



WATERTOWN

CHARTER TOWNSHIP

Volume 34 Issue 1

Winter 2020

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Office Hours:
Monday - Friday
9am - 5pm

**Township Offices
Closed:**

**Monday, February 17
Friday, April 10
Monday, May 25**

**PROPERTY TAXES DUE
5pm, February 14**

STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP

JOHN MAAHS, TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR | JENNIFER TUBBS, TOWNSHIP MANAGER
DONNA CASE, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

The Watertown Township board has provided its residents with a 2020 balanced budget that is fiscally responsible and meets the community's needs. The township has taken the necessary steps to ensure that programs and services continue at their current levels.

Although the economy in the private sector has improved, public sector funding has not kept pace, and costs for the services the township provides have increased at an alarming rate. Watertown Township has no special millages and operates all services out of the general fund. The township adjusted to the lower tax revenues caused by falling taxable values, millage rollbacks, and tax tribunal reductions by reducing staff and spending, and by being fiscally conservative throughout the last decade. This allowed the township to navigate the recession. However, township millage reductions and reduction in taxable values have made it difficult to sustain the substantial increase in costs for fire service and road repairs.

Residents often question how much of their tax dollars stay within the township. Consider this example: A home worth approximately \$150,000 with a taxable value of approximately \$75,000 has a total tax bill of approximately \$2,445. Of this amount, only \$340 of those tax dollars are paid to the township for township services and operations.

The 2020 Looking Glass Regional Fire Authority operating budget is \$549,604, of which Watertown Township is responsible for 62% (the township shares this service with Eagle Township, which is responsible for the other 38%). In addition, there are capital expense costs which are estimated to be \$115,000 in 2020, of which Watertown Township pays 65%. The total \$665,104 budget for 2020 for the Looking Glass Regional Fire Authority reflects a savings from a firefighter staffing grant. The grant expires in 2021 and the full cost of operations from that point forward will have to be paid by Eagle and Watertown townships.

State of the Township Continued on Page 4

WATERTOWN TOWNSHIP FIRE SERVICES

HOLLY MADILL, TOWNSHIP TRUSTEE

The township's last newsletter touched on a few reasons why 2019 was the first time there was a need to use reserve funds to cover a gap in the township budget. One of the reasons relates to fire and ambulance service. This article explains the circumstances more fully.

Currently, Watertown Charter Township supplies fire and ambulance service through the Looking Glass Regional Fire Authority. Prior to 2001, the township provided fire service only through a contract with the Grand Ledge Fire Department. The Looking Glass Regional Fire Authority (LGRFA) was created in 2001 to service Watertown and Eagle Townships through a fire department that relied in large part on part-time firefighters. Watertown Charter Township is a 65% owner of the Looking Glass Regional Fire Authority, which means that the township is responsible for 65% of the costs of the building and equipment. The township also pays for yearly operations based on an average number of run calls, which is currently 62% of operation costs.

Around 2010, costs for operation and legacy costs began to increase exponentially, and it was beginning to become difficult to find qualified part-time firefighters. As a result of rising costs and a changing workforce, the LGRFA looked for options to provide service as good as or better than what the township had been receiving.

In order to control costs and provide highly skilled staffing, the best option was for LGRFA to contract with Delta Township to staff the fire station. Delta Township provides an Advanced Life Support Ambulance (one of the few on duty in the county) to the LGRFA service area. Prior to this arrangement, ambulance service was provided to township residents through Mercy Ambulance.

While Delta Township staffed LGRFA with as many part-time firefighters as possible, and extended those savings to LGRFA, Delta Township is also experiencing a firefighter shortage, and has found it both time consuming and extremely difficult to staff qualified part-time firefighters. To remedy this, Delta Township applied for and received a Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, or "SAFER" grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2016. The SAFER grant covered the cost of six full-time firefighters for four years and Delta Township shared those grant funds with the LGRFA. While the grant was helpful in covering the costs of some firefighters for the first few years, its support tapers off and will end in 2021.

There is a statewide staffing crisis for fire personnel. In just two communities in this area there are over 20 unfilled positions. Currently, there are only 12 students in the Paramedic program at Lansing Community College. Even if all the students passed their paramedic exam and took local jobs, that would still leave eight positions open. Delta Township alone currently has six open positions which they have tried to fill and are having the same issue as others finding qualified candidates.

Including all types of service calls, the LGRFA is averaging more than 1,000 runs a year. The majority of fire department calls are actually not for fires, but are for ambulance service.

Although Watertown Township has received a significant savings in operation expenses since the LGRFA began contracting with Delta Township, with the grant running out and the everyday costs for service increasing in 2021, Watertown Township will either have to seek alternate funding sources or service cuts will have to be made.

UPCOMING ELECTION INFORMATION

DEB ADAMS, TOWNSHIP CLERK | CHRISTY SOCHAY, DEPUTY CLERK

The March 10, 2020, Presidential Primary has been designated a "**closed primary**," just as it was in 2012 and 2016. Per Michigan election law, voters in closed primaries **must** choose a party (democratic or republican) ballot that they wish to vote. The ballot given to voters only shows the party candidates that correspond to their choice. A voter may also choose to receive a No-Presidential Primary ballot, to vote on local issues only. A voter can only receive one ballot.

While a voter must select a specific ballot for a closed primary, there is no political party registration in Michigan's voter registration system. Per Michigan law, the voter's *ballot selection* is public information for the 22 months following the election. A specific party ballot is not used in other types of elections, although in the August primary, a voter may still only vote for candidates from one party even though both parties show on the same ballot. Only in the November general election can a voter split votes between parties.

If you are one of the many people on our permanent absent voter list, you have probably already received your application for a ballot. Notice that the application allows the option to request a ballot for the November 2020 general election. Please return your application to our office as soon as possible and we will mail your ballot to you for voting when it becomes available. The envelopes are different this year, and look like this:

Watch for your ballot in the mail; and return your voted ballot to our office no later than 8pm on Election Day, March 10, 2020. If you would like to be added to our permanent absent voter list and automatically receive an absent voter application before every election, please contact Deb Adams at Dadams@WatertownTownship.com or Christy Sochay at CSochay@WatertownTownship.com, or call our office at (517) 626-6593.

IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MAILING AND REGISTERED ADDRESSES:

By default, election-related material is mailed to a voters' registered address; the home where you live. However, some people choose to direct their mail to a separate mailing address. If you previously provided a separate, permanent mailing address to the clerk's office or the Secretary of State, please be sure to keep it up to date. Absent voter ballot applications and other election communication will be sent to your *mailing address* on file; an out-of-date mailing address may prevent you from promptly receiving your material and it will not be removed or changed without notification from you. Contact our office to update your mailing address, if necessary.

By law, **ballots** will be mailed to your *registered address*, unless you request otherwise in writing. If you use a separate mailing address and would like your ballot sent to that address, you must indicate that in the space provided on the absent voter ballot application; otherwise, your ballot will automatically be mailed to your registered address, even if a mailing address is on file.



STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

For demonstration purposes, using the 2020 budget for Watertown Township of \$448,480 for fire department operations and anticipated capital expenses and dividing it by the township 2010 census population of 4,836 people, that amounts to \$93 per resident. If the township receives, on average, \$340 per household from taxes, a typical household of four costs \$372, which is \$32 more per household for fire service than what is received in tax dollars ($4 \times \$93 = \372). This may not seem like much of a difference, but it does not include any other township services and, annually, it has a great impact.

In addition to fire service, the township funds programs and services such as road resurfacing, graveling and chloriding; election administration; assessing; property tax collection; cemetery maintenance; the recycling center maintenance; planning and zoning; community events; parks; economic development; general administration; facility maintenance; grant writing and management; and many other general services. Residents are often surprised to find out that nearly all road maintenance on all local roads are paid for by the township.

The township board continues to prioritize fiscal responsibility and a balanced annual budget. The township is able to continue services without interruption because the board has made thoughtful decisions to save funds in advance for unforeseen events and future projects. As a result, Watertown Township has been able to maintain services while having the lowest tax rate among the cities and the charter townships in Clinton County and the surrounding area. In fact, Watertown Township is the only community in the surrounding area that has no extra millage for fire, police, or roads. However, unless the legislature addresses Proposal A, or restores the revenue sharing that was cut from local governments, it will become impossible to sustain services at current levels without alternate forms of revenue.

SAVE THE DATE...

DUMP YOUR JUNK DAY
SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2020
8AM - 12PM*

- *or until the bins are full
- Watertown Township residents only
- Check the township website and future newsletter for more information

TOWNSHIP EASTER EGG HUNT



Wednesday, March 25 - 6pm

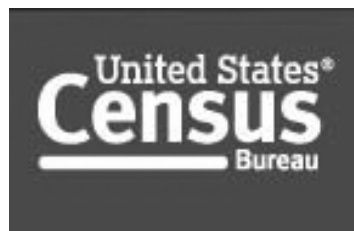
Watertown Township is sponsoring an Easter Egg Hunt on Wednesday, March 25, 2020. Don't be late! The "hunt" begins at 6pm SHARP behind the township hall, located at 12803 S. Wacousta Road, Grand Ledge. Bring a basket or bag to collect the surprise-filled eggs. The Wallace Watt Community Center (gym) will not be open. Contact Donna Case at (517) 626-6593 ext. 207 with any questions.

THE 2020 CENSUS IS COMING

Your participation in the 2020 U.S. Census is critical. This once a decade population count affects your representation in government by accurately determining how many representatives each state has in Congress. It determines how much funding local governments may receive, and it provides data to help plan for the future and to ensure services like Medicare, Medicaid, social security, and public transportation can support those who need them.

By April 1, 2020, every home will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. You can respond online or by phone. A paper questionnaire will be mailed to every household that has not yet responded giving an opportunity to mail in your responses.

For questions or more information please visit 2020census.gov.



TOWNSHIP CONTACTS (517) 626-6593

Please listen to the prompts to select an extension.

www.WatertownTownship.com

TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR

John Maahs - Cell (517) 242-6336
johnny@tir.com

TOWNSHIP TRUSTEES

Chad Cooley - Work (517) 819-4980
lookingglasscyclery@gmail.com
Todd Hufnagel - Work (517) 626-2200
hufnagelauto@gmail.com
Holly Madill - madilltwp@gmail.com
Ronald Overton - Home (517) 626-6447
overtonron@wowway.com

TOWNSHIP MANAGER

EXT *207

Jennifer Tubbs, Township Manager
jtubbs@watertowntownship.com
Donna Case, Administrative Assistant
dcase@watertowntownship.com
Questions concerning special assessments, sewers, roads, non-zoning ordinance enforcement, sewer and water permits, park/pavilion rental

OFFICE OF THE TREASURER

EXT *206

Janice Thelen, Township Treasurer
jthelen@watertowntownship.com
Melanie Wright, Deputy Treasurer
mwright@watertowntownship.com
Lisa Winans, Treasurer's Assistant
lwinans@watertowntownship.com
Questions concerning tax bills, special assessments

LOOKING GLASS REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY

(517) 627-9831
Fax (517) 627-9846
Questions concerning fire coverage districts, burn permits

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

EXT *201

Deb Adams, Township Clerk
dadams@watertowntownship.com
Christy Sochay, Deputy Clerk
csochay@watertowntownship.com
Susan Hunter, Bookkeeper
Questions concerning the cemetery, Freedom of Information Act, elections, meeting dates, voter registration, township records, accounts payable

CEMETERY

Weekdays (517) 626-6593 or (517) 626-6066
Andy Case, Maintenance Supervisor/Sexton (517) 490-1383

PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE

EXT *205

Andrea Polverento, Planning Director
apolverento@watertowntownship.com
Melanie Wright, Planning and Zoning Assistant
mwright@watertowntownship.com
Lisa Winans, Planning and Zoning Assistant
lwinans@watertowntownship.com
Questions concerning building/zoning/trade permits, zoning requirements, zoning & subdivision ordinances, Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Commission

ASSESSOR

EXT *210

Jeff MacKenzie, Assessor
jmackenzie@watertowntownship.com
Jill Schliep, Assistant
Office hours: 9am - 5pm on Monday, Thursday, and Friday
Questions concerning assessing, SEV's, property listings, property splits

BUILDING DEPARTMENT

Jeff Cranson, Building Inspector
Phone (517) 622-8822 Fax (517) 622-8833