

West Traverse Township

PO Box 528
Harbor Springs, MI 49740



West Traverse Township

(Established 1897)

West Traverse Township - 2016 Newsletter

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www.westtraversetownship.com

Annual Greetings from your West Traverse Township Board

We hope you all have a safe and enjoyable summer here. If you have any questions or comments about this newsletter or the Township in general, don't hesitate to contact any of us. Our Board meetings are the second Tuesday of the month and there are opportunities for public comment. We really do welcome hearing from you.

Thorne Swift Nature Preserve

The annual "Swift Current" brochure, which includes a listing of summer programs and hikes, is enclosed and is also available in color on the Township website. We hope you make it a point to visit the Nature Preserve and experience all that it has to offer. Be sure to say hello to John Riggs and congratulate him on his 20th year as Manager.

From the Treasurer

Summer tax bills will be mailed out by the County Treasurer by July 1, 2016. If you haven't received your tax bill by July 8, please contact the Township Office. The summer tax is due on September 14, 2016. Detailed instructions regarding payment will be included with the bills.

Township Website

Just a reminder about the Township website (www.westtraversetownship.com). It remains a great resource for information about the Township. Please let us know if you have suggestions for other items to place there.

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Township Board

Bob Sandford - Supervisor
Cindy Baiardi - Clerk
Kristi Hollingsworth - Treasurer
John Baker - Trustee
Jim Bartlett - Trustee

Planning Commission

Nancy Sarowski - Chair
Cindy Baiardi
Dan Gorman
Scott Kennard
Paul Opfermann
Paul Repasky
Pete Wallin

Zoning Board of Appeals

Sam DeCamp - Chair
Chris Baiardi
Jim Bartlett
Dick Collie - Alternate
Eva Lauer
Nancy Sarowski
Pete Wallin - Alternate

Board of Review

Jim Frang - Chair
Bill Borglin
Curt Regentin

Recreation/Thorne Swift Committee

John Baker - Chair
Darrell Amlin
Joey Arbaugh
Cynthia Fisher
Sam DeCamp
Laurie Ford
John Riggs
Carolyn Sandford

Zoning Administrator

Larry Sullivan
First & Third Tuesdays
9:00 am - 1:00 pm
Other times by appointment

Planner

Larry Sullivan
By Appointment

Assessor

Joe Lavender
Mondays 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Administrative Assistant

Sue Matsko

Township Hall Office Hours

9:00 am - 1:00 pm Daily

Township Board Meetings

2nd Tuesdays - 7:00 pm

Planning Commission Meetings

2nd Wednesdays - 7:00 pm

A complete list of committees and appointees is maintained on the Township website

From the Clerk

Two of our four elections this year are over. The turnout for the March Presidential Primary was very good, with 694 total voters, or 42%! In May we only had 217 voters. Thank you to everyone that took the time to vote. Our next election is the Primary August 2nd, followed by the General Election November 8th.

The Permanent Absentee Voter List remains popular and we are adding people all the time. Please let us know if you would like to be on the list. This past winter when many of you were out of the area, having your name on the Permanent AV List was quite helpful in getting the applications and ballots to you in a timely manner. To all of our young voters, if you will be attending college out of the area and would like to vote absentee, please stop in and register with the Clerk or register at the Secretary of State. If you register by mail you will be required to vote in person in the first election. ***"A person who registers to vote by mail must vote in person in the first election in which he or she participates. The restriction does not apply to overseas voters, voters who are disabled or voters who are 60 years of age or older."*** Registering ***in person*** at the Secretary of State or Township will allow you to be eligible for an absentee ballot in the first election you vote in after registering.

June 18, 2016 applications to vote in the August and November elections will be mailed to people on the Permanent AV List. One Application will be sent that will suffice for ***BOTH*** of the elections if you intend to vote Absentee, but please complete it carefully ensuring I have accurate information for mailing ballots. The Post Office will not forward a ballot. Please remember to sign and complete the bottom portion of the application before returning it. A ballot can't be issued unless this is done. The Township Hall is open daily if you choose to get your application or ballot in person. Generally, the Clerk is available from 8AM – 12PM but you may want to call before coming in.

If you have not already registered to vote, July 5, 2016 is the last day to register if you would like to vote in the August Primary and October 11, 2016 is the last day to register to be eligible to vote in the November General Election.

We are always looking to add to the great group of election inspectors we already have. If anyone has a desire to serve in this capacity, please contact the Clerk at the Township Hall, 231-526-7361 or by email at clerk@westtraversetownship.com and an application will be sent to you.

Personnel Changes

- Larry Sullivan assumed the duties of Zoning Administrator as well as Planner.
- Joe Lavender was hired as the new Assessor.
- Scott Kennard joined the Planning Commission replacing Cynthia Fisher, to whom we extend our appreciation for her contributions.
- Jim Bartlett will be stepping down as Trustee when his term expires in November. Thanks Jim, for your strong leadership and many contributions these past 8 years.

Birchwood Medical First Responders

A grateful thank you is again extended to Birchwood Farms Security & Emergency Medical Services for voluntarily providing medical first responder services throughout the Township. 96 (58%) of the medical runs were in the Township off Birchwood property. The Township is fortunate to have this capability near by. ***REMEMBER, IF YOU HAVE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY, CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY.*** The 911 dispatch center will send out the nearest available ambulance and notify the Birchwood Medical First Responders.

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Township Finances

The Township's finances remain unchanged, with healthy fund balances in all funds at the end of fiscal year 2015-16.

- General Fund: The over budget revenue came from closing out the Cook Property (i.e. Rental) fund and transferring the remaining balance to the GF. Expenses were over budget only because of an unbudgeted transfer of \$35,000 to the Road Fund.
- Road Fund: The transfer from the General Fund accounted for the above budget revenue. Expenses were minimized to build up the reserve for Lower Shore Drive.
- Thorne Swift Fund: Gate fees accounted for most of the above budget revenue and expenses were managed under budget.
- Cook Property Fund: The fund was closed due to exiting the rental business and the remaining funds were transferred to the General Fund, where they will be used for asbestos abatement and demolition costs in 2016.
- Sewer Fund: Expenses were under budget due to minimal maintenance requirements.
- Water Fund: The tap-in fees for 3 unplanned new customers accounted for the over budget revenue and expenses were essentially as budgeted.

Funds---->	General	Road	Thorne Swift	Cook Property	Sewer	Water
2015/16 Actual						
Revenues:						
Actual	380,435	255,369	72,024	4,610	14,113	100,928
Versus Initial Budget	+27,772	+34,326	+4,606	-3,910	+63	+12,808
Expenses:						
Actual	323,233	92,059	67,056	25,716	8,155	60,946
Versus Initial Budget	+7,233	-58,941	-9,294	+18,496	-5,945	+946
Revenues - Expenses:						
Actual	57,202	163,310	4,968	-21,106	5,958	39,982
Versus Initial Budget	+20,539	+93,267	+13,900	-22,406	+6,018	+11,862
Ending Fund Balance	1,441,252	435,817	101,897	0	126,553	199,760

For fiscal year 2016-17, the Township's total property tax millage rate remains at 1.60 mills. 0.70 mills each for the General and Road Funds and 0.20 mills for the Thorne Swift Fund. The budget summary is shown below.

Funds---->	General	Road	Thorne Swift	Sewer	Water
2016/17 Budget					
Revenues:	360,770	223,150	68,920	14,050	88,120
Expenses:	359,063	421,000	73,350	13,100	66,000
Revenues - Expenses:	1,707	-197,850	-4,430	950	22,120
Ending Fund Balance	1,442,959	237,967	97,467	127,503	221,880

Road Projects

Writing about the Township's road projects for 2016 is very simple - there's only one. After years of deliberating over what to do about the continual slope movement and failure along 624 feet near the southeast end of Lower Shore Drive, the Township Board decided to follow the advice of the engineering firm that has been monitoring the situation since 2004 and construct a retaining wall to mitigate further damage. Lower Shore Drive is owned by the Emmet County Road Commission, which should be responsible for the cost of the project. However, the lack of funds for road commissions in Michigan has been well documented. The most recent slope failure in 2014 made it very clear that something needed to be done relatively soon to prevent a potentially catastrophic failure. The Township Board has designated \$330,000, most of it obtained from the extra-voted road millage levied in 2014 and 2015, to cover the cost, per the low bid. Another \$30,000 in engineering costs will be shared equally with the Road Commission. It should be noted that the 2016 project only involves constructing a retaining wall along the most vulnerable 378 feet, nearest M-119. The retaining wall along the remaining 246 feet is being delayed, possibly indefinitely, because the slope there is not showing as much movement and including it would result in closing the road well into the summer. Despite a three week delay in getting started, it's certainly hoped that Lower Shore Drive will be re-opened by July 1.

As rated annually by the Road Commission, the Township's roads have consistently been ranked near the top of the other townships in the County. The credit goes to the Township's taxpayers who have provided over \$2 million for road improvement projects since the extra-voted road millage was implemented in 2005. Several roads, including portions of Lightfoot and Heynig, are tentatively scheduled for attention in 2017.

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Planning and Zoning

Over the past year, the Planning Commission recommended approval of and the Township Board approved several amendments to the Zoning Ordinance regarding fences, accessory buildings, the rear setback for the C-1 District, and side yard setbacks for non-conforming lots in the R-1 and R-1-A Districts. An amendment to eliminate warehouses and storage buildings in the C-1 District was recommended for approval by the Planning Commission but not approved by the Township Board. Other activities of note included the approval of the site plan for commercial storage buildings on State Road and approval of an amendment to the Birchwood Farms Golf & Country Club PUD.

As recommended by the Planning Commission and approved by the Township Board, the Township has entered into a contract with Networks Northwest to reformat the Zoning Ordinance to address ambiguities and organization deficiencies, to bring it into compliance with changes in zoning laws and regulations, and to utilize the latest technology to make it more interactive and user-friendly. The outcome will be similar to Emmet County's recently implemented new zoning ordinance, a copy of which has been placed on the Township website under the Township Zoning tab to the left.

The combined County (residential only) and Township zoning permit activity for 2015 remained at the same levels as the past two years with a total of 37 permits: new residential construction - 6; residential additions/remodels - 11; residential accessory buildings - 14; new commercial construction - 1; commercial additions/remodels - 3; signs - 1 and other - 1 (fence).

Rental House

You may have noticed that something is happening to the Township's remaining rental house across Lake Road from the Township Hall. After the departure last October of the most recent tenants, who left the house in spotless condition, the Township Board decided that the house would require more upgrading than it was willing to do and that it was time to exit the rental business. The house was initially offered to the Harbor Springs Area Fire Authority to burn as a training exercise. It was intended that this would happen in March while there was still snow on the ground. However, demolishing a commercial building, which the house is considered because it is owned by a governmental entity, requires that it first undergo an asbestos assessment. The assessment revealed the presence of asbestos in several places - dry-wall compound, textured ceilings, and vinyl flooring. Unfortunately, the removal of the asbestos lasted well into May, in part because asbestos was also found in some of the ceiling insulation. Burning the house was then no longer an option. Instead, the house will be demolished and taken to an approved disposal site in June, followed by restoration of the grounds. On the plus side, the Fire Authority did get some valuable extrication practice out of the house.

LTBBOI vs. Rick Snyder Lawsuit

As you may already know, the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians (LTBBOI) filed a federal lawsuit against Governor Snyder in August 2015 asking a federal court to declare that a large part of Emmet and Charlevoix Counties is a reservation for the LTBBOI based upon an 1855 treaty. The lawsuit also asks that the state and local units of government be prevented from interfering with or asserting jurisdiction over the Tribe and its citizens on this property. The lawsuit covers ten Emmet County Townships, including all of West Traverse Township. It also extends to the cities of Petoskey, Harbor Springs, and parts of Charlevoix and Charlevoix County. This case could affect issues of local concern such as zoning, construction codes, tax revenue, gaming, police powers, roads, child welfare, criminal and civil jurisdiction, and environmental regulation on property claimed as a reservation.

West Traverse Township has joined with the nine other affected Emmet County Townships to intervene in the lawsuit. This provides the townships with greater access to information concerning the lawsuit and with the ability to participate and be heard in any court proceedings to settle or otherwise resolve the lawsuit. The Emmet County Townships have engaged Thad Morgan, an experienced federal court attorney with the firm of Fraser Trebilcock in Lansing, to represent them. The cost is being allocated in proportion to the State Equalized Values of the respective Emmet County Townships. West Traverse's share is 18.16%. Some other municipalities in Emmet and Charlevoix Counties and some non-governmental entities have also formed groups to intervene in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit has been assigned to the U.S. District Court based in Kalamazoo and is still in the preliminary stages. A resolution is not expected until at least late 2017 or 2018.

Library Services

The Township has renewed its agreement with the Alanson Area Public Library to provide free library services to all Township residents. Check out their website at www.alansonlibrary.org for information about their services and programs. Non-resident library cards may also be purchased from the Petoskey District Library for \$25 for 3 months or \$95 for a year.