



charter township
oshtemo
est. 1839

NEWSLETTER

*To advance the quality of life of all residents through a commitment to responsible growth, and value-driven municipal services that promote the relationships among economic vitality, environmental stewardship, and social equity.
(Adopted 2/14/2017)*

TOWNSHIP BOARD

Supervisor

Libby Heiny-Cogswell
libbyhc@oshtemo.org

Clerk

Dusty Farmer
dfarmer@oshtemo.org

Treasurer

Clare Buszka
cbuszka@oshtemo.org

Trustees

Cheri Bell
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Kizzy Bradford

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Kristin Cole

kcole@oshtemo.org

Zak Ford

zford@oshtemo.org

**Need a safe
place to
exchange
online
purchases?**



The Township Hall
is safe and secure
and open
M-Thur 8am-5pm
and
Fri 8am-1pm
(Check website for
changes in office hours)

Capital Improvement Bond for Sewer/Roads Fails



On November 3rd, Oshtemo voters rejected the Township's notice of intent to issue capital improvement bonds (not to exceed \$10 million) to extend public sanitary sewers and make related roadway improvements within select older neighborhoods of the Township.

Phase I included seven (7) principal subdivisions: Allenwood, Burgundy Manor, Fairlane, Pioneer Acres, Skyridge Plat, and Whitegate Farms 1&2. The Board had secured a federally guaranteed maximum loan rate of 2.375% through the selling of municipal bonds. The funding would come from a competitive loan application submitted to USDA Rural Development in 2017. The loan was being finalized (at an even lower rate of 1.125%) when a citizen's right of referendum petition was filed last summer. The Township is now notifying the Agency that the sewer expansion and road improvements have been cancelled, and that the obligated federal funds can be released.

Township Department Information

Assessor Kristine Biddle
216-5225 assessor@oshtemo.org

Fire Chief Mark Barnes
375-0487 mbarnes@oshtemo.org

Ordinance Officer Rick Suwarsky
216-5227 rsuwarsky@oshtemo.org

Parks Director Karen High
216-5233 khigh@oshtemo.org (Rentals: 375-4260)

Planning Director Iris Lubbert
216-5223 ilubbert@oshtemo.org

Public Works Director Marc Elliott
216-5236 mellott@oshtemo.org



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From Clerk Dusty Farmer—

What an election year! My office successfully conducted 4 elections in 2020, 3 of which were in the middle of the COVID pandemic. This year presented a number of challenges for my staff and election workers, but they pushed through as dedicated community leaders. Thank you to all staff and election workers for your hard work and dedication in providing safe and secure elections for Oshtemo.

We will likely have an election in May and another in November for local millage requests. I will share more information as I receive it.

I would like to welcome our newly elected Board members, Treasurer Clare Buszka, Trustee Kizzy Bradford, Trustee Kristin Cole, and Trustee Cheri Bell (appointed mid-term). Running for office is as important as it is difficult, and the real work begins now. I look forward to working together to continue making Oshtemo a great community.

As we wrap up 2020 and look to 2021, we have lots to look forward to accomplishing. 2020 has been extremely difficult for many people. While many of us stay isolated in our personal bubbles, remember to reach out to your neighbors and friends who might be struggling. We can continue working through this together until we come out on the other side.



From Treasurer Clare Buszka—

The Treasurer's Office is pleased to announce the launch of a new electronic billing and payment service through Invoice Cloud, offering customers greater flexibility to view and pay Summer and Winter tax bills. The new service also enables customers to make a payment by phone 24/7 and Pay by Text. Visit www.oshtemo.org or call 844-956-1371.

This new service provides customers with quick access to view bills, check balances, and make payments, which is a new option. Features include an "at a glance" dashboard, scheduling one-time or automatic payments, securely storing payment information, and receiving email and text (optional) reminders.

Creating an account is recommended to access all the features, but is not required to view and pay bills.



From Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell—

With sincere appreciation, the Board thanked departing Members in November. Treasurer Grant Taylor began working at the City of Portage, Trustee Ken Hudok is focusing on his executive career for Jackson Insurance Company, and Deb Everett retired, welcoming her fourth grandchild in December. Deb's career at the Township began in 1988. She worked tirelessly on behalf of the Oshtemo community. Colten Hutson left his position as Technical Specialist in Public Works but remains with the Township in Planning as the Zoning Administrator. HR Specialist Ed Hellwege also retired in November. Gratitude is extended for his dedicated work.

Actions taken this Fall include:

- Added three contracted County Sheriff police deputies to the four-year police protection agreement.*
- Upgraded plowing equipment for maintenance personnel to clear fire stations and Township properties for the predicted colder, and perhaps snowier, winter ahead.*
- Constructed several of the award-winning GO! Green Oshtemo Master Plan projects, sidewalk and path projects along Stadium Drive and Drake Road.*
- Conducted Public Hearings on the 2021 annual budget components in November, followed by budget adoption. All is available on the website.*
- Reached a two-year collective bargaining agreement between the Township and the full-time Oshtemo Professional Fire Fighters Local 5240.*
- Welcomed three new Township Board members elected November 3rd—Trustees Kristin Cole and Kizzy Bradford, and Treasurer Clare Buszka. Of note, Ms. Bradford is the first Black representative elected to the Township Board.*
- Stopped the sewer expansion projects in the specified older neighborhoods following the bond referendum failure.*
- Hired Sara Feister, an HR professional and WMU graduate, following retirements. We value her enthusiasm and expertise. Also welcomed is Anna Horner, PE, Deputy Director of Public Works. Ric Kienbaum filled the position of IT Coordinator, and Emily Westervelt joined the Township in the legal department, allowing overlap until the pending 2021 retirement of long-time paralegal Kathy Barnes.*

Please don't hesitate to contact me, department staff, or elected officials, with your questions or comments. The Supervisor will conduct a virtual 'Open Office Hours' on Monday January 18th, 3-5 pm. This will be held via a Zoom meeting (Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83630132939>). Or call 216-5220 to set up appointment anytime.

We wish everyone health and fortitude this Holiday Season, and the best in the 2021 New Year!

New Signs for Disc Golf Course at Oshtemo Township Park



The popular disc golf course at Oshtemo Township Park now features new signs. Two signs are posted at each of the 18 fairways in the course, one at the short tee pad (orange signs) and one at the long tee pad (green signs). The signs show the layout of the fairway and the distance from the tee pad to the basket, with an arrow pointing to the next tee pad.

Special thanks go to local disc golf enthusiast Larry LaBond for sharing his expertise to ensure the signs are accurate and user friendly. Our thanks also go to Larry and disc golf volunteers who installed the signs, digging 36 holes, setting 36 posts and attaching 36 signs! We appreciate their efforts and the savings they bring to the Township. The signs were designed by Kalamazoo graphic designer Bonnie Pfingst and fabricated by Kal-Blue. The project was funded by Oshtemo Township.



Story Walk at Oshtemo Township Park



Recent visitors to Oshtemo Township Park may have noticed colorful laminated pages posted along the loop trail between Township Hall and the Kalamazoo Public Library (KPL). The pages create a 'Story Walk' – a fun way for children — and adults! — to enjoy reading and the outdoors at the same time. The project is a partnership between KPL and Oshtemo Friends of the Parks. Through December, the featured story is Eric Carle's "From Head to Toe". "The Snowy Day" will be featured in January and February. Take a walk in the park and check it out!

Enjoy Oshtemo's Parks ... All Winter Long

Our parks are busier than ever! We're pleased to provide safe outdoor spaces to have fun, exercise, connect with nature, and gather safely during the pandemic. We hope you'll continue to get outdoors and enjoy our parks all winter long, whatever the weather. **New this year:** we will clear the snow from the paved path at Oshtemo Township Park (behind the Township Hall at 7275 West Main Street) to offer a place for walking outside. As in previous years, the wood chipped paths will be available for snow shoeing or cross-country skiing. Clearing the path will be a lower priority than other areas cleared by the Township and will depend in part on the amount and frequency of snow fall. (Oshtemo Township does not plow roads. We clear sidewalks, driveways and parking lots at the Fire Stations and other Township properties.) Though the park restrooms will be closed for the season, a portable toilet will be available at both Township Park and Flesher Field.

Parks Q & A: Was KL Landfill Property Recently Sold?

Kalamazoo County recently sold a 57-acre parcel of land located at 8443 West KL Avenue, across the road from the landfill. The County purchased the property many years ago as a source of fill for the landfill cap project, though it was never used for this purpose. The Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners voted to sell the property to the high bidder, a private buyer, in September. Some residents may have heard that Oshtemo Township and the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) partnered in an attempt to purchase the land for public recreation and conservation purposes. The land was particularly desirable because it adjoins SWMLC's 70-acre Wolf Tree Nature Trails Preserve and would have created a 127-acre publicly accessible preserve. State grant funds for park land acquisition were the planned funding source, with the grant match from private donors. We are disappointed that the County did not accept our offer and the land will not be preserved or made available to the public. None of the landfill itself has been sold.

Public Works

South 8th Street Reopens

Higher than normal rainfall has raised many lake levels, including the Great Lakes. The wetland adjacent to 8th St, between ML and KL Avenues raised significantly in 2018 and flooded the road, causing it to be closed. Following months of observation in the hopes that this local flooding would subside, the Township Board elected to contract the Road Commission of Kalamazoo County to raise the road so that it could be reopened. The presence of the wetlands made Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) permitting a requirement. The construction technique proposed by RCKC was selected as a cost efficient, timely means to minimize wetland impacts. EGLE permitted the work but added a provision that a new conduit/pathway be included to provide a native species of concern a safe means to travel between the bisected wetland.



Sidewalk and Pathway Projects

Several 2020 projects moved the Township toward its "Go-Green" goals of a bike-friendly and walkable-community. The first is a Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study (KATS) grant which supported the construction of a Stadium Drive sidewalk. This project has an east starting point of the existing pedestrian facilities at 11th St and the sidewalk over MDOT's bridge at US 131. From here a new sidewalk was extended westerly to Quail Run Drive and a short extent beyond. The current sidewalk ends at the east boundary of the Oshtemo Downtown Development Authority. The DDA plans to complete the north-side extension of the sidewalk in 2021, and thereby complete a new pedestrian facility through to the 8th St. intersection along Stadium Dr.



Perhaps the most notable accomplishment is the non-motorized connector installed along Drake Road, between KL Avenue and West Main Street. Two Township grant-supported contracts were underway this year to bring this facility to fruition, a "Safety" and a "Transportation Alternative" project. The entire corridor included a third project to coordinate—a Road Commission paving project. The multiple authorities, topographic challenges, and a fully developed corridor in a complex urban landscape created many challenges. Additionally, all parties faced the real-time challenge of navigating evolving Covid-19 safety requirements. A third Drake Road segment (Stadium Dr to KL Ave) is now scheduled for 2023, with expectations that Oshtemo will receive Amtrak's permission to allow this non-motorized facility to cross their high-speed rail line.

Spotlight - Development in Oshtemo

We are excited to share that a number of development projects have been submitted to and approved by the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals in 2019 and 2020. Some of these approved projects are already in place, some are under development, and others have yet to break ground. Summaries of four such development projects that are coming soon are highlighted below. Stay tuned for the 2020 Planning Department Annual Report, released in the Spring, for a complete list of development projects reviewed this year.

Hampton Manor Assisted Living Center – A new 51,680 square foot senior assisted living facility is planned at the northeast corner of Lexy Lane and North 9th Street. This project was approved at the May 23rd, 2019 Planning Commission meeting.

New Medical Office Building – A new 18,500 square foot medical office building is planned for the northwest corner of Stadium Drive and South 11th Street. This project was approved at the March 24th, 2020 Zoning Board of Appeals meeting.

Arbor Financial Credit Union - Located at the southeast corner of S 9th Street and Quail Run Drive, the Arbor Financial Credit Union's headquarters will be constructing a 24,000 square foot addition and building a new 5,128 square foot standalone member service branch south of the existing facility. This project was approved at the April 30th, 2020 Planning Commission meeting.

Jiffy Lube - A 3,020 square foot new Jiffy Lube vehicle service facility is planned to be constructed just north of the existing Meijer Gas Station within the Meijer parking lot at 6660 W Main Street. This project was approved at the July 30th, 2020 Planning Commission meeting.

The Planning Commission typically meets the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month. The Zoning Board of Appeals typically meets the 4th Tuesday of the month. Their agenda packets, including staff reports with details on any of the above projects, and meeting minutes can be found on the Township's website. If you have any questions about these developments or others in Oshtemo please don't hesitate to contact the Oshtemo Planning Department at 269-216-5223 or ilubbert@oshtemo.org.

Fire Department—

Maintaining a mission driven, safe and efficient fleet designed to meet the needs of our residents continues to be a priority of our department and the Township. Our 25-year vehicle refurbishment and replacement schedule had targeted replacement of our two 2008 GMC Yukons in 2017 but we were able to cautiously push them three more years to 2020. With 100,000 + miles, it became time to secure the replacements.

The vehicles are special service, heavy duty Ford Explorers designed for emergency response. They are slightly smaller than the previous Yukons but with a bit of engineering, we were able to insert the necessary equipment to meet Michigan's requirements for an EMS vehicle and include a few basic needs for firefighting.

They are used daily in place of full-sized fire engines when responding to medical events. As we approach a projection of just over 2,000 medical responses in 2020, utilization of these significantly saves wear and fuel costs for the large trucks. In addition, they provide a quicker arrival time and afford easier access when traversing long driveways and crowded parking lots.



Is Your Streetlight Out?

Streetlight issues, included outages or repairs, can be reported directly to Consumers Energy by visiting:
www.consumersenergy.com/outages/street-light

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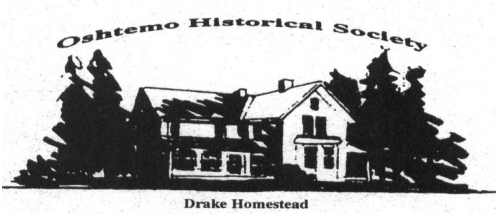
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OSHTEMO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Visit our website for more information.
www.oshtemohistoricalsociety.org

We invite you to join us to learn about local history. Our programs are free and you do not need to be a member to attend. We meet at the Oshtemo Township Hall, 7275 W. Main St, unless otherwise stated.

**NOTE: PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE
DUE TO COVID-19 CONCERNS.
WE ARE HOPEFUL TO BE ABLE TO MEET SOON.**

Happy Holidays and be safe.

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