

## ***West Traverse Township***

PO Box 528  
Harbor Springs, MI 49740



### **West Traverse Township**

(Established 1897)

## ***West Traverse Township - 2015 Newsletter***

8001 M-119, PO Box 528, Harbor Springs, MI 49740  
(231) 526-7361 Fax: (231) 526-0028 E-Mail: [secretary@westtraversetownship.com](mailto:secretary@westtraversetownship.com)  
[www.westtraversetownship.com](http://www.westtraversetownship.com)

### **Annual Greetings from your West Traverse Township Board**

We're lonely. Was it something we've done or something we've not done that keeps everyone away from our Township Board meetings? Admittedly, sometimes they are "bored" meetings, but not always. Feel free to join us at the Township Hall at 7:00 pm on the second Tuesday of any month. We'd appreciate the company and enjoy hearing from you. There are opportunities during the meeting for general public comments and if there's something in particular you'd like to have on the agenda, let us know by the Thursday before the meeting.

The Township is always looking for more property owners willing to serve in various capacities, such as the Planning Commission, the Board of Review, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and others. If you are interested, please contact the Township Hall or send an e-mail to [secretary@westtraversetownship.com](mailto:secretary@westtraversetownship.com).

All of the township elected positions, supervisor, clerk, treasurer, and two trustees, are up for re-election in 2016. To be on the August 2016 primary election ballot, the required forms must be submitted to the Township Clerk in April 2016. If you are interested, contact the Township Clerk in January 2016 for the forms and the exact submission date.

### **Township Website**

Just a reminder about the Township website ([www.westtraversetownship.com](http://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  
Cynthia Fisher  
Dan Gorman  
Paul Opfermann  
Paul Repasky  
Pete Wallin

### Zoning Board of Appeals

Sam DeCamp - Chair  
Chris Baiardi  
Jim Bartlett  
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

Bob Sandford  
Most Thursdays : 9:00 am - 11:30 am  
Other times by appointment

### Planner

Larry Sullivan  
By Appointment

### Assessor

Brian Grimm  
9:00 am - 1 pm Thursday

### 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

3rd Wednesdays - 7:00 pm

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

## **From the Treasurer—Important Taxpayer Information**

The Township greatly appreciates that the majority of the 2,300 (for each of the summer and winter taxes) tax payments can be processed with no or minimal difficulty. However, there seems to be an increasing number of tax payments that require special attention. The Treasurer is asking that you read this information so your tax payment doesn't fall into that category.

- Summer property taxes will be mailed at the end of June. Winter taxes are mailed at the end of November. If you do not receive your tax bill within a reasonable time period, please contact the Township Office to verify that we have your correct mailing address and we will mail you a duplicate bill.
  - **Summer taxes are due SEPTEMBER 14, 2015.**
  - **Winter taxes are due FEBRUARY 15, 2016.**
  - After the due dates, taxes will be late and interest will be added at a rate of 1% per month beginning immediately.
  - POST MARKS will be accepted for the due date ONLY. **NO EXCEPTIONS.**
  - The Township cannot apply any over-payments to future tax bills.
  - Any UNDERPAYMENTS will be turned over to the Emmet County Treasurer on March 1<sup>st</sup> at which time additional interest and penalties will be added.
- When mailing tax payments, please make out your check to **WEST TRAVERSE TOWNSHIP** and send it to the current Township mailing address - **P.O. BOX 528**
  - The Township is NOT responsible for taxes mailed to the incorrect address.
  - The Township is NOT responsible for lost or delayed tax payments due to Postal Service errors and is not able to waive any resulting interest and penalties. **If your check does not clear in a timely manner, that's a good indication it hasn't been received.**
  - Taxes are processed promptly.
  - Receipts are not issued unless requested.
  - The Township does not accept credit card payments.
  - **Any checks that are incorrect or not signed will be returned.**
- Please review your tax bill carefully for Principal Residence Exemption (PRE), Taxable Value and Assessed Values. If you have any questions concerning these, you may contact the Township Assessor at the Township Office.
- As always, you are welcome to make your tax payment in person at the Township Office. Please note that the secretary is not able to provide change if paying in cash. Township office hours are Monday – Friday 9am – 1pm.
- If you have any questions or concerns regarding payment of your tax bill, you may contact the Treasurer by e-mail to [treasurer@westtraversetownship.com](mailto:treasurer@westtraversetownship.com) or by calling the Township Office.

## **From the Clerk**

Thanks to all those who voted in the May 5<sup>th</sup> Special Election. We had 483 voters, including those who voted absentee. Please call the Township Office if you would like to be on the Permanent Absentee Voter List. Already over 200 have requested to be placed on this list and automatically receive an application for a ballot as soon as the ballots are available for each election. Due to changes in the election law, the 2016 Presidential Primary will be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday in **March** instead of the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday in February. We hope to see you at the polls!

There are significant new regulations governing the administration of requests under the Freedom of Information Act that will become effective on July 1, 2015. The Township has complied and made the necessary changes. Anyone wishing to make a FOIA request can access the updated information on the Township website or at the Township Hall.

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## **Township Finances**

The Township continues to be in good shape financially, with healthy fund balances in all funds at the end of fiscal year 2014-15. This is the case even though expenses exceeded revenues for the General and Road Funds, the Township's property tax millage was reduced in 2014-15, and the property tax administration fee was eliminated. The summary for fiscal year 2014-15 is shown below. For those of you interested in more details, fiscal year 2014-15 is undergoing a complete audit and the results will be posted on the Township website later this summer.

Funds---->	General	Road	Thorne Swift	Cook Property	Sewer	Water
2014/15 Actual						
<b>Revenues:</b>	<b>360,170</b>	<b>232,179</b>	<b>84,575</b>	<b>8,520</b>	<b>14,184</b>	<b>84,859</b>
<b>Expenditures:</b>	<b>425,483</b>	<b>344,823</b>	<b>63,746</b>	<b>5,455</b>	<b>9,789</b>	<b>52,299</b>
<b>Revenues - Expenditures:</b>	<b>-65,313</b>	<b>-112,644</b>	<b>20,829</b>	<b>3,065</b>	<b>4,395</b>	<b>32,560</b>
<b>Ending Fund Balance</b>	<b>1,384,050</b>	<b>272,506</b>	<b>96,930</b>	<b>21,106</b>	<b>120,595</b>	<b>159,778</b>

For fiscal year 2015-16, the Township Board opted to return the Township's total property tax millage rate to 1.60 mills, what it had been for at least the seven years prior to this past year. The main reason for this is to increase the Road Fund balance in anticipation of the Lower Shore Drive slope improvement project in 2016 (see article on Lower Shore Drive). Of the 1.60 mills, the General and Road Funds will both receive 0.70 mills, with the remaining 0.20 mills going to the Thorne Swift Nature Preserve Fund. The budget summary for fiscal year 2015-16 is shown below.

Funds---->	General	Road	Thorne Swift	Cook Property	Sewer	Water
2015/16 Budget						
<b>Revenues:</b>	<b>352,663</b>	<b>221,043</b>	<b>67,418</b>	<b>8,520</b>	<b>14,050</b>	<b>88,120</b>
<b>Expenditures:</b>	<b>316,000</b>	<b>151,000</b>	<b>76,350</b>	<b>7,220</b>	<b>14,100</b>	<b>60,000</b>
<b>Revenues - Expenditures:</b>	<b>36,663</b>	<b>70,043</b>	<b>8,932</b>	<b>1,300</b>	<b>-50</b>	<b>28,120</b>
<b>Ending Fund Balance</b>	<b>1,420,713</b>	<b>343,550</b>	<b>87,998</b>	<b>22,406</b>	<b>120,545</b>	<b>187,898</b>

## **Property Tax Exemptions**

There are two ways that qualifying property owners can be exempt from paying property taxes - the poverty exemption and the disabled veteran exemption. Both exemptions must be applied for annually. For the poverty exemption, there are income guidelines depending upon the size of the family/household and an asset test that excludes the value of the principal residence and up to two vehicles. For the disabled veteran exemption, there are specific requirements that need to be met. More information on both of these exemptions is available on the Township website under the "Assessing" tab or by contacting Brian Grimm, the Township Assessor. Once applied for, these exemptions can be approved by the Township Board of Review (plus the Township Supervisor for poverty exemptions) at its March, July, or December meetings.

## **Road Projects**

As explained in the article on Lower Shore Drive, the Township Board has limited the 2015 road projects to build up the funds needed for the Lower Shore Drive slope improvement project tentatively scheduled for 2016. The 2015 projects, at a total cost of about \$100,000 are:

- Asphalt overlay on Middle Road from Birchwood west to M-119
- Wedging and asphalt overlay on Welsheimer from Heynig Road to the Township line, shared 50% with Pleasantview Township.
- Crack sealing and patching on Cemetery Road (Hughston to Pine Hill), Middle Road (Charlie's Run to Amy's Way), and Middle Road (Birchwood east to Hughston).

The beginning balance in the Road Fund for the current fiscal year is about \$273,000 and the ending balance after the above projects and the millage collected in the December 2015 taxes will be about \$400,000, due to less spending than was initially budgeted for 2015-16.

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### **Lower Shore Drive**

At about this time a year ago, it was observed that Lower Shore Drive had again incurred another slope failure, this time farther east up the hill towards M-119 than the initial failure in 2004. Northern Design Group's analysis of this recent failure confirmed that while the slope has been in a constant state of movement since the failure in 2004, the wetter than usual conditions in late 2013 through the spring of 2014 contributed to a higher level of movement than anticipated.

Working with NDG and the Road Commission, short term remedial actions included adding more drainage near the top of the hill adjacent to the current failure, repairing the asphalt where it had failed, posting a weight limit warning sign on M-119 ahead of the Lower Shore Drive intersection, using a pickup truck for snowplowing instead of the much heavier trucks, continuing to measure the slope movement, and urging Lower Shore Drive residents to adhere to the speed limit and weight limit for any traffic for which they are responsible, especially construction, delivery, maintenance, and garbage vehicles.

After this latest failure, it has become evident to the Township Board that a longer term solution is needed. Back in 2011, NDG had recommended the construction of a soldier pile and lagging wall along the slope at an estimated cost of \$500,000. After receiving two independent second opinions about this recommendation, the Township and the Road Commission have jointly commissioned NDG, at a cost of about \$12,000, to prepare a final design document that can be used to obtain bids for constructing all or part of the wall in 2016. In the meantime, the Board is limiting the number of road projects in 2015 to build up the funds to cover the cost of the wall. Even if additional funding is made available to the Road Commission, given its long list of needs, it is unlikely the Road Commission will be able to provide any financial assistance with Lower Shore Drive anytime soon.

### **Planning and Zoning**

The Planning Commission has been active the past year completing the update of the Township's Master Plan (available on the Township website under Master and Recreation Plans) and working on amendments to the Zoning Ordinance primarily for fences, accessory buildings, the definition of setback line, and the rear setback for the C-1 Commercial District (available on the Township website under Township Zoning when they are approved).

You may have noticed that the Township has a new planner. Mary Campbell, after serving as contract planner for about two years, is retiring effective July 1, 2015. The Township has now contracted with Larry Sullivan to be the new contract Planner/Zoning Consultant. Larry brings with him considerable planning experience, having been the Charlevoix County Planner for over 30 years, in addition to working with various townships.

The combined County and Township zoning permit activity for 2014 remained at the same level as 2013, with a total of 40 permits: new residential construction- 7; residential additions - 12; residential accessory buildings - 8; new commercial - 2; commercial additions - 1; commercial accessory buildings - 3; signs - 5 and other - 2 (home occupation and internet tower).

### **Recreation/Thorne Swift Committee**

Your attention is directed to the enclosed Thorne Swift Nature Preserve brochure, which includes general information about the Preserve and a listing of this summer's programs and hikes.

In the Township '80' park on Ridge and Griffen Roads, you will notice that many trees affected with the beech blight disease and Emerald Ash Borers have been felled along the Hunters Trail to eliminate the danger of them falling unexpectedly. Trail maps are available at trail intersections and also on the Township website. It's anticipated that more trails will be cleared by early summer.

### **Library Services**

The Township still has an agreement with the Alanson Area Public Library to provide library services at no cost to all Township residents. In addition, the Petoskey District Library rescinded its previous action of discontinuing non-resident library cards. Any person outside its contractual boundaries, which includes our Township, is now eligible again to purchase a non-resident card for a fee of \$25 for 3 months or \$95 per year.

### **Birchwood Medical First Responders**

It may sound like a broken record, but a hearty thank you is again extended to Birchwood Farms Security & Emergency Medical Services for voluntarily providing medical first responder services throughout the Township. Of the total of 135 medical runs in 2014, 82 of them (61%) 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.