in any given process, ranging from "Inform," where the governmental body commits to providing the public with objective information about a decision, to "Collaborate" where the public is a partner in input and solutions. Among the spectrum categories are:

- 1) **Inform.** Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- 2) **Consult.** Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
- 3) **Involve.** Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- 4) **Collaborate.** Partner with the public in each aspect of the process, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

*(A fifth spectrum category, "Empower," placing decision-making in the hands of the public, is not applicable to township boards, which have the responsibility of final decision-making over township decisions.)*

Where on the spectrum a particular engagement opportunity lands may depend on multiple factors and is something that should be considered in the planning process. It is important to consider what type of feedback a township is looking for from its residents, how that feedback will be used, and what the goals of any engagement are.



Effective community engagement can be a very useful tool for the regular township planning cycle—such as budgeting, and capital improvement and strategic planning—as well as in instances such as determining how to use the township’s American Rescue Plan Act funding.

Once the township decides the purpose and scope of its public engagement effort, the next step is planning the actual engagement, including what methods will be used. Educational events, newsletters, websites, videos and social media posts are examples of tools used to **Inform** residents. These involve a one-way flow of information from township officials to the public, helping residents understand the issue and decisions.

At the **Consult** and **Involve** levels, information flows both ways, with the township helping residents understand the issue and possible decisions, and residents providing feedback to both identify possible solutions and inform the selection of the ultimate solution(s). This is sometimes accomplished through public hearings, town hall-style events, advisory committees, online surveys or focus groups.

Engagement at the **Collaborate** level requires more effort and time, as multiple opportunities for engagement are almost certainly required. These may use facilitated dialogue processes that engage residents in defining the issues and possible solutions. Residents may also provide input on the decision or decide collectively what recommendations to offer. “Collaborative governance” networks have also emerged as a strategy for collective decision-making and implementation of efforts involving government, community members, and private sector working together.<sup>1</sup> This can include both informal and formal relationships in problem-solving and decision-making in which a policy problem is identified, and those participating in the network collaborate to develop policies and solutions.

## Engagement boosts trust, support

While it is clear there are many issues causing division in society and government, trust in government is highest at the local level. Only 44% of respondents to Michigan State University’s 2022 State of the State Survey of Michigan residents said they trust the federal government at least “some of the time,” while just 47% said they trust state government. Nearly two-thirds (65%), however, trust their local government.

That trust in local government is important at a time when municipalities and counties are entrusted with unprecedented access to vast and varied sources of federal stimulus—though it also creates pressure to maintain and build that trust further. Townships and other local governments can, and should, continue to make efforts to increase that trust. Certainly, authentically engaging the public in decisions that significantly impact their communities now, and in the future, can only help.

Effective community engagement can be a very useful tool for the regular township planning cycle. In addition to the annual budget, many townships also annually prepare a capital improvements program (CIP)<sup>2</sup>, providing details and estimates of time and cost for needed capital investments in public structures or improvements. At first glance, this may seem to be a purely bureaucratic exercise, and perhaps it can be without much public involvement. However, many capital improvements amount to infrastructure that have physical development or land use associations for which public scrutiny is often high. Thus, many capital improvements are closely tied to the township master plan. In other words, infrastructure is appropriately planned and budgeted based on current and future land use, and wise land use policy is tied to infrastructure policy and provision. With such significance associated with these budgetary and land use decisions, public participation can provide important insights in determining the general order of priority, need or desire.

A township strategic plan—a short-term, implementation-oriented plan designed to be nimble and responsive to changes in the surrounding environment or circumstances of the community—is another regular local government planning exercise where effective public engagement can produce more broadly supported policies, more committed residents, and partnerships, resources and opportunities for implementation.

Take a moment to consider your township CIP, master plan and/or strategic plan. When was the last time each was updated? How engaged was the public in each process? How confident is the township board that these plans adequately identify, explain and set implementation for current community priorities? If concerned about lackluster public engagement in the past, fortunately, there’s always next year! Plan now to consider ways to improve the level of participation and engagement in future planning processes.

## Community decision-making for federal stimulus

More than 90% of Michigan’s townships applied for and received their allocation of American Rescue Plan Act dollars, and many are continuing to consider how to best put those funds to use in their community. The money can be used under four broad categories: revenue replacement; public health and to offset negative economic impacts of the pandemic; premium pay for essential workers; and infrastructure investments in water, sewer and broadband infrastructure. (The funds can also be used to hire consultants to help the township administer the funds.) According to the MSU Extension Center for Local Government Finance and Policy, and as shown in the chart below, the majority of ARPA dollars have been designated by Michigan local governments for revenue replacement, with supporting public health and economic response the second highest portion.

The federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) also presents an opportunity for communities to engage residents. According to the Citizens Research Council of Michigan<sup>4</sup>, Michigan could receive \$4.3 billion for transportation, water, broadband and electric vehicle charging infrastructure over five years. The IIJA includes local government match requirements, creating opportunities for public involvement in deciding local infrastructure investment priorities. While the funding presents another significant opportunity for transformative local projects, funding may well mostly go to the communities that are best positioned to apply for funds, not necessarily those that most need funding or that most effectively engage the public in project prioritization.

As with any expenditures, townships must ensure that any use of these funds is a lawful expenditure under state statute. Strategic use of ARPA and other federal funds have the potential to make significant positive impacts in Michigan communities by supporting significant investment in key areas of community vitality. According to the spring 2022 Michigan Public Policy Survey, in which MTA is a partner, from the University of Michigan’s Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy, 67% of local leaders in Michigan expect ARPA funds to improve infrastructure somewhat or significantly in their

community. More than half (58%) expect it to improve their community’s quality of life.

While capital improvements appear to be the most common planned use of ARPA funds, with 52% of local governments planning to spend on facilities such as public buildings, parks and other capital projects, the specifics of those projects vary, and it appears that many communities are not pursuing public engagement, collaboration or public-private partnerships to maximize the impact of this investment. According to the MPPS, just 15% of jurisdictions statewide have engaged their community members to gauge support for spending options. Only 20% have pursued regional or multi-jurisdictional collaboration on projects, and only 10% have pursued public-private partnerships. These strategies each present an opportunity to leverage the funds for greater impact.

Given the increased flexibility and ease of categorizing ARPA funds as revenue replacement, it is not surprising that most funds have been marked as such. These funds, however, still represent a great opportunity for townships and other local governments to make significant and necessary investments in their communities.<sup>5</sup> Even if categorized as revenue replacement, for many townships, the reality is that these funds will be surplus to existing funds, which could arguably be used to invest in the community’s future.

It is very likely the U.S. Treasury’s final rule allowing local governments to choose a standard allowance of up to \$10 million of revenue loss to be used for government services affected jurisdictions’ decisions to engage the community in spending decisions. Still, there are inspiring examples of local governments effectively soliciting public opinion on the best use of ARPA funds. (*Turn to page 23 to see how some townships have sought input and decided to put these dollars to use.*) On a

broader level, and in ways that can be—and have been—replicated by townships, counties like Ottawa and Marquette have created web surveys to collect public opinion about priority ARPA funding. Marquette County’s webpage states “The thoughtful allocation of this funding will improve the quality of life for the people living, learning and working in Marquette County.” Ottawa County also appointed a COVID-19 ARPA Advisory Committee, with recognition that public input is a cornerstone of good governance. The committee, which includes representation by community members from a cross-section of local public and private organizations, has the sole purpose to guide how the county’s \$57 million in ARPA funding will be distributed.

## Sample ARPA projects (revenue replacement)

- Bridge replacement
- Americans with Disabilities Act compliance renovations
- Fire trucks and emergency equipment
- Broadband access collaboration
- Replacing streetlights with LED
- Replacement of sports courts
- Community sustainability plan development
- Municipal office computer/information technology upgrades

## Summary of ARPA fund usage by expenditure category<sup>3</sup>

Expenditure Category	Obligated (\$)	Spent (\$)	Portion of Existing Project Funds Obligated	Projects (count)
Revenue replacement	\$541,497,365	\$274,093,460	72%	868
Negative economic impact	\$81,981,737	\$23,447,170	11%	100
Administrative	\$32,369,782	\$10,567,211	4%	49
Public sector capacity*	\$32,323,058	\$27,804,402	4%	56
Infrastructure	\$30,901,479	\$8,445,256	4%	109
Public health	\$20,596,866	\$14,228,991	3%	106
Premium pay	\$15,076,423	\$12,659,700	2%	41

\*Public sector capacity use falls under the public health/negative economic impact usage

## ARPA spending guiding principles

The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) created the following recommended guiding principles for spending American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars. You can find more guidance and information on GFOA's "Coronavirus Response Resource Center" (look under "Federal Advocacy" on [www.gfoa.org](http://www.gfoa.org)).

- Care should be taken to avoid creating new programs or add-ons to existing programs that require an ongoing financial commitment.
- Use of ARPA funds to cover operating deficits caused by COVID-19 should be considered temporary and additional budget restraint may be necessary to achieve/maintain structural balance in future budgets.
- Investment in critical infrastructure is a particularly well-suited use of ARPA funds because it is a non-recurring expenditure that can be targeted to strategically important long-term assets that provide benefits over many years. However, care should be taken to assess any on-going operating costs that may be associated with the project.
- Local jurisdictions should be cognizant of state-level ARPA efforts, especially regarding infrastructure, potential enhancements of state funding resources, and existing or new state law requirements.
- Consider regional initiatives, including partnering with other ARPA recipients. It is possible there are many beneficiaries of ARPA funding within your community, such as schools, transportation agencies and local economic development authorities. Be sure to understand what they are planning and augment their efforts; alternatively, create cooperative spending plans to enhance the structural financial condition of your community.
- Use other dedicated grants and programs first whenever possible and save ARPA funds for priorities not eligible for other federal and state assistance programs.
- Whenever possible, expenditures related to ARPA funding should be spread over the qualifying period (obligated by Dec. 31, 2024, and fully expended by Dec. 31, 2026) to enhance budgetary and financial stability.
- Adequate time should be taken to carefully consider all alternatives for the prudent use of ARPA funding prior to committing the resources to ensure the best use of the temporary funding.

## Meaningful public involvement is an essential tool

Michigan local government leaders, of course, are much more familiar with ARPA funding than their residents, as one would expect given their responsibilities. That means an excellent first step in any public engagement around local use of ARPA funds is education—or **Inform**, as the Spectrum of Public Participation would say. Townships would be wise to inform residents about ARPA funds and their allowable use, even if that use has already been determined.

Beyond that, townships should carefully consider how this infusion of funds can help their community thrive and think strategically about how to **Involve** the public in that decision-making process. Budget decisions relating to broader plans, such as a strategic plan, capital improvements program and/or master plan, can be made stronger when developed through a process where the public could meaningfully **Collaborate**. A significant one-time investment gives communities the chance to invest in key areas that have gone underfunded or ignored for years, or pursue something new—either of which can have a major impact in a community now, and for years to come. For decisions like that, meaningfully involving township residents is an essential tool.

Initially, township leaders will have to work hard to reach broad and diverse stakeholders in their community when developing new policies and strategies to effectively engage the public. Over time, the benefits of effective engagement can become clear, and townships, residents and other stakeholder groups can come to understand that partnership in creating better communities can be the norm. Sustained civic engagement can empower communities with collaborative, impactful decision-making that benefits townships now, and long into the future.



**Bradley Neuman**, AICP, Senior Extension Educator, and **Eric Walcott**, State Specialist, Michigan State University Extension

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Carmine Bianchi, Greta Nasi & William C. Rivenbark (2021) Implementing collaborative governance: models, experiences, and challenges, *Public Management Review*, 23:11, 1581-1589, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2021.1878777

<sup>2</sup> Any township may prepare and adopt a capital improvements program. However, a CIP is only required for a township if the township, alone or jointly with one or more other local units of government, owns or operates a water supply or sewage disposal system. (MCL 125.3865(2))

<sup>3</sup> ARPA Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funds in Michigan: Spending Plans as of April 2022. (September 2022). MSU Extension Center for Local Government Finance and Policy.

<sup>4</sup> Citizens Research Council of Michigan. Dec. 1, 2021. The Federal Infrastructure Act Will Help Fix Michigan. <https://crcmich.org>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



# MTA asks: How is your township spending its American Rescue Plan Act funds?

## Letting firefighters know ‘they are important to our community’

So far, **Boardman Township** (Kalkaska Co.) has awarded our first responders (volunteer firefighters) with a 20% premium pay retroactive to 2020 and 2021. We also have work to do on our dam that we may use some funds on.

To get ideas, I asked each board member to create a “Top 5 list” of items and then invited several community members to be on a committee. We met once a month for three months to discuss the board’s “votes” and then discussed other things we could do to improve the community. We have a prioritized list, but have not yet acted on anything else.

I know that we would not have awarded premium pay to our firefighters if it hadn’t been for ARPA. We are trying hard not to lose any more firefighters; it has been almost impossible to attract more to the job. So, the ARPA fund bonus is really aimed at letting them know they are important to our community and to retain them for the future.

—Trustee **David Witek**

## ‘Benefitted the township in many ways’

**Eureka Charter Township** (Montcalm Co.) has made good use of our ARPA funds and is very appreciative of having them made available to us. We have made decisions on how to best use the money allotted to us:

**2022 efforts:** Purchase two acres of land by the township hall—future use coming; build two pickleball courts; add parking around our Flat River for kayak users to park; purchase of 100 mesh folding chairs; and improvements to township roads

**2023 plans:** Remodel kitchen in township hall; add to township playground area; create one-mile walking trail on property by the township pavilion; install additional parking area; and road improvements to the township roads

The township board made these decisions with township residents’ input, research on various options and ideas generated from the board members. With the 2021 winter tax bill, we sent a survey asking for resident input, and also held a public hearing in January 2022 to garner additional input.

I highly doubt we would have been able to accomplish all of this without the ARPA money—we might have been able to do about a third of these projects. We have added to recreational opportunities for all ages, with plans to expand even more in this area. We have been able to make additional

improvements to our roads and will now be remodeling our kitchen, which is in use most weekends as many enjoy renting the hall for their personal family and friend get-togethers. The ARPA funds have benefited our township in many ways.

—Supervisor **Darcia Kelley**

## ‘Involving all aspects of the community’

**Lawrence Township** (Van Buren Co.) created a committee of five people consisting of a board member, representatives from the school district and business district, and two members from the community. They met several times to create a list of projects that would be beneficial on which to spend the funds. The township board then voted to approve the list. We now have completed four projects off that list, which includes:

- Emergency services purchases, including toward new air packs, and an all-terrain vehicle to help navigate along our river banks for possible rescues of kayakers
- Funding toward community mental health programs
- Cemetery upgrades, including a new flagpole and utility vehicle for the sexton’s use
- Township hall/senior center improvements, including parking lot upgrade and furnishings
- Funding to help upgrade community broadband

The committee decided on broadband as a major cost because our community needs better connections than we currently have. The big thing was to have a group from the community decide ways to spend the money and not just the township board, even though the board has to approve the decisions.

We, as a board, felt that we did a great job of involving all aspects of the community and creating a long “wish list.” Those listed above are just a few of the projects we have either completed or are working through. We do expect our list may change as new things arise, and as a board, we will decide as time moves forward which are the priorities.

—Supervisor **Donna Spinner** and Clerk **Judy Janssen**

## ‘Could never have done this without these funds’

In **Peacock Township** (Lake Co.), we asked our board members to come to a board meeting with a list of needs. From there, we selected which were most critical, including replacing the well and improving plumbing at the township hall; seating for the public, board and staff; hall furnishings,

# cover story

including file cabinets and desks; and a simple board table, if funds allow.

We received around \$52,000 and would do more if there was more funding. Once everything is done, we will have an office that functions like it should and we should be able to do our work in a more timely manner. We could never have been able to do this without these funds.

—Clerk **Shirley Blackler**

## Community improvements and equipment

**Flushing Charter Township** (Genesee Co.) chose the \$10 million standard allowance under revenue loss. However, we did not wish to spend the money totally on items that we would typically budget for anyway. We have used ARPA funds to:

- purchase two generators for the township office and hall
- rebuild the gravel road in our 130-acre nature park
- purchase in-car and body cameras, and an infrared drone for police department

We are also trying to get bids on building a pavilion at township hall to rent out with the hall. We have not yet spent half of our allotted \$1.16 million

—Supervisor **Frederick Thorsby**

## Developing a recreational area

**Fort Gratiot Charter Township** (St. Clair Co.) is planning to use its ARPA funding to develop a recreational area. We have 101 acres where we plan to use APRA funds for grant matching amounts. Concept plans include pickleball, sport fields and a recreational vehicle campground.

Creating a multi-use recreational and campground destination will have a positive impact on our business district. Fort Gratiot's business district has a taxable value near \$110 million, which provides significant benefit to our county at large and our schools. Fort Gratiot benefits from the revenue sharing dollars received generated in our business district.

—Supervisor **Rob Crawford**

## Expanded broadband to rural parts of township

**Green Charter Township** (Mecosta Co.) has built two towers to broadcast wireless broadband to the rural parts of our township. We leased the towers to a local provider, which will broadcast the signal and sell the service. Wireless reaches a lot more rural residents per dollar spent than fiber. We decided to go this way to get internet to our rural residents after seeing the effect of the lack of access during school shutdowns. It started as a discussion in the township hall, but all decisions were made by the board. There is no way we could have accomplished this without the ARPA money. We have tried to benefit our people with the money via a permanent, rather than temporary, gain.

—Supervisor **Jim Chapman**

## 'Allowed us to better plan'

**Sturgis Township** (St. Joseph Co.) has used ARPA funds as follows: installed security cameras inside and outside of our building; paid our subsidy for ambulance service (which is a countywide service); resealed a deteriorating parking lot; and paid for the repaving of one our local roads (a 50% share with the St. Joseph County Road Commission). Without ARPA funding, some of these projects would not have been completed or, at best, delayed. ARPA funding has allowed us to better plan for future road projects and prepare for increases in emergency services.

—Clerk **Michael Bobalik**

## Improving local roads

**Wayland Township** (Allegan Co.) is using our ARPA funds for road construction. The Gun Lake Casino is in our municipality and the Gun Lake Revenue Sharing Board shares funds with us semi-annually. We truly had a loss of revenue when the casino was closed down for a period of time during the pandemic. As a board, we discussed the ARPA funding and revenue sharing funds. Wayland Township is very thankful for the generosity of the Gun Lake Revenue Sharing Board, and have used the revenue they share for road construction and small items for the township.

—Clerk **Ann McInerney**



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# MTA's 2023 Board of Review Training

Under Public Act 660 of 2018, every board of review member (and alternate) must complete State Tax Commission-approved training at least once every two years. **MTA can help! We're offering both in-person and online Board of Review Training this February.** You can choose from two classes, one that satisfies the training requirement OR another, more advanced class that explores common trouble spots, hot topics and other issues encountered by boards of review. You'll walk away with critical insights, even if you've been on the board of review for years! Class takeaways are described at right.

Class participants will receive comprehensive handouts and resource materials, including samples, updated forms and bulletins, as well as guidance and information created specifically for the board of review. *(Assessors seeking renewal credit will find it at our April 17 class held in conjunction with MTA's Annual Conference. Find details in the Conference brochure in this issue, and on our website.)*

**Join us in person!** Both classes will be held concurrently. Dates and locations appear below. Check-in and lunch begin at 11 a.m. Sessions are held from noon to 4 p.m.

**Feb. 1:** Fetzter Center at WMU, Kalamazoo

**Feb. 2:** Comfort Inn & Village Conference Center, Chelsea

**Feb. 7:** Memorial Union at MTU, Houghton

**Feb. 8:** Island Resort & Conference Center, Harris

**Feb. 14:** Alpena Events Complex (APlex), Alpena

**Feb. 15:** Treetops Resort Conference Center, Gaylord

**Feb. 16:** Quality Inn Forward Conference Center, West Branch

**Feb. 21:** LCC West Campus, Lansing

**Feb. 22:** Comfort Inn Conference Center, Mt. Pleasant

**Feb. 23:** Evergreen Resort, Cadillac

**Feb. 28:** Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth

**Prefer to join us online?** Choose from one of the following options:

*PA 660 Required Training for Board of Review Members, held:*

**Feb. 10, 1-5 p.m., Feb. 27, 8 a.m. to noon OR March 2, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.**

*Beyond the Basics: Management of the Board of Review, held Feb. 27, 1-5 p.m.*

We're offering two different classes this year to meet you where you're at in your learning curve. Choose from:

## PA 660 Required Training for Board of Review Members

*(Meets the STC's required biannual training requirement)*

- Overview of the board's role and statutory authority
- How to handle protests
- July and December boards of review
- Key items for 2023

OR

## Beyond the Basics: Management of the Board of Review

*(Does NOT meet the STC's training requirement)*

- Key points of the new STC assessment roll audit
- What goes in the minutes and on the agenda
- Tips and tricks: Handling paperwork and forms
- What you need to know about the Open Meetings Act
- Key questions: What can you answer, when to involve your assessor
- 2023 trouble-spots and hot topics

*Instructor varies by location: Cindy Dodge, MCAO, MTA Member Information Services Liaison; Shila Kiander, MAAO, Director, Mecosta County Equalization; Debby Ring, Michigan Master Assessing Officer (MMAO); and Laurie Spencer, MMAO, Presque Isle Township Assessor*

**Continue the learning with MTA's Board of Review Guide:** Registrants may purchase the 2023 edition for \$34.50/book (member rate only; non-members, call for rates) when registering for the class. Books will be distributed on-site or shipped to online registrants. Online registrants, please add \$5 shipping/handling for orders up to \$150; \$10 for orders up to \$350.

**Need to cancel, substitute or switch classes?** *Written cancellation requests received at MTA at least two weeks before the event date will receive a full refund. No refunds will be issued thereafter. In-person registrations can be switched to online upon timely request. If space allows, in-person registrants may switch locations at no charge if MTA is notified at least one week before the event; otherwise, a \$25/person fee will be assessed. Another individual from the same township may be substituted for your registration at any time without incurring a charge; please notify MTA of the change.*

## Board of Review Training Registration Form

**Must include which session EACH person will attend.**

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

Name & Title \_\_\_\_\_ Email (required for online training) \_\_\_\_\_  
*Attending:*  PA 660 Required Training OR  Beyond the Basics **Add a book:**  Yes  No

Name & Title \_\_\_\_\_ Email (required for online training) \_\_\_\_\_  
*Attending:*  PA 660 Required Training OR  Beyond the Basics **Add a book:**  Yes  No

Name & Title \_\_\_\_\_ Email (required for online training) \_\_\_\_\_  
*Attending:*  PA 660 Required Training OR  Beyond the Basics **Add a book:**  Yes  No

Name & Title \_\_\_\_\_ Email (required for online training) \_\_\_\_\_  
*Attending:*  PA 660 Required Training OR  Beyond the Basics **Add a book:**  Yes  No

NOTE: Payment must accompany form in order to be processed.  
 Check enclosed (payable to MTA) OR  Charge to: (circle one) MasterCard VISA

Card # \_\_\_\_\_ CSV (3-digit code) \_\_\_\_\_ Expires \_\_\_\_\_

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

### Choose your date/method of participation:

#### In-Person Training

- Feb. 1: Kalamazoo
- Feb. 2: Chelsea
- Feb. 7: Houghton
- Feb. 8: Harris
- Feb. 14: Alpena
- Feb. 15: Gaylord
- Feb. 16: West Branch
- Feb. 21: Lansing
- Feb. 22: Mt. Pleasant
- Feb. 23: Cadillac
- Feb. 28: Frankenmuth

#### Online Training

- Feb. 10: PA 660 Required
- Feb. 27: PA 660 Required
- Feb. 27: Beyond the Basics
- March 2: PA 660 Required

*Those taking the required training online must participate live, keep their cameras on during class and complete a quiz at the end of to receive certification.*

**Early-bird Rate\*:** \$100/person *Expires two weeks prior to event date*  
*Premium subscribers pay \$ 80/person\*\**

**Regular Rate\*:** \$125/person *Begins two weeks from event date*  
*Premium subscribers pay \$100/person\*\**

**On-site Rate\*:** \$150/person *Applies one week prior to event date*  
*Premium subscribers pay \$120/person\*\**

\_\_\_\_\_ (# registrants) x \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (rate) = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (# of books) x (\$34.50/book\* + shipping online only) = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

AMOUNT ENCLOSED = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Rate applies to MTA members; non-members, call MTA for rates.*

*\*\*Premium subscribers are townships that have purchased an MTA Online subscription at the Premium level. Find out if your township is a premium subscriber at [www.michigantownships.org/learning/mta-online](http://www.michigantownships.org/learning/mta-online).*



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, ext. 221

# A Year Ahead in MTA Ed(ucation)

We're excited to share what educational offerings we have in store for you in 2023 so that you—and your entire township team—can plan ahead.

To help you budget accordingly, early-bird registration rates are included below. Rates are per person, and increase by \$25 two weeks prior to the event date. Details, descriptions and registration materials will be included in *Township Focus*, mailed to every township and available on MTA's website, [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org) (under the "Learning" tab) as event dates near.



## Now You Know

### MTA's Monthly Webinar Series

Make the most of your lunch break with MTA's lunchtime learning series, *Now You Know*. These live one-hour webinars provide timely updates, insights from our experts and a chance to get your questions answered in real time. Join us live the day of or watch a recorded version later. *Rate: \$25/session*  
*Townships with a subscription to MTA Online at the Premium level can watch every episode for FREE with no limit on participants. Turn to page 6 for a list of 2023 topics.*



## February

### Board of Review Training

MTA is offering both in-person and online *Board of Review Training* at 11 locations throughout the state! We're hosting two classes, one approved by the State Tax Commission to satisfy the PA 660 training mandate AND one for those who have already met the requirements and are ready to dive into common trouble spots, hot topics and other issues encountered by boards of review.

*Rate: \$100/person*

*See page 25 for all the details, including a registration form.*

## March

### MTA's Capital Conference

Learn the latest on legislative issues impacting townships. From ongoing debates regarding local authority, to new issues driven by changing winds based on election results. This event offers a direct line to lawmakers, state departments and MTA policy experts to help you best serve your constituents. Be an advocate for township government when you join us at the **Lansing Center on March 1**. *Register by Jan. 31 for only \$55/person; turn to page 16 for all the details.*

## April

### MTA's Annual Conference & Expo

Our signature event, returning to the **Grand Traverse Resort on April 17-20**, connects you with municipal experts, inspiring speakers and nearly 1,000 of your fellow officials. You can choose from 50 timely township topics at sessions crafted to keep you on top of the changes, requirements and expectations of today's local leaders. Our expo features more than 100 municipal vendors offering services that can help you improve your community. We've also got pre-Conference classes geared for your township assessor, attorney and every member of your township team.

*The registration brochure appears in **this issue** of Township Focus, as well as at [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org), and includes all the details, including class descriptions, event highlights, registration and housing information.*



## May

### Breaking the Zoning Code

This afternoon class, designed for township officials, planning commissioners and zoning administrators, explores why zoning regulations exist, what they are intended to accomplish, and how they may be used. Classes will be held in Frankenmuth, Gaylord and Kalamazoo. *Rate: \$100/person*

## June

### Cemetery Management

Dig into cemetery administration and management at this afternoon workshop coming to Gaylord, Mt. Pleasant and Jackson. We'll cover everything from legal obligations to fees and green burials, to the role of the board, caretakers and committees. *Rate: \$100/person*

## July

### U.P. Education Extravaganza

MTA is packing up our resources, publications and municipal experts and bringing them to the Island Resort in Harris (west of Escanaba) for two full days of education! Join us for a session, a day or both days, based on your areas of interest. Topics will include financial fundamentals, cemetery management and more! **Save the dates (July 18 & 19)** and watch for more details soon! *Rates vary based on sessions chosen.*

## August



### TGA Double-Feature

Have you heard of MTA's Township Governance Academy (TGA)? This premier learning curriculum, designed with the township board in mind, helps you hone your leadership skills, providing techniques and strategies to enhance your decision-making for the benefit of your community. We bring you multiple classes over a couple of days to maximize your time. Classes will be held at the Evergreen Resort in Cadillac. Sessions will be announced soon; *rates are \$100 for half- and \$125 for full-day classes.*

## September

### Emerging Issues in Emergency Services

MTA can help your township turn down the heat on the hot issues facing your fire department and emergency services personnel. This annual, full-day event will be held at the **Bavarian Inn Lodge in Frankenmuth on Sept. 12.** *Rate: \$125/person*

## September & October

### Professional Development Retreats

No one understands townships or your roles and responsibilities like MTA. That's why we created these unique events packed with intensive learning targeting the challenges you face and offering the information that you need. Join your fellow officials, MTA staff and municipal experts from across the state at **Boyne Highlands in Harbor Springs.** *Full program rate: \$365/person*  
Dates include:

**Clerks Retreat:** Sept. 26-27   **Planning & Zoning Retreat:** Oct. 3-4   **Trustees Retreat:** Oct. 3-4  
**Supervisors Retreat:** Oct. 5-6   **Strategic Management & Innovation Retreat:** Oct. 5-6   **Treasurers Retreat:** Oct. 10-11

## November

### Online Learning Sale

MTA is so thankful that you turn to us to fill your educational needs that we offer half-off every webcast in our Online Learning Center during the month of November. Browse our virtual classrooms at [learn.michigantownships.org/](http://learn.michigantownships.org/) and use the code **"Thanks"** during checkout to apply the savings. You'll have up to a year to watch, and rewatch your selections.  
*Want to make online learning available to your entire township team for one low annual rate? Learn more at [www.michigantownships.org/learning/mta-online/](http://www.michigantownships.org/learning/mta-online/).*

## December

### Financial Fundamentals

This full-day event features municipal experts exploring financial fundamentals that impact townships, from auditing to budgeting, lawful expenditures and much more. *Rate: \$125/person*



## Budgeting and planning reminders and updates for 2023

**A**s we head into a new year, the following is an overview of reminders, updates and changes that could impact township administrative and budgeting planning in 2023.

### **Township budget reminders**

**Schedule budget public hearings**—For the roughly 900 general law townships with an April 1-March 31 fiscal year, the proposed budget should be prepared, the budget public hearing scheduled and notice published so the hearing can be conducted and the budget adopted by the township before April 1.

**Townships may spend funds on dues, seminars**—Townships may pay dues to associations. The payment of dues has been challenged and upheld in several Michigan Supreme Court cases. MTA Legal Counsel advises that laws are to be liberally construed in favor of townships' authority to expend funds for association dues, registration fees to attend useful public information or educational workshops or conferences, and mileage reimbursement for attendance at authorized seminars and governmental meetings other than township board meetings.

**Adopt salary resolutions before annual meeting**—Townships that hold an annual meeting of the electors are required to pass a salary resolution for each elected office paid by salary at least 30 days prior to the annual meeting date. Townships that hold an annual meeting in March should adopt salary resolutions in January or February, depending on the March meeting date. (Please note that the annual meeting of the electors is different than the budget public hearing.)

If the township board does not pass salary resolutions at least 30 days prior to the annual meeting, the electors have no authority to act on or increase salaries. As a result, the salary of each elected official would remain at the previous year's established level. Electors cannot reduce township board members' salaries during a term of office, unless the duties of the office have been diminished and the township official consents in writing to the reduction. (MCL 41.95)

According to Attorney General Opinion 6422 of 1987, a separate resolution must be adopted for each township office.

Each resolution must contain the date in the next fiscal year the salary will be effective. Board compensation can also be set by a compensation commission or by board resolution. Sample resolutions to establish township officers' salaries are available on the members-only section of [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org) (search for "Compensation" after logging in), or by calling (517) 321-6467 (press option 1 to reach our Member Information Services Department).

### Minimum wage increase in effect Jan. 1—potentially another increase in February

Michigan's minimum wage rate increased from \$9.87 to \$10.10 on Jan. 1, 2023. Under Michigan's Improved Workforce Opportunity Wage Act, Michigan's minimum wage will increase each Jan. 1 until it reaches \$12.05 in 2030. Public Act 337 of 2018 establishes an annual schedule and increases.

The minimum wage could further increase to \$13.03 per hour, however, pending the outcome of court action. In 2022, the Michigan Court of Claims found that the 2018 efforts by the state Legislature to "adopt and amend" two ballot initiatives that would have increased the state minimum wage and required paid sick leave for employees were unconstitutional. The Legislature's actions—initially adopting the provisions and then amending the law following the 2018 election—effectively prevented the voter-approved initiatives

from taking effect. The court decision stayed those increases until February. While the state Court of Appeals heard oral arguments in the case in December, no final decision was made as of *Township Focus* press time. Continue to watch MTA publications, including our weekly *Township Insights* e-newsletter, for updates as they become available.

Townships can download the required, updated minimum wage workplace poster from the member side of [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org) (look for "Workplace Posters" in the "Index of Topics" under the "Answer Center" tab after logging in), or by visiting [www.michigan.gov/wagehour](http://www.michigan.gov/wagehour).

### 2023 threshold for publishing minutes set at \$104 million for general law townships

The 2023 taxable value threshold for exempting general law townships from the requirement to publish minutes has increased to \$104 million. The 2022 rate was \$96 million.

The rate is determined by the Michigan Department of Treasury's Office of Revenue and Tax Analysis, which is required to determine the adjusted amount each year. Public Act 465 of 1996 exempts general law townships with a taxable value under a threshold from the requirement to publish township board meeting minutes, or a synopsis of the proceedings, within 21 days after the meeting.

According to PA 465, the limit must be adjusted annually for inflation each Jan. 1 and rounded to the next million.

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# Supporting your first responders

Care and response following traumatic calls

**H**ow do townships respond after their first responders are exposed to a rough call? Do they “check in” and take care and support of their personnel and their families? The exposure to adrenaline, stress and trauma is nothing new in the first responder world, but as a profession and culture, we are finally beginning to talk more openly about this important topic.

With the implementation of wellness committees, peer support teams and psychoeducation specific to how trauma affects us and our loved ones, local officials, emergency services personnel, the industry and communities as a whole are beginning to pay more attention to this crucial topic—but there is much more to be done.

## What is your township doing after a critical incident?

A critical incident can be defined as, “A traumatic incident perceived, experienced or witnessed where a threat of death or serious injury to self or others, with a response of intense fear, helplessness or horror.”

There is so much more to this definition. This can be a first responder being exposed to their own potential life-and-death situation, or the serious injury or death of a patient or fellow first responder ... and the list can go on. Research and personal experiences tell us that how a first responder reacts to the critical incident can be very different for each person involved. Many first responders are affected by a critical incident to some extent, although some may not be affected at all for a variety of reasons. Township leaders, and departments’ organization, command structure, fellow responders and families must have a better understanding that it is not the critical incident itself, but the *meaning* it has for the individual that makes it traumatic. This is a very unfortunate misunderstanding that the emergency services

## About the article author

**Mike Wierenga** was a firefighter medical first responder for 18 years and in law enforcement for more than 30 years. He is currently the team leader for Grand Rapids Police Department’s Peer Support Team and co-founder of Two The Rescue Life Saving Training LLC. Wierenga has taught on critical topics, including first responder peer support, situational awareness, de-escalation techniques and more, for communities, as well as at MTA events. He recently taught a “Career Survival” program for the **Oxford Charter Township** (Oakland Co.) Fire Department staff and families.

Learn more from Wierenga at MTA’s 2023 Annual Conference, when he’ll teach “Keep Calm and Carry On,” with a panel of experts. Contact Wierenga at [info@twotherescue.com](mailto:info@twotherescue.com) or visit <https://twotherescue.com> for more information.



profession has dealt with for years. Too often, one might encounter finger-pointing comments, like “I was on that call. It wasn’t that bad, so why is it bothering him or her?” Every reaction is unique to the individual.

It is also critical to remember that while one call certainly can result in traumatic reactions, simply responding to calls, stresses and emergencies has a cumulative effect—and responders need support before they reach their breaking point.

### **Trauma affects responders differently**

There are a lot of reasons why a certain trauma-related call may or may not have an impact on your township’s emergency responders. How a person responds to trauma often depends on what kinds of internal and external resources they have in place to help them cope.

While emergency responders receive training to achieve their positions, training is certainly different than the actual calls themselves, which can have lasting, emotional impacts on individuals. And the effects will be different for each person. The everyday world comes with plenty of stressors—for first responders, their chosen profession or service to their community can add a veritable roller coaster ride of highs and lows, and is one with which not many others can fully understand or relate. Does the township have the right mindset to ensure their people have the tools they need to

feel supported and encouraged? Does the responder have good peer networking opportunities? Does the responder have support at home?

Another variable to consider can be traced back to the upbringing of the first responder, as explained in detail with research done on adverse childhood experiences. A study on such experiences conducted by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente medical care consortium explored potentially traumatic events that occur before a child reaches the age of 18. Such experiences can interfere with a person’s health, opportunities and stability throughout his or her lifetime, including exposures to critical incidents as a first responder.

Vicarious or secondary trauma can potentially be brought into the homes of the first responder as well. This may influence the relationship with a responder’s spouse, family or whomever their support structure is in the home, including children. According to a study led by Dr. Rudy Arrenodo, director of the Southwest Institute for Addictive Diseases at Texas Tech University, children can develop traumatic stress vicariously by witnessing others’ experience of a traumatic event or by just knowing that a traumatic event was experienced by a loved one. This has never had more meaning to me until my own 13-year-old daughter wrote this in a school essay:

*As a police officer, my dad has gone through some difficult times. That can sometimes affect my family, especially me being old enough to understand and know what's going on in this world. Being a spouse of a first responder is hard. When your husband or wife comes home from an extensive, tiring and difficult day, they start to really process what happened that day. Everyone has different ways of coping, and that can be hard to understand as a spouse of a first responder. You may be thinking, "She's overreacting" or "It's not that hard to be a first responder." Yes, I know I am only in 8th grade, but as the oldest daughter of a police officer, and knowing what happens in my dad's daily life as a policeman, I know a thing or two about how stressful and difficult their days can be as a first responder.*

## Taking care of those who take care of us

First responders make a difference in their communities every day and night. "Strong Type A" personalities are drawn to this calling as they take charge, get things done, take control of complete chaos and fix things, often for complete strangers. Occasionally, the outcome isn't always a positive one and it may have an impact on these men and women in your township. What can your township—and individual officials—do to reach out to them?

Supporting first responders needs to be part of the township or department's (or multiple departments) culture. Townships can implement peer support teams, which can instill and normalize day-to-day interactions and checking in with emergency services personnel. It's imperative to change the focus from *resolving* issues to *preventing* issues. Some townships may be able to offer employee assistance plans through their benefits provider to offer mental health and other support.

Discussing stressors and trauma can be difficult for many individuals, but holding in trauma or pushing it down is unsustainable and potentially even dangerous. Township officials can help to instill a culture of support by having regular conversations with the fire or police chief—with discussions that go beyond budgets or needed equipment, and hearing what—and how—these public safety personnel are doing and handling on a regular basis. While this can take time to take root in a department, township officials and department chiefs can set intentions and make efforts to make this a reality.

First responders will experience many difficult events in their career; townships can help prepare them with the right tools to deal with the aftermath. These sacrificing individuals help their fellow human beings in their time of need. It is critical for townships to create a culture and, even further, specific programs to ensure that those who take care of us are also taken care of.

## Safety considerations for township buildings

There are myriad ways that townships work to keep their officials, personnel and residents stopping in at township facilities safe. The Whole Building Design Guide, in affiliation with the National Institute of Building Sciences, identifies four key elements that must be addressed to ensure safety in public buildings:

- **Fire protection**—Protecting buildings (and occupants) from fire and related hazards like smoke, heat and structural damage

*Building considerations:* Major walkways and fire exits should be clear of obstacles, smoke detectors should all be functioning, and a disaster plan should be written. This is, of course, in addition to the usual fire safety considerations.

- **Occupant safety and health**—Ensuring a building is suitable for occupancy by addressing air quality, electrical safety, fall hazards, ergonomics, and similar considerations.

*Building considerations:* Adding extra lighting, better ventilation, more sanitary facilities, and more maintenance and repair checks (as applicable). Monitoring and surveillance systems, and sensors can help notify occupants of incumbent problems.

- **Natural hazards protection**—Ensuring buildings can resist, better recover from, and protect inhabitants against natural disasters like floods and storms.

*Building considerations:* Structural changes to make a building more resilient, the use of resistant materials, and basic safety precautions are recommended.

- **Security**—Deterring and managing human threats.

*Building considerations:* Stable doors and windows, chain link fences, access-control measures, smart locks, smart security systems, human security personnel and panic buttons.

—Submitted by Janice Miller, Contributor,  
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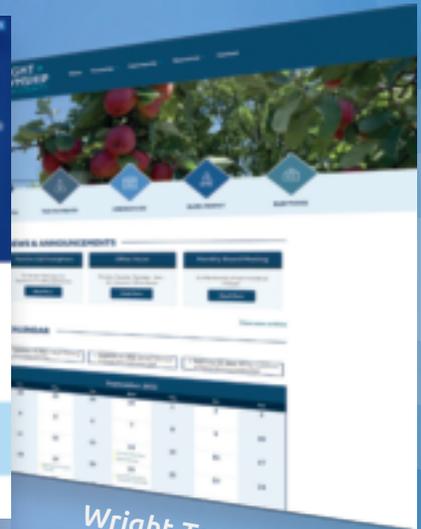
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