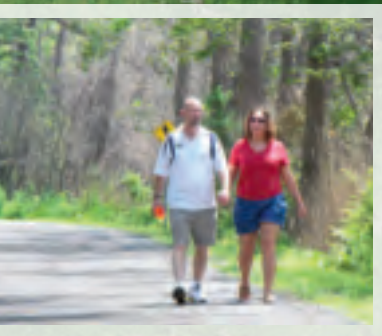


Michigan Township Focus

SEPTEMBER 2014

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

Is your township a resilient community?



Primary results align well with
MTA legislative goals
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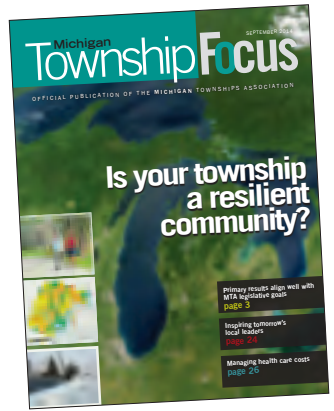
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mission statement

The Michigan Townships Association promotes the interests of township government by fostering strong, vibrant communities; advocating legislation to meet 21st century challenges; developing knowledgeable township officials and enthusiastic supporters of township government; and encouraging ethical practices of elected officials who uphold the traditions and unique characteristics of township government and the values of the people of Michigan.



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August primary results align well with MTA legislative goals

In spite of MTA's unqualified support, I was sure that Proposal 1 was destined to fail. In fact, I already had this editorial written in my head the day before the August primary. I would lament how ballot language complexity resulting from the personal property tax phase-out and voter cynicism would send MTA and the Legislature back to the drawing board to find reliable replacement revenue for townships.



My pessimism seemed well-founded, as the proposal seemed to have more critics than supporters. Progressives were decrying yet another tax break for business and creating an impending hole in the state budget, while conservatives maintained the proposal authorized tax increases and expanded the reach of state government.

At a wedding reception Saturday evening before the primary, other reception guests confessed their confusion about Proposal 1. "Why is this even on the ballot?" they asked me. "Couldn't the Legislature just make this happen?"

After I explained that voter approval of a ballot proposal was necessary for local government reimbursements to not be subject to the annual legislative appropriations process, their skepticism dissipated. But the conversation left me even more dubious that Proposal 1 would pass, as there just wasn't time to have similar conversations with a couple million other voters.

I remained doubtful that Proposal 1 would pass even after my mother-in-law told me that her absentee ballot included a "yes" vote for Proposal 1. She reasoned that Proposal 1's broad support and no organized opposition indicated to her an absence of sinister intentions. So there was one vote for Proposal 1, but no harbinger of the proposal passing.

Declining an invitation to a Proposal 1 campaign party on primary night, I settled in at home to watch the Tigers' new pitcher battle the Yankees and monitor statewide returns on the Internet. Regardless of Proposal 1's fate, MTA's Political Action Committee had made endorsements in most House and Senate races, and the success of our endorsed candidates is important for building strong relationships with lawmakers and successfully moving the MTA legislative agenda.

As I surfed through county clerk and media websites for early returns, I noticed Proposal 1 passing by hefty margins, but I chalked these local wins up as likely aberrations. But long before most other races were called, the media proclaimed Proposal 1 passing by a landslide.

Thankful that I had mostly kept my errant Proposal 1 prognostication to myself, I turned my attention to monitoring the election returns of our endorsed candidates. MTA-PAC had carefully considered the bona fides of literally hundreds of candidates and the committee had based their endorsements on how closely the candidates aligned with MTA's policies and values, campaign organization strengths, and member input. These primary endorsements were particularly challenging for the MTA-PAC given the large number of competitive races. Now, many of these unfolding primary results would indicate with which lawmakers we can expect to start off with good relationships, and with which lawmakers we will need to indulge in a lunch of humble pie.

A little before 1 a.m., I exchanged final text messages with MTA's Director of Government Relations, Judy Allen, with whom I had been sharing election updates, dozed awhile and resumed around 5 a.m., catching results on races that earlier had been too close to call. Overall, the election results were very positive for townships. We missed the mark on a few races, but most of the PAC-endorsed candidates prevailed and will likely win in November as well.

With the primary behind us, the MTA-PAC will soon be making more endorsements in competitive general election races, and townships will further benefit as our PAC promotes more productive relationships with lawmakers.

And, we can close the book on personal property tax reimbursement revenue for townships.



EDUCATING YOUTH

Township officials can head back to school this fall, too!

It's back-to-school time—not just for kids but for township officials, as well! Township officials can make great strides in educating students about local government, simply by visiting a classroom, and discussing their role as an elected official and the role of townships in Michigan.

Local officials can help spread the message of what township government is—and how it impacts life each day in local communities. September provides the perfect time to send a note or call your local school superintendent or government teacher to let them know you are available as a resource. Offer to make a presentation about township government. **Remember:** Even if you have been invited to make a presentation in the past, it may take persistence to remind a teacher that you are available to visit the class year after year.

By initiating this contact, students will have an important opportunity to engage in a dialogue with you about your various roles and responsibilities as a township official and the day-to-day operations of the form of government that represents more than 50 percent of Michigan's residents.

While in the classroom, discuss topics that students can relate to. Talk about the fire and police protection, library services and even local roads. No one likes potholes—especially teenagers who are driving in their first car. The goal is to leave the students with a greater understanding of the local government that impacts their daily lives.

Whatever the method, the important part is that you actively share your love for local government with the next generation. As an elected township official, you are the expert on township government. So use that expertise and go back to school this fall—and throughout the year as well. Your efforts can have an impact on the life of a student.

Need some more ideas? For tools to take into the classroom, visit www.michigantownships.org/curricula.asp.

WORTH THE DRIVE

U.P. drive highlighted in road trip 'bucket list'

An 11-mile scenic drive starting in **Ironwood Charter Township** (Gogebic Co.) was put in the national spotlight recently when it was named to a Top 10 “bucket list” for road trips in *USA Today*.

The Black River National Forest Scenic Byway—also called Highway 513—was named one of the favorite routes for Jamie Jensen, author of *Road Trip USA*, who said, “People who know ocean coasts think that's the only way to go, but lake views can be just as beautiful.” The *USA Today* article noted that “Michigan's Upper Peninsula offers road trip magic, with thick forests and waterfalls, and expansive Lake Superior vistas.

“While State Highway 513 is labeled a scenic byway, drivers should venture off the route,” the article continued. “There are old roads that don't really go anywhere but get you deep in the woods,” Jensen added.

Highway 513 (Black River Road), which follows a section of the Black River in the Ottawa National Forest, was officially dedicated as a National Forest Scenic Byway in 1992, in recognition of its exceptional beauty and recreational opportunities. The Black River National Scenic Byway begins in Ironwood Charter Township, continuing north for 11 miles to Black River Harbor. The harbor, which is part of Lake Superior, is one of just two harbors within the national forest system and features beaches and a suspension bridge.

The road also provides access to five sets of waterfalls: Great Conglomerate, Potawatomi, Gorge, Sandstone and Rainbow Falls.



Share your township's story!

At *Township Focus*, one of the biggest (and best!) parts of our job is to tell your township's story—your successes, your innovations, your solutions to overcoming challenges. Your experiences can help your fellow township officials learn and grow as they endeavor to best serve their communities. Got a story you'd like us to share with *Focus* readers? Let us know! Contact Editor Jenn Fiedler at jenn@michigantownships.org or call (517) 321-6467. We're waiting to hear from you!

Township happenings

Some 550 hungry guests attended the **Chester Township** (Ottawa Co.) Fire Department's annual pancake breakfast, netting more than \$3,200, which will be used to purchase a dangerous-gas detector and roof ventilating safety equipment for the department.

Haring Charter Township (Wexford Co.) broke ground on a nearly \$4 million wastewater treatment plant that is expected to be operational in summer 2015. The plant is funded in part by a grant from USDA Rural Development.

Fundraising efforts are underway to connect **Holland Charter Township** (Ottawa Co.) with neighboring Windmill Island Gardens. Plans include a pedestrian walkway from the township to the island, which features the nation's only authentic, working Dutch windmill. The 252-year-old DeZwaan windmill was recently repaired after the windmill stopped turning, due to a large crack spanning its cap. Additional plans include repairs to the island's carousel and restoration of the Amsterdam street organ.

Middle Branch Township (Osceola Co.) was among 15 townships that took part in a joint scrap tire clean-up effort this summer, for the second year in a row. After receiving a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality grant, township volunteers helped collect over 7,000 tires, filling six semi-trucks—four more trucks than last year.

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MTA welcomes new staff

MTA welcomed two employees to the Association team this summer.

Julie Cook joined the Administration Department as executive assistant, and Emily DeRushia is the new Knowledge Center aide. Both currently reside in the City of Lansing.

As executive assistant, Cook will manage vital records and provide logistical support while ensuring that the Association's building is well-maintained. She will also manage meeting logistics, policy implementation and records for the MTA Board of Directors.



Cook

She comes to MTA with more than 10 years of experience in managing daily office operations. Most recently, she worked as the executive assistant at a university foundation. She also has an extensive background working in the insurance industry.

"I am excited to work for such a professional and well-respected association," Cook said. "I look forward to exploring the issues that affect Michigan's townships and working with the amazing people at MTA, both in the office and in our membership."

DeRushia's role as Knowledge Center aide includes preparing staff for MTA educational workshops, assisting in preparations for the MTA Annual Conference and serving as the point-person for MTA publication sales.



DeRushia

Before coming to MTA, she studied graphic design at Michigan State University and Web design at Lansing Community College. Most recently, she was an electronic prepress technician at a printing company.

"I couldn't be more excited to begin my career at the Michigan Townships Association," DeRushia said. "I'm looking forward to becoming a valuable asset to the team and learning more about all of the diverse townships in Michigan."

mta events | september

18 *Perfectly Legal* workshop, Battle Creek

23 *Perfectly Legal* workshop, Midland

25 *Perfectly Legal* workshop, Boyne Falls

MTA County Chapters: Reserve your Annual Conference hospitality suite by Sept. 17

Is your MTA County Chapter interested in hosting a hospitality suite during the MTA Annual Educational Conference & Expo, held Jan. 27-30, 2015, at the Amway Grand Plaza & DeVos Place in Grand Rapids? 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 during the Conference.



Reservations for MTA County Chapter suites should be made by Sept. 17 as unused suites will be made available to sponsors and exhibitors after this date, and availability is not guaranteed. Several different types of suites are available at the host hotel, the Amway Grand Plaza, at discounted rates.

To make a reservation or for more information, call (517) 321-6467 or email 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.

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SEPTEMBER

By 4 Post-primary campaign statements due. Books closed Aug. 25.

5 Final date townships can establish, move or abolish a polling place for Nov. 4 general election. (MCL 168.662)

15 Summer taxes due. (MCLs 211.905b(10), 380.1613 and 211.107)

Last day for qualified taxpayer to apply to local unit treasurer for deferral of payment of summer property tax. (MCL 211.51(7))

On the immediately succeeding business day after taxes are payable and due, interest of 1 percent per month accrues if the payment is late for taxes that are part of the summer tax collection. (MCLs 211.905b(10) and 211.44a(6))

By 20 Delivery of military and overseas absentee voter ballots must begin for Nov. 4 general election by this date. (MCL 168.759a)

County clerks deliver absentee voter ballots for Nov. 4 general election to local clerks. (MCL 168.714)

25 through Oct. 14. Precinct inspectors for Nov. 4 general election appointed by township election commissions. (MCL 168.674)

By 29 Notice of close of registration for Nov. 4 general election published. (MCL 168.498)

30 Clerk delivers to supervisor and county clerk a certified copy of all statements, certificates, and records of vote directing monies to be raised by taxation of property. (MCL 211.36(1))

Financial officer of each township computes tax rates in accordance with MCL 211.34d and MCL 211.34 and governing body certifies that rates comply with Section 31, Article 9, of 1963 Constitution and MCL 211.24e, Truth in Taxation, on State Tax Commission (STC) Form L-4029.

OCTOBER

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

15 The assessor reports the status of real and personal Industrial Facility Tax property to STC. (MCL 207.567(2))

Governmental units report to STC on the status of each exemption granted under the Commercial Redevelopment Act. (MCL 207.666)

Qualified local governmental units report to STC on the status of each exemption granted under the Commercial Rehabilitation Act. (MCL 207.854)

The assessor's annual report of the determination made under MCL 207.783(1) to each taxing unit that levies taxes upon property in the local governmental unit in which a new facility or rehabilitated facility is located and to each holder of the Neighborhood Enterprise Zone certificate. (MCL 207.783(2))

Qualified local governmental units report to STC on the status of each exemption granted under the Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act. (MCL 125.2794)

By 24 Pre-election campaign statements filed. Books closed Oct. 19.

Write-in candidates file Declaration of Intent forms for Nov. 4 election by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.737a)

By 25 County clerks deliver remainder of ballots and election supplies for Nov. 4 general election to local clerks. (MCL 168.714)

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

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

31 Deadline for submission of New Personal Property (PA 328 of 1998), Obsolete Property (PA 146 of 2000), Commercial Rehabilitation (PA 210 of 2005), Neighborhood Enterprise Zone (PA 147 of 1992) and Industrial Facilities Tax (PA 198 of 1974) tax exemption applications to STC.



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Q We have boxes full of files and paperwork taking up space in our hall. Can we dispose of them, or do we have to keep them?

The answer depends on the type of document and whether there is an official record retention period that tells you when the document may be destroyed.

Public records of a township are also the property of the state and can be disposed of or destroyed only in compliance with Michigan law. MCL 399.5 provides that “a record that is required to be kept by a public officer in the discharge of duties imposed by law, that is required to be filed in a public office, or that is a memorial or a transaction of a public officer made in the discharge of a duty, is the property of this state and shall not be disposed of, mutilated or destroyed, except as provided by law.”

In other words, you cannot dispose of any township record unless a law or the office of Records Management Services in the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget says you can.

In practice, the state has simplified the process by adopting “general schedules,” or lists, of common records types that identify when those records may be disposed of or destroyed. Although a township could create its own “special” record retention schedule, it would have to obtain state approval to use it. A township does not need to take any action to adopt or get approval before using a general record retention schedule.

The General Schedule No. 10—Michigan Township Record Retention, approved July 1, 1997, by the State Archives and State Administrative Board, was the original official record retention schedule for township records not covered by another schedule. In recent years, the state, working with MTA and other governmental agencies, has updated and reorganized most of the general record retention schedules. Township records are currently covered by several schedules, including, but not limited to, General Schedules No. 10—Townships, No. 11—Local Law Enforcement, No. 17—Public Libraries, No. 18—Fire/Ambulance Departments, No. 23—Elections Records, No. 25—Township Clerks, No. 26—Local Government Human Resources, and No. 29—Township Treasurers. In all, there are 34 schedules. Townships may access record retention schedules and other records management resources on www.michigantownships.org/members, under “Records Management,” or on the state’s website at www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement.

Although they are called “retention” schedules, the schedules actually identify the earliest time that a record may be destroyed. If a record is not listed on the schedule, it cannot be disposed of or destroyed and must be retained permanently, unless permission is obtained from the State

Archives and State Administrative Board. Some records are listed on the schedule as having a permanent retention period, as a reminder to keep them permanently, and not destroy them.

Where a law requires a retention period, it is cited in the schedule. But it’s not always a specific statute that establishes the retention period. For example, many records should be retained for a period in which the township or individuals connected to the records may have some legal liability.

Some documents are defined as “non-record” materials, and do not need to be retained for a specific period. General Schedule No. 1—Non-Record Materials, describes types of non-record materials such as duplicates or copies of records, outdated publications, preliminary drafts or notes that do not represent significant basic steps in the preparation of public records.

The township clerk has custody of all the records, books, and papers of the township when no other provision is made by law for custody by another official. And the clerk is responsible for “the safekeeping of the records, books and papers of the township in the manner required by law,” including seeing that they are not kept where they will be exposed to an “unusual hazard of fire or theft.”

In addition, a township should comply with the retention schedules to help ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and other statutes that require public access to records.

So it is important for the clerk, and any township officials with recordkeeping responsibility to be aware of the retention periods, and for the entire township board to support and appropriately fund recordkeeping methods that protect the safety of the records, but also to organize and maintain them in a system, location and format that allows for easy and timely access to keep them readily available to the public upon request for copies or to inspect, as long as the records exist.

Q How long do you retain email or text messages?

The format of the record makes no difference. As long as it is a “writing,” it may be a record subject to a retention schedule—and to the FOIA and other requests for public access.

A “writing” is defined by the FOIA as: “handwriting, typewriting, printing, photostating, photographing, photocopying, and every other means of recording, and includes letters, words, pictures, sounds, or symbols, or combinations thereof, and papers, maps, magnetic or paper tapes, photographic films or prints, microfilm, microfiche, magnetic or punched cards, discs, drums, or other means of recording or retaining meaningful content.” (MCL 15.232)

It’s the message, not the medium, that determines the nature of the record and its retention period. Imagine the

email or text correspondence printed out. Or, if it's easier, actually print it out. That takes away the distraction of the digital format in determining if something is a public record and what type of record it is. It's the same for a taped or digital recording. Imagine it transcribed onto paper.

The record retention schedules include brief descriptions that can help in identifying the type of record. Once you've determined what the record is, then refer to the record retention period code in the schedule. You retain that record for the same period as if it were a paper record.



Can we make digital copies of our paper records and throw out the paper ones?

You may make digital copies, but you cannot destroy the original, paper versions until one of the general record retention schedules allows disposal.

Under the Records Reproduction Act, Public Act 116 of 1992, MCL 24.401, *et seq.* (formerly the Records Media Act), a township or a township official acting in his or her official capacity may reproduce a record by photograph, photocopy, microreproduction, optical media, data transfer, digitization, digital migration, digital imaging, magnetic media, printing, or any other reproduction method approved by Records Management Services in the Department of Technology, Management and Budget.

A certified, non-paper copy of a record made under the act has "the same force and effect as a true paper copy of a record." So a township may scan paper originals to make digital copies of records, such as PDF copies. If certified, the copy is admissible in court, administrative proceedings and elsewhere as evidence in the same manner as an original.

When the act was amended in 2005 to allow this, there was some confusion as to whether a township could scan all of its paper original records into digital formats and then dispose of the paper originals to "go paperless." But township original records can be disposed of or destroyed only in compliance with a state-approved record retention schedule, and some records, such as minutes, have a permanent retention period.

Also, the officer in whose office the original was filed or recorded must certify a copy produced under the act as true for it to have the same force and effect as the original for all legal purposes.

So township records may be digitized to allow for more efficient storage and retrieval, but the original paper records must be retained unless, and until, a retention schedule authorizes their destruction.

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

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Our auditors issued a ‘reportable condition’ that our internal controls for cash receipts and disbursements in the tax collection process are insufficient. How can we improve the process?

Many small townships do not have the same controls over the tax collection fund that exist for other township funds.

Townships that do not have a local area network, and the clerk and treasurer do not post activities to a centralized accounting system, should use the following internal controls:

- Treasurer should “batch” deposits and forward copies to the clerk for posting to the general ledger system, which produces daily cash receipt postings and “spreads” collections by taxpayer and by taxing authority.
- Clerk posts cash receipts by debiting cash and crediting the appropriate liability account.
- Treasurer forwards copies of checks or check register to clerk. The checks are entered into the general ledger by debiting the appropriate liability account and crediting cash.
- Clerk reconciles the monthly bank statements to the general ledger, examining cancelled checks returned with statement. The clerk should examine date, payee, amounts and endorsement. The clerk and treasurer should follow up on any checks not cleared in an appropriate time frame.
- Clerk and treasurer should reconcile cash balances at month-end.
- Clerk and treasurer should reconcile liability balances due prior to settlement with the county treasurer.

To further strengthen internal controls and directly address the “reportable conditions” comments made by your auditors, the following is suggested:

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

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

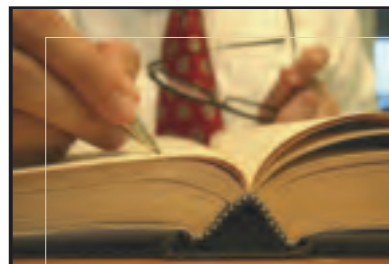
- Setting up the tax collection fund formally in the accounting package.

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

All townships should—or, in some cases, must—use the following controls for general (non-tax) disbursements:

- Dual signatures are required for all bank accounts (except the tax collection account); the signatures must be the treasurer or deputy treasurer, and the clerk or deputy clerk.
- Bank statements should be reconciled by the clerk to the general ledger, and the clerk and treasurer should reconcile the general ledger to the treasurer’s cash control journal.
- Numeric controlled pre-numbered checks must be used.
- Adequate security over unused checks; the treasurer should maintain numeric controls over unused checks.
- Appropriate documentation—i.e., original invoices—must accompany all disbursements. Payment should not be made from vendor statements.
- All disbursements must be approved by the township board.
- Checks should not be returned to the originating office for distribution.

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



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MTA-PAC endorsed candidates succeed in August primary

MTA's Political Action Committee (MTA-PAC) was once again successful with its endorsements in the Aug. 5 primary election. Of the 130 state legislative candidates MTA-PAC endorsed, 117 individuals now move on to the November election—84 House candidates and 33 Senate candidates. The endorsements were based on a variety of factors, including the candidate's response to an MTA questionnaire on key legislative issues and input received from township officials within that district. The MTA-PAC will reconvene this month to review endorsements for the November election. MTA encourages township officials to meet the candidates and share issues facing townships, especially in areas of the state where new representatives and senators will be elected. Establishing a relationship now can mean more effective and meaningful communication with legislators in the future.

Voters overwhelmingly approve Proposal 1

Voters approved the MTA-backed statewide proposal to phase out the personal property tax (PPT) in the August primary. Proposal 1 was approved by an estimated 69 percent to 31 percent margin—passing in every county across the state.

Passage ensures that townships and other local governments will have greater stability with replacement revenue when the PPT is phased out for small businesses and manufacturers.

In addition to the small parcel exemption that went into effect this year, the phase-out for manufacturing personal property will begin in 2016. The bipartisan passage and voter approval of Proposal 1 dedicates revenue from the use tax to local governments for that purpose. The measure benefits both local government and business without increasing taxes.

Federal Highway Trust Fund bill signed

Last month, President Obama signed a bill to extend funding for the Highway Trust Fund. HR 5021, introduced by U.S. Rep. Dave Camp (R-MI), extends the current transportation authorization providing an estimated \$11 billion through May 2015. The measure passed the U.S. Senate and House in early August—just hours before the U.S. Department of Transportation was set to begin cutting highway reimbursements to states. The Highway Trust Fund provides funding to states for highway and transit projects. The short-term measure was needed as Congress has been unable to reach a long-term transportation funding solution and to prevent transportation projects around the country from being shut down due to lack of funding.



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Rep. Ed McBroom (R-Waucedah Twp.)

Ed McBroom wants to protect the rights of the individual Michigander. Though the second-term representative serving in the 108th House District is part of the state government, he wants to keep state interference to a minimum.

His respect for the individual is one of many reasons why he believes townships play a key role in Michigan. Not only are townships in close proximity to their residents, but they provide a value per dollar that is an asset to each citizen. Townships can also address local concerns more quickly and efficiently.

“Whether it is in a special assessment for snow plowing, handling elections or dealing with land use, townships bring a level of government that is accessible to every resident,” McBroom said.

The Upper Peninsula lawmaker was first elected to serve in Lansing in 2010. A lifelong dairy farmer, the **Waucedah Township** (Dickinson Co.) resident leaves his cows in the care of family during the week to advocate for agriculture and the individual in the House.

Not only does he farm, McBroom also has degrees in both music education and social studies education. He taught as a substitute teacher while also working on the farm, and directs the Norway City Band as well as the music at the First Baptist Church of Norway. He’s even been known to sit down at the piano and play a few tunes during session breaks at the Michigan Capitol.

McBroom got his first taste of government during a term on the Waucedah Township Board of Zoning Appeals.

“This gave me some firsthand exposure to the issues and problems that follow an arbitrary zoning system that is not flexible to individual property owners or townships,” McBroom said.

Since coming to the House, McBroom has fought against other issues that he sees as harmful to individuals and townships. He believes a major problem facing townships and local governments today is the “dark store” or “big box store” issue, in which large retail stores are taxed as if their properties are vacant.

McBroom said this issue must be resolved, whether it’s through another court ruling, legislative action on the law or an action to reform the Michigan Tax Tribunal.

“If the current interpretation is not changed and the law is left unaltered, the effect to local units’ budgets will be an unstoppable, constant erosion,” McBroom said.

Also important to local government funding is the issue of state-owned land. McBroom wants to continue the push



Rep. Ed McBroom (R-Waucedah Twp.) got his first taste of government during a term on the Waucedah Township Board of Zoning Appeals.

for returning more parcels to the tax rolls and helping the economy to be more productive.

As vice chair of the House Regulatory Reform Committee and member of the Agriculture, Criminal Justice and Natural Resources committees, McBroom encounters bills that affect local units on a regular basis. Legislation on taxation, land use and alcohol regulation requires a fine balance of protecting individual land and business owners as well as local units of government. He said he tries to gather all the necessary facts and make a decision that is best for the state’s future.

In order to make informed decisions, McBroom believes contact with local officials is very important. He urges officials to contact him when they’re concerned about a particular bill or issue so that he has time to help make changes before the bill is too far along in the legislative process. He added, “A call, letter or email that not only repeats a talking point but offers concrete solutions is absolutely critical.”

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Rep. Dale Zorn (R-Ida Twp.)

After nearly three decades serving local government in Monroe County, Rep. Dale Zorn felt well-prepared for his role in the state Legislature.

Zorn served as **Raisinville Township** (Monroe Co.) constable for three years, until 1984, followed by a five-year stint as township trustee. He spent 19 years serving as a county commissioner before being elected to his first term in the Michigan House of Representatives in 2010.

“Representing Raisinville Township and Monroe County was the best training one could get to serve in the state Legislature,” Zorn said. “On those boards, we had to set policy, provide services and balance our budget. The issues discussed then are strikingly similar to the issues we discuss in the Legislature. Local government experience provides awareness to many issues that one can only receive when serving on local boards. I wholeheartedly appreciate my time on local boards—even more now that I’m a state legislator.”

Zorn continues to reach out to local officials in the 56th House District, which includes **Bedford, Dundee, Erie, Ida, La Salle, Milan, Raisinville, Summerfield** and **Whiteford Townships**, as well as part of **Monroe Charter Township**. His relationships with local leaders help Zorn to better understand the impact that pending legislation will have on local government.

“I frequently attend local township meetings not to just say hello and leave, but to learn,” said Zorn. “I typically stay through their entire meeting so that I can hear and take their challenges and frustrations back to Lansing. When debating issues in Lansing, I regularly call local elected officials to discuss the situation so I understand what positive or negative effects it may have on township government.”

His time in township government has also given Zorn an appreciation for the challenges that townships face—and ideas for how to alleviate those issues. “It is difficult for townships to fund essential services such as roads, police and fire,” he said. “Ensuring state revenue sharing is protected at 100 percent reimbursement would be beneficial. In these economic times and as a way to better serve while reducing costs, making it easier to combine or share services with other municipalities would reduce the overall cost of government. Lastly, regulations making services more efficient and faster would help streamline government.”

Zorn knows the value of local government—and believes that townships serve an essential role for Michigan’s residents.

“I view local government as the first line for constituent service,” said Zorn, noting that he does not support any type of mandated local government consolidation. “Township government must remain strong and accommodating to residents. Townships [also] play an important role in economic development, from zoning to permitting.”



(From left) Erie Township Supervisor Bill Frey, Bedford Township Supervisor Greg Stewart, Rep. Dale Zorn (R-Ida Twp.), Monroe County Road Commission Chair Bob Stammer, and Whiteford Township Supervisor Walter Ruhl held pick axes for the official groundbreaking to reconstruct County Road 151.

As vice chair of the House Commerce Committee, Zorn is well aware of the impact that the committee’s decisions have on local government and the local—and the state’s—economy.

“Appointments to [legislative] committees are very important to the community you represent,” he said. “As a member of the Commerce Committee, those decisions drastically affect business and industry. Business and industry are paramount to any local community’s quality of life.”

Another key to quality of life and this state’s success is its roadways—which is what brought Zorn to state government. “I came to the Legislature with one major goal: rebuild and reinvest in infrastructure for roads and bridges,” he said. “That is why I continue to work on finding solutions outside the box.”

Zorn calls the passage of bills allowing county boards of commissioners to participate in road funding (Public Act 119 of 2011), and transferring road commission responsibilities to county commissioners (PAs 14 and 15 of 2012) among his proudest accomplishments since coming to Lansing.

At the end of the day, Zorn—a founder and executive director of the Christmas in Ida Festival—wants to be known as the small-town guy who helped his neighbors. He said, “I really want my legacy to say that I helped make our community a better place to live and work—that I was a humble public servant from a small town called Ida.”

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Is your township a resilient community?

Michigan communities are no strangers to the notion of resilience. No state in the union is more accustomed to taking a hit and getting back up. Most communities across the state can recount at least one tale of hardship, whether it was a cornerstone business shutting its doors, the loss of an entire crop of fruit blossoms to a surprise frost, or yet another maddening season of Detroit Lions football.

Time and again, Michigan has demonstrated a gritty toughness and stoic work ethic; these characteristics allowed for the greatest manufacturing center of the 20th century to rise from the near-total collapse of what was the greatest timber center of the 19th century. That same toughness has held the state together through the Great Recession, and it's that sense of optimism in the face of utter despair that keeps us coming back to the Lions.

But on the immediate heels of some of the worst economic conditions the state has ever seen, what are we left with? For townships across Michigan, the answer boils down to having to do more with less—sometimes a lot more with a lot less.

Making time for the big picture

When the delivery of basic government services is threatened by dwindling revenues and strained resources, townships can be forgiven for indulging in the here and now, particularly since Michigan's current transformation still leaves us with more questions than answers (a condition of intractable uncertainty that community planners poignantly refer to as "wicked"). *Has the manufacturing plunge leveled off? What about land values? And when do I have the time to think about the big picture between budget cuts and potholes?*

Of course, communities that don't make time for big-picture thinking do so at their own peril, a recognition enshrined in state law through statutes like the Michigan



“The key to the success of Resilient Monroe was its collaborative foundation. We hope to continue this momentum and keep working together in making positive changes.”

—Alan Barron,
Monroe Charter
Township
(Monroe Co.)
Supervisor

Planning Enabling Act (Public Act 33 of 2008). Local governments are the primary conveners of public discussions concerning community development and civic life. Local governments create and host a wide array of citizen-driven processes for land use planning, economic development and community problem-solving.

The Planning Enabling Act ensures that a community comes together at least every five years to review its own big picture: the municipal master plan. But one of the most “wicked” problems facing townships is that some of today’s most powerfully disruptive and costly forces appear far beyond the reach of local control. Global economic shifts had far more to do with the Great Recession than any local planning commission. In the face of climate change, no government of any size wields direct control over harmful weather events. More than ever, the “big picture” seems as if it’s becoming too big to handle.

Building community resilience

Engaging in a community planning process with resilience in mind helps communities to cut big, unwieldy problems down to size. Resilient communities are able to learn from adversity and adapt quickly to change, thereby limiting harm that might arise from the change and making the most of the new conditions. By adapting rapidly to changing circumstances, communities can go beyond surviving challenges; they can thrive.

Planning for Resilient Communities Projects

Resilient Monroe
Monroe Charter and
Frenchtown Charter
Townships (Monroe Co.), and
the City of Monroe

Resilient Ludington
Pere Marquette Charter and
Hamlin Townships
(Mason Co.), the City of
Ludington and Mason County

**Resilient
Grand Haven**
Grand Haven Charter
Township (Ottawa Co.) and
the City of Grand Haven

Resilient East Jordan
South Arm Township
(Charlevoix Co.) and the
Village of East Jordan

Resilient St. Joseph
The City of St. Joseph

cover story

In municipal planning and development, some of the most important characteristics of community resilience are:

- strong and meaningful social relations
- social, economic and environmental diversity
- innovation and creative problem-solving
- extensive use of ecosystem services

Communities interested in becoming more resilient assess their vulnerabilities and make action plans to reduce their sensitivities and exposures to hazards of all kinds. For example, local governments can improve building standards to reduce heating and cooling challenges posed by severe temperature swings, adapt stormwater practices to better manage more intense rain events, and preserve ecosystem services such as coastal wetlands to combat shoreline erosion and inundation. Based on its own unique vulnerabilities, culture and existing infrastructure, each community must explore and employ different tools to best strengthen its resiliency and ability to adapt to challenges.

Planning processes can help increase civic engagement by improving communications and cooperation between cultural and service organizations and by organizing larger community projects. Such improvements in social cohesion and civic engagement lead to improved community resilience by increasing the capacity of volunteer organizations to

address evolving community needs and by providing more secure neighborhoods, among other things. Increased engagement also helps deepen the community's overall connectivity among organizations and individuals, fostering the social ties that keep a region strong. When its networks are robust, a community is more adaptable to changes.

To improve economic resilience, communities can work to encourage and support local production of goods and supplies, increasing self-reliance and reducing the flow of funds out of the community. Programs to encourage local investing and entrepreneurship have been helpful in building both employment and production capacity. Local investments, consumption of locally produced products, and locally owned businesses all help to diversify the community's economy, giving it greater resilience.

For example, Local First of Grand Rapids funded a 2008 study of local businesses in Kent County to better evaluate how local businesses impact mid-sized communities in Michigan. They found a 10 percent shift in consumer spending toward locally owned businesses would create \$140 million in new economic activity, 1,600 new jobs, and \$50 million in new wages. According to the research firm Civic Economics, when West Michigan consumers choose a locally owned business over a non-local alternative, 73 percent more money stays in the community.


Planning for resilient communities in Michigan

A statewide project, *Planning for Resilient Communities*, is applying a resilience lens and a systems approach to local planning in Michigan. Through this project, local governments are building capacity to account for forces beyond their own control, adapt to the inevitable and often unpredictable challenges these forces bring, and thrive in the face of change.


Planning for Resilient Communities is a multi-jurisdictional planning assistance program developed by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA) with assistance from the Michigan Townships Association, Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Association of Planning, and the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan (U-M). The project mission is to foster and support community-wide master planning efforts that promote community resilience in the face of rapid economic changes and increasing climate variability.

With grant funding from the Kresge Foundation, the Americana Foundation, the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, Michigan's Coastal Zone Management Program (Office of the Great Lakes, Department of Environmental Quality), and direct assistance from project partners, participating communities receive a full range of professional planning and technical support services. These services include public education and participation processes, data gathering and analyses, evaluation of future scenarios, vulnerability analyses, visioning and goal setting, task identification, and formal master plan development.


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Resilient communities must identify populations that are at risk from anticipated hazards, such as extreme temperatures or severe storms.

The project is focused on the small to mid-sized communities that make up the majority of Michigan's settlements. Thanks to the partnerships with U-M and the Coastal Zone Management Program, the project has an additional focus on Great Lakes coastal communities.

Michigan communities are not defined by individual jurisdictional boundaries. Michiganders rely on the people, products, jobs and services found in a larger geographic area—the true extent of their communities. Land-use planning and regulation, and all forms of community development must become more comprehensive, systematic and inclusive to properly address problems like climate change mitigation and adaptation. To foster resilient communities in Michigan, local governments must find a way to plan cooperatively, coordinate their actions, and invest in the future together.

The *planning* here is explicitly focused on master plans. Many larger municipalities around the country have developed separate Climate Action Plans (CAPs) that are ancillary to a master plan. For most Michigan communities, a truly effective CAP will not emerge from special committees or governmental departments, nor will it succeed as an adjunct to other planning efforts. Rather, the CAP will be fully integrated into a comprehensive, community-wide master plan that addresses and guides all sectors and systems of the community. Resilience is as much a mindset and an overall approach to planning as it is an end goal.

A resilient planning process

The *Resilient Communities* planning process begins with a review of current climate data and projections, as well as research into the local weather history. Local newspaper archives are tapped to recount historic weather events. Daily high/low temperatures and precipitation records are obtained from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Midwestern Regional Climate Center. Additional climate data and regional projections (downscaled summaries) are solicited from the Great Lakes Integrated Sciences + Assessments project.



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Educated and informed township officials make better decisions. The Michigan Association of Planning's annual conference, *Planning Michigan 2014*, offers sessions customized for township land use leaders. National expert Jim Segedy, PhD, FAICP, *The Planning Guild*, will address the changing character of small towns and rural areas. Breakouts include: Right to Farm Act updates, holding fast to your master plan, property rights, updating your zoning ordinance, as well as hosting the entire MSU Extension Citizen Planner Program. Register today!



Students from two Monroe area high schools took part in a visioning and goal-setting project, offering their thoughts on what would help make their community a more vibrant and attractive place to live.

Along with climate data, the project team conducts a thorough review of existing community-based plans. Master plans and others (hazard mitigation, emergency management, infrastructure, social services, etc.) help to provide a complete view of the community and its existing strategies and structure.

The next phase of work is to conduct a vulnerability assessment that will identify, quantify and locate populations that are at risk from anticipated hazards, such as extreme temperatures, severe storms, wildfire, flooding and wind. A population's vulnerability is gauged in terms of its potential exposure and its sensitivity to the hazard. A sensitivity analysis focuses on provision of services for sensitive populations. Sensitivity to natural hazards includes a number of human population characteristics, such as:

- Age (e.g., older people and the very young)
- General health (e.g., mobility, pre-existing diseases, obesity)
- Socioeconomics (e.g., no high school diploma, living in poverty, minority)

A spatial GIS analysis is conducted using 2010 U.S. Census block level information to measure sensitive populations. Information may also be considered about neighborhoods with housing stock that is dated or made of inferior building materials, or other particular infrastructure vulnerabilities that might disproportionately affect a certain portion of the community under certain stresses.

Two potential exposures of concern for Michigan's communities are flooding and heat. GIS analysis and mapping of flooding vulnerability in project communities includes the use of FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (50- and 100-year flood zones), soil surveys, and historic data.

Heat exposure incorporates the digitization of tree canopy cover and the percentage of impervious surfaces (including building footprints) in the community.

The project team also helps the community complete local economic assessments and leakage analyses to identify opportunities for enhancing the local economy (e.g., greater self-reliance, energy savings, and local retention of funds).

Public engagement

A concerted public engagement effort in each project community begins with stakeholder interviews. Social service providers, emergency managers, public health officials (environmental health and emergency preparedness), the local Commission on Aging, the local hospital, police and fire departments, and the drain commissioner are usually among the first contacts.

These stakeholders provide suggestions for additional contacts, culminating in a day-long Leadership Summit of elected officials, planning commissioners, business people, and community leaders. The summit includes a variety of educational presentations on climate science, the intersection of climate change and public health, local economies and economic resilience, shoreline dynamics, emergency management and response, and green stormwater management.

The Leadership Summit also serves as a networking and recruitment tool for Community Actions Teams (CATs). The CATs come together a total of three times after the Leadership Summit to allow for smaller groups of citizens, elected officials, planning commissioners, and staff members to work together in addressing specific topics, or systems, that sustain the community. The systems often include:

- Agriculture and food
- Access and transportation
- Neighborhoods and infrastructure
- Human and social
- Energy and economy
- Environment and natural

Each CAT develops system-specific recommendations for actions that can be incorporated into each jurisdiction's master plan. The teams may also serve in the longer term to educate the community on specific topics and advocate for their recommendations in the master plan.

Local examples

Planning for resilience does not require brand-new tools or techniques. Most of the policies and programs needed to increase local resilience are familiar and well-tested. The challenge communities face is in finding the cooperative spirit and collective resolve to improve local capacity for absorbing and managing both economic storms and weather events.

Resilience planning should ideally touch every part of the community, from public service delivery systems to municipal capital improvement projects. For small to mid-sized

communities, the municipal master planning process presents the best opportunity to consider all aspects of development and change while engaging public officials and citizens in a broad, educational discussion about alternatives.

Five Michigan communities are currently engaged in the *Resilient Communities* project, with plans to add at least one more coastal community in this fall. At the time of this writing, Monroe has largely completed its planning project, Ludington is well underway, and the communities of Grand Haven, East Jordan and St. Joseph are in the early stages of the planning effort.

Monroe Community

The greater Monroe Community—including the adjoining jurisdictions of **Monroe Charter** and **Frenchtown Charter Townships** (Monroe Co.), and the City of Monroe—was the first participant in the *Resilient Communities* project. The “Resilient Monroe” effort focused on a coordinated review and update of master plans, bringing the planning commissions and elected officials of all three governments together for the first time. The project addressed a wide range of shared concerns such as improvements to transportation corridors, efforts to build the local economy, and new ways to manage the impacts of climate variability for this coastal Lake Erie community.

“The key to the success of Resilient Monroe was its collaborative foundation,” said Monroe Charter Township Supervisor **Alan Barron**. “We hope to continue this

momentum and keep working together in making positive changes.”

To enhance community resilience, the Monroe Community is focused on expanding and diversifying its local economy to attract and retain talented workers as well as boost tourism. The community is continuing efforts to expand and diversify its local energy portfolio along with local food production, processing and distribution. Additionally, the community is preparing for an increase in extreme weather events such as flooding and extended periods of extreme heat and/or drought.

“A number of ideas came out of this process that we can start integrating immediately into our day-to-day activities, like landscape standards and what we do with [stormwater] drainage,” said **Chris Khorey**, Monroe Charter Township planner. “Based on recommendations, we plan to make updates to the site design review process and to the zoning ordinance.”

Highlights of the Resilient Monroe process included an intensive three-day planning charrette focused on the Telegraph Road Corridor that runs through all three jurisdictions; heat and flooding vulnerability assessments specific to the Monroe Community; and a comprehensive 106-page Resource Atlas that highlights existing conditions, community trends and options for action (available at www.resilientmonroe.org/resourceatlas).

“Right from the start [of the Resilient Monroe planning process], some people did not appreciate the value of the information on climate variability,” said **Charlie Jackson**, a Monroe Charter Township planning commissioner. “But



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cover story

after the past few months, I think those people would think a little differently. Now, everyone is talking about the weather. I think this climate discussion was done very well, as far as how to get the conversation started.”

Ludington Community

On Lake Michigan, the four jurisdictions of the Ludington Community—including **Pere Marquette Charter** and **Hamlin Townships** (Mason Co.), the City of Ludington and Mason County—have also brought their planning commissions and elected officials together for the first time. In addition to the work on master plans, the Ludington Community used its multijurisdictional convening to conduct an intensive three-day planning charrette around a major economic driver within its community: a highway corridor connecting Ludington with the broader region (www.resilientmichigan.org/us10materials).

“It’s great to have a chance to work with neighboring units of government toward a common goal,” said **Paul Keson**, Pere Marquette Charter Township supervisor. “It is also an incredible opportunity for these entities to work together to shape a better community.”

According to **Hamlin Township** Supervisor **Nancy Vandervest**, public involvement is an important part of the Resilient Communities process. “Public participation is a key to the success of project,” Vandervest said. “We are encouraging citizens, local leaders and public officials from each jurisdiction to become involved in the planning process to help create a vision for the future of their community.”

In Ludington, project partner U-M is studying shoreline dynamics and developing alternative shoreline development scenarios that incorporate an understanding of the impacts of climate change on coastal resources. Part of the impetus for this research is to better understand how coastal communities use shoreline data to inform their planning process and policy decisions (*see sidebar at above right*).

Cultivating a resilient mindset

Michigan is a natural place to cultivate a resilient mindset, which is great news for our townships. We work hard. When we take a hit, we get back up. We still root for the Lions. We’re Michiganders. And we’re becoming even more resilient.

By **Whitney Waara**, Executive Director, **Matt Cowall**, Communications Director, and **Claire Karner**, Community Planner

Land Information Access Association (LIAA), Traverse City

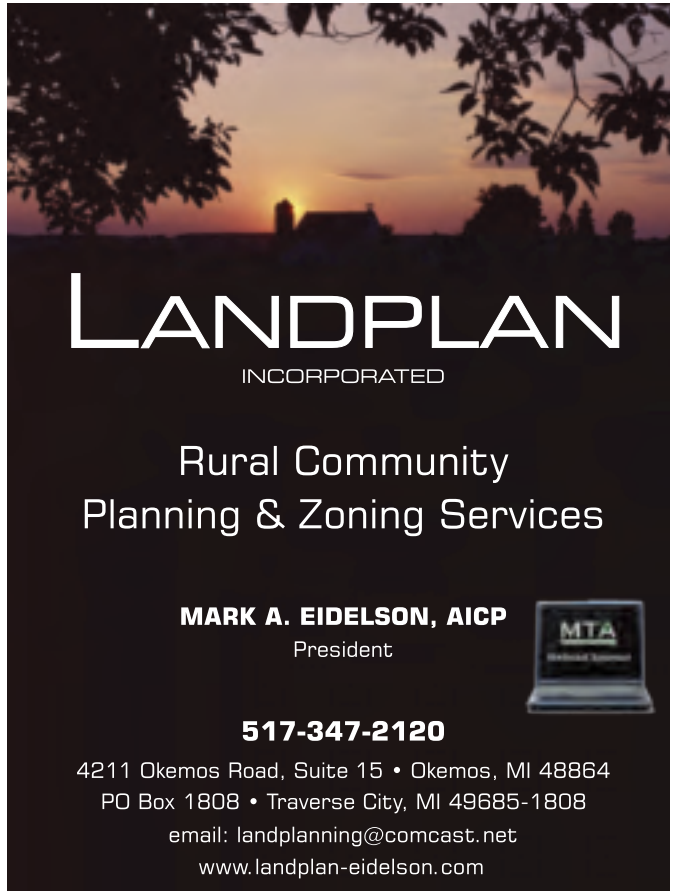
For more information on the *Planning for Resilient Communities* project, visit www.resilientmichigan.org or www.liaa.org.

A focus on resilient coastal communities

Researchers from the University of Michigan and Michigan Technological University are contributing to and studying the *Resilient Coastal Communities* project. The overarching research goal is to find ways to help coastal localities improve Great Lakes shoreland area management through local master plans, regulations and infrastructure policies. The overarching policy goal is to help coastal localities promote economic vitality while minimizing risks to people and property and improving natural coastal habitats in nearshore areas.

A major aspect of this research is the development of scenario-based planning methods focused on managing Great Lakes shorelands. These scenarios will combine climate change uncertainties, with a range of potential shoreland area management options that encompass current practice (current zoning), desired practice (incorporating master plan policies not yet adopted), and best practice (incorporating additional and appropriate best-practice strategies).

Researchers are developing analytical methods to assess potential risks from lake level fluctuations, storm surge, flooding, lake temperature variations, and so on, along with corresponding potential fiscal, critical facilities, and environmental impacts. Training materials will be developed to convey the planning methods developed through this study to other coastal localities.



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Workshop examines unlawful expenditures, conflict of interest

Save your township time—and money—by addressing concerns before they become a reason for someone to take legal action. Don't miss MTA's afternoon workshop, coming to three locations in September, designed to keep your township from agonizing over doing the right thing.

Determining lawful expenditures

Large or small, rural or urban, townships across the state face increasing scrutiny about the lawfulness of their expenditures. Questions regarding the legality of certain expenditures don't

just come from residents, but from fellow board members, special interest groups and township auditors as well. As more needs arise (and more legislation gets passed), it's critical to understand the framework and guidelines for ensuring your township expenditures are lawful.

Wait, is that a conflict of interest?

Delve into ethical quandaries, compatibility of offices, fiduciary duty and more. Join the discussion on what constitutes a conflict of interest and when to abstain from voting. Learn how to apply these issues to your own situation.

Avoiding legal pitfalls

Take a proactive approach to avoiding litigation and walk away with tips to keep your township out of court.

The workshop is held from 1 to 4 p.m. and includes lunch served at noon. Dates and locations are:

Sept. 18: Holiday Inn, Battle Creek

Sept. 23: Valley Plaza Resort, Midland

Sept. 25: Boyne Mountain Resort, Boyne Falls

Download the registration form or register online at www.michigantownships.org

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upcoming MTA workshop

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Emerging issues in emergency services

Providing emergency and fire protection services may be one of the more complicated—and most important—services your township provides. Residents demand comprehensive protection, and state and federal mandates set high standards for training and safety requirements. MTA can help you gain a better understanding of the myriad of hot issues facing your fire department and emergency services personnel.

Join us **Oct. 14** at the **Bavarian Inn Lodge in Frankenmuth** for a full-day event that examines *Emerging Issues for EMS and Fire Departments*. Delve into cost recovery options and hurdles. Explore the intricacies of mutual aid, the challenges of recruitment and retention (particularly among smaller communities) and join the discussion on licensing requirements.



Learn more about the Federal Excess and Firefighter Property Programs, which provide quality surplus equipment to help support local emergency services agencies. Tap into the top five things the township board can do to help their fire departments be successful. Get the inside scoop on establishing expectations for fire chiefs and personnel to maintain strong relationships and a supportive environment.

Registration, along with continental breakfast, begins at 8:30 a.m. Class is held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and includes lunch served at noon.

Cancellations & Substitutions

Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office by Sept. 30 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.

Registration Form

Township _____ County _____

Daytime Telephone _____ Email Address _____

Name & Title _____

Name & Title _____

Name & Title _____

Name & Title _____

Emerging Issues for EMS and Fire Departments Oct. 14 at the Bavarian Inn Lodge, Frankenmuth

REGISTRATION RATE*: \$119/person if registered **after** Sept. 30.

DISCOUNTED RATE*: \$99/person if registered **by** Sept. 30.

Save \$20/person by registering early!

| # of Persons | | Registration Fee | | Total |
|--------------|---|------------------|---|-------|
| _____ | x | _____ | = | _____ |

*Rates apply to MTA members. Non-members, call for rates.

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

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

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|-----------|
| - | - | - | / |
| Card # | | | Expires |
| Print Card Holder's Name | | | Signature |



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.

upcoming MTA workshops

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

October workshops examine township finances and services

Relevant to the entire township board ... no matter what your level of experience.

MTA can help your township navigate the maze of funding and providing services for your community. Explore the types of revenue sources available for various programs and services, and learn to identify what services are most important to the residents you serve and how to manage the risk inherent with those services. Join us in **Lansing** at the **Comfort Inn West** on **Oct. 27-28** for one (or both!) of the sessions described below:



Township Finances (F-103; 6 credits)

Oct. 27, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Includes continental breakfast & lunch)

Township boards are responsible for ensuring that there are adequate resources to serve the community in a manner consistent with constituent expectations, and for protecting the townships' financial resources. Explore the types of revenue sources available to townships and their appropriateness for various programs and services. Gain insight into fiduciary duties, the allocation of resources and evaluation of results through the budget process, and how township boards use policies to provide financial leadership.

Presented by: *Larry Merrill, MTA Executive Director*



At Your Service: Meeting Township Needs (F-101; 6 credits)

Oct. 28, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Includes continental breakfast & lunch)

Learn more about the role, authority and legal requirements of the township board in providing services for your residents. Explore funding options as well as the board's responsibility in assuring that the risk inherent with these services is properly managed. Discover how to evaluate whether your township's services are effectively serving the community and what considerations should be made today to ensure future viability.

Presented by: *Steve Mann, Attorney, Miller, Canfield, Paddock & Stone, PLC; and Susan Radwan, Owner, Leading Edge Mentoring*

These courses are part of MTA's Township Governance Academy, an innovative credentialing program for township officials and local leaders in Michigan. You do NOT have to be enrolled in the Academy to attend.



Cancellations & Substitutions: Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office by Oct. 13 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.

Registration Form

Township _____ County _____

Daytime Telephone _____ Email Address _____

Name & Title _____ Full Program Finances Services

Name & Title _____ Full Program Finances Services

Name & Title _____ Full Program Finances Services

Name & Title _____ Full Program Finances Services

| | Registration Rate | Discounted Rate |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | After Oct. 13 | By Oct. 13 |
| FULL PROGRAM: Both sessions! | \$ 250/attendee | \$ 290/attendee |
| Township Finances (F-103) | \$ 125/attendee | \$ 145/attendee |
| At Your Service (F-101) | \$ 125/attendee | \$ 145/attendee |

Register by Oct. 13 and save up to \$40!

| # of Sessions | Registration Fee | Total |
|---------------|------------------|---------|
| _____ x _____ | _____ | = _____ |

*Rates apply to MTA members. Non-members, call for rates.

| | |
|--|---------------|
| NOTE: Payment must accompany form in order to be processed. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Check enclosed (payable to MTA) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charge to: (circle one) MasterCard VISA | |
| _____ - _____ - _____ | _____ / _____ |
| Card # | Expires |
| Print Card Holder's Name | Signature |



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



Inspiring tomorrow's local leaders

MTA awards Robinson Scholarships

Two Eastern Michigan University (EMU) students with their sights set on serving in local government are this year's recipients of the MTA Robert R. Robinson Memorial Scholarship. The one-time scholarship is awarded to a junior, senior or graduate student enrolled at a Michigan college or university who is pursuing a career in local government.

A passion for parks

Taylor resident Evan Sweet dreams of one day becoming the director of a parks and recreation department. Today, he's working toward a public administration degree in pursuit of that goal. He sees parks as a way to engage new residents and keep citizens in the community. He has also seen the way park events pull a community together and bring enjoyment to all residents.

Already, Sweet and members of EMU's Delta Sigma Phi fraternity have helped the **Canton Charter Township**

(Wayne Co.) Leisure Services Department with events, such as the Home Expo. The group also partnered with the department to assist Christmas in Action, a nonprofit organization that provides free home repairs to seniors and disabled residents.

In addition to planning events, Sweet knows he will need to master the art of managing finances and juggling priorities for his career in parks and recreation to be successful. He is already committed to the idea of prioritizing spending on the most beneficial projects, and to keeping up regular repairs

and maintenance to ensure that park facilities are kept in peak condition. Efficiency and constant improvement are the keys to making these programs work, he said.

“Parks and recreation is one of the things I care about most in life, and one thing that I feel has a huge impact on local government,” Sweet wrote in his scholarship application.

“Although many cities and townships have been cutting back on their parks and recreation events ... I still think that parks and recreation departments are huge, and so very important to pulling in new residents into a community.”

Helping build communities

Canton Charter Township resident James Tatum is already well on his way to establishing a career in the field of economic development. Last year, he completed an internship with Canton Charter Township’s economic development manager, during which he intensely studied the business permit process. In addition to attending meetings with township staff and prospective businesses, he created a set of instructions for businesses in an attempt to minimize confusion and mistakes that could delay their expansion or entry into the township.

Currently a political science major at EMU, Tatum wants to help build communities by eventually leading a land bank. He has also learned about the importance of financial

literacy through his coverage of the Detroit bankruptcy in weekly columns for *The Eastern Echo*, EMU’s student-run newspaper.

In many cases, Tatum said, a local government’s insolvency is not intentional, but instead can be the result of a lack of knowledge. Public officials must be diligent in their fiduciary duties, and maintain a strong grasp on municipal finances to ensure the future fiscal health of their municipality, he said.

“In order to balance budgets and be careful stewards of their localities’ finances, local elected officials have to understand finances first,” Tatum wrote in his scholarship essay. “Such a defense against insolvency and fiscal distress is as important as reserve funds and low debt levels.”

Inspiring future leaders

As MTA’s second executive director, Robert R. Robinson was dedicated to townships and to furthering the form of government closest to the people. Awarding the endowment each year in his name helps to ensure that Michigan’s future local leaders continue to value and protect township government and the Michigan residents it serves.

Learn more about the scholarship on MTA’s website, at www.michigantownships.org/scholarship.asp.

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Insurance

Managing health care costs

Public employers today face increased pressure on their budgets through increasing costs and decreasing revenues. Their traditionally stable employee benefits are being scrutinized in the news and by the public who have watched their own benefits shrink over the past several years.

Added to these pressures are the ramifications of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which can mean higher costs to employees through increased deductibles, prescription drug copays and out-of-pocket maximums. At the same time that employee benefits are decreasing, the costs to provide them are increasing.

How does a public employer, like today's townships, continue to offer valued employee medical benefits when faced with decreasing budgets and sky-rocketing premiums? A recent study conducted by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) provided 12 strategies used by public employers that have proven to be successful in maintaining health care costs while continuing to offer valued employee benefits. While some of these strategies are implemented by larger public entities, such as self-funding and wellness plans, others can be utilized by public employers of all sizes, including: changing the level of benefits, managing participant's choice of providers, sharing costs with employees, right-sourcing health benefit services, and maximizing the value received for health care dollars.

Let's take a closer look at some of the GFOA study recommendations and how they could be implemented.

Strategies to consider

Changing non-core benefits, such as dental and vision, to voluntary benefits (employee paid) is an example of how an employer can reduce their cost while still offering benefits that employees value. This allows the employer to free up dollars so they can be spent on critical core benefits that employees value most, such as medical and prescription drug coverage. The employees can then decide individually if they would still like to purchase the non-core benefits.

Some public employers structure employee contributions as a percentage of the cost or as an employer fixed contribution. With this strategy, the public employer can budget more effectively by making plan changes and having employees share in the cost increases and plan changes. Other strategies



included increasing deductibles and other out-of-pocket maximums. A simple way to cut costs is to implement “cash in lieu of” coverage, offering employees an incentive to waive coverage from the municipality’s plan in favor of a spouse’s plan. Such “cash in lieu of” coverage plans are often popular with both the employee and employer, but must be structured correctly under Section 125 of the Internal Revenue Code.



Public employers are also looking at limiting provider choices, such as offering a health maintenance organization (HMO) to control costs. These plans are usually less expensive than other plans, but limit the choices of doctors. Many of the GFOA survey respondents have implemented increased copays, coinsurance and prescription drug out-of-pocket expenses. Several strategies can be used to mitigate the impact these changes have on employees. One successful strategy is to change to a high-deductible plan. GAP or supplemental coverage can be purchased by the employer and/or employees to fill in some of the gaps caused by the increased deductibles. Health reimbursement accounts, health savings accounts and flexible spending accounts can be implemented to help fund the increase to employee’s out-of-pocket expenses.

Right-sourcing strategies, such as outsourcing employee communications, mandated ACA employee notifications, and employee benefit enrollments can lessen the overall costs without impacting benefits. Public employers should make sure they are taking advantage of IRS Code Section 125 tax-free employee contributions, which reduces both the employee and employer’s costs. Premium contributions are tax free to the employee and exempt from FICA taxes for the employer. If a public employer is taking advantage of Section 125 savings, they must also ensure that they have the required documentation in case they are ever audited by the IRS or Department of Labor.

To ensure that health care dollars are maximized, large employers can outsource dependent verification. The study showed that municipalities could save significant dollars by removing dependents who are not eligible to be on their plan.

Although employee communications can be outsourced at no cost, a public

employer should carefully consider who they choose to partner with to educate their employees about the changes mentioned above. Employees can view some of these changes as negative and the employer will want to choose a partner that is very familiar with the nuances of public employers and their employees. Effective communication and employee education are critical to the successful implementation of these strategies. While the GFOA study shows employee communications are critical to the success of a program, it also demonstrated many public employers are falling short of the goal to educate their employees about their benefits.

Managing change, maintaining value

While change in employee health benefits may be inevitable, it can also be managed. Public employers have proven solutions they can implement to reduce costs, while maintaining their valued benefits. Even implementing just a few of these strategies can have a substantial impact on controlling the costs of benefits.

For more on the GFOA study, visit health.bfgroup.com/gfoa



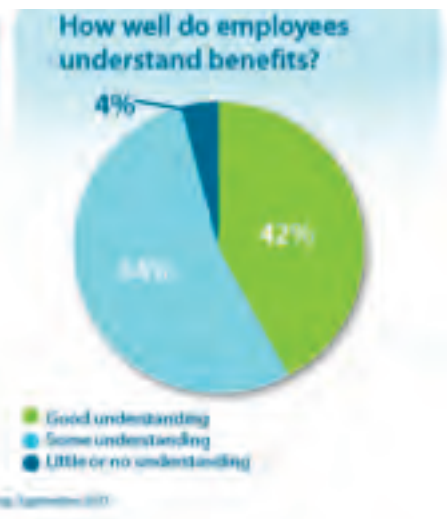
Jack P. Schmitz, Director, Municipal Benefit Sales, Burnham & Flower Insurance Group, Kalamazoo

For more information, visit www.bfgroup.com, or contact Schmitz at (810) 923-0355 or jschmitz@bfgroup.com.

Sources: Government Finance Officers Association Containing Healthcare Costs, and Colonial Life Insurance Company



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aroundthe**state**

townships in the spotlight



Thetford Township

Thetford Township, located in Genesee County, is home to more than 7,000 residents. The 34.8-square-mile township is part of the Clio Area Fire Authority, is home to one of authority's fire stations, and also has its own police department. A unique partnership between the Thetford Township Police Department and an area college has benefitted the township, students and the surrounding region. In 2012, the police department teamed up with Baker College's Automotive and Design Division to restore one of two Humvees that had been made available to the township by the U.S. Department of Defense.



The partnership continued, and students refurbished the second Humvee—also allowing the apprentice mechanics to become certified mechanics. The vehicles are used for search-and-rescue missions or during natural disasters. Thetford Township allows any mid-Michigan police or fire department to utilize the four-wheel-drive Humvees in case of emergency.

The township police department also helps to hosts a popular annual Halloween party each fall, complete with a

pumpkin-decorating contest, costume contests and hayrides. In the winter months, the young and young at heart can woosh down a new sledding hill that was constructed behind the township hall.

The township's senior center offers a wide array of activities for the area's elderly population, and residents of all ages can enjoy the outdoor activities at the no-wake Buell Lake within the township. Students from the area can also receive a lesson in the great outdoors at Ligon Outdoor Education Center, located in the township, which is comprised of 268 acres of nature and hiking trails spanning over six miles.

While the township is embracing the future, with a recently debuted website and Facebook page to better communicate with residents, it also celebrates its past. The township cemetery includes burials dating back to 1897, and its grange hall houses the area's genealogical records dating back to 1850.

Above all, local officials say, the people of Thetford Township make all the difference in making this tight-knit community a wonderful place to live and raise a family.





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January 27-30, 2015
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Registration and housing reservations open October 21.



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