



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

Grant Taylor
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Trustees

Cheri Bell
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Deb Everett

deverett@oshtemo.org

Zak Ford

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Ken Hudok

khudok@oshtemo.org

2019 Dump Days

Proof of Residency Required

Township Hall
7275 West Main St.
9 AM – 3 PM

November 23—LAST DAY

Leaf Drop Off

November 9 and 23

Township Office Closed

November 11—Veteran's Day

November 28 and 29—Thanksgiving

December 24 and 25—Christmas

New Fire Department Administrative Assistant Celebrated By All



Melissa Rugg joined the Oshtemo Fire Department as a part-time Administrative Assistant in August. She grew up in Three Rivers, Michigan and currently lives in Scotts with her husband, Chris. Having over 20 years of office experience, she brings administrative skills, human resource experience and a strong background in customer service to the Oshtemo Fire Department.

Melissa is also a yoga teacher, co-owner of a cleaning business called Sister Suds, and works one day a week at the Greater Kalamazoo Auto Auction.

Melissa loves spending time with her husband, family and friends. On her downtime she enjoys reading and practicing yoga.

Welcome, Melissa!

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 melliott@oshtemo.org



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From Clerk Dusty Farmer—

The Clerk's Office has been busy with election activity in preparation of November's election and beyond. Next year will be a much busier election year and we are making sure to stay up to date in training and education. You can also stay up to date by checking our elections page on the Township website: www.oshtemo.org/elections-information/ to see the current election cycle information and view past results. As we begin to wrap up the year and prepare for 2020, I want to remind residents that they should ask to be on the permanent absentee voting list and vote from home next year. No reason to miss an election!

In other news, some residents may have heard that the Board took action to dissolve the West Main Corridor Improvement Authority. This was a long-term project that would have helped fund safety improvements along West Main between Drake Rd and the Township Hall, but there was little support from the County Commission to move forward. This is disappointing in many ways, most of which is the lack of vision from County leaders to understand that high traffic corridors in Oshtemo (or anywhere) are the responsibility of the entire community. West Main intersections in Oshtemo are the most dangerous in Kalamazoo County and some of the most dangerous in the State of Michigan.

Special thanks to County Commissioners Christine Morse, Tracy Hall, and John Gissler for understanding that regional issues require regional solutions and deciding to vote for County involvement. Moving forward, as we continue to work toward improving the safety of this corridor for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers, I hope leaders coming onto the Boards and Commissions across the county work together as a community to provide real solutions for all County residents.



From Treasurer Grant Taylor—

The Treasurer's Office is currently working on cleaning up the delinquent taxes on personal property. When I took this position, I noticed there was a lot of outstanding delinquent personal property tax. Businesses, and people with buildings on leased land, sometimes forget or overlook their taxes on personal property. Property within the business or attached to a manufactured home has an assessed value and a tax is levied on that value. I found a lot of this delinquent tax was on manufactured home communities. I sent out delinquent tax notices and was shocked at how much of the tax was from former owners because the debt follows the structure, not the person. How could someone take on a large property tax debt from a previous owner and not be notified of the transfer? I immediately contacted the Kalamazoo County Treasurer's Association and the Michigan Municipal Treasurer's Association, along with State Senator Sean McCann to find out how we can change the state law that creates this delinquency mess. In the meantime, I have decided that I will only be collecting delinquent taxes of current owners. If a property owner provides proof of ownership date, I will prorate any tax due for personal property. I will not unjustly collect tax from someone who did not incur it or owe it. Please be assured that I am working diligently to correct this problem in our legislative system that I believe to be broken.

We are also preparing for our larger of two tax bills, the winter tax bill. Our office is in the beginning stages of auditing and preparing the winter tax bill to ensure accuracy. Look for your winter tax bill to be mailed out the first week of December. Winter taxes are due by February 14th of 2020.



From Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell—

The forecast is for a warmer than usual winter. Hopefully snow is NOT falling as you read this newsletter!

Supervisor's Office and other efforts in recent months include:

The Township received the Michigan Association of Planning state-wide 2019 Environmental Planning Award for the GO! Green Oshtemo Master Plan update. (Plan available on the website). The next challenge is to take steps to implement.

The draft 2020 Budget is complete. The Township Board will hold a public hearing and consider adoption at the November 12th meeting.

The Township Board adopted the six-year Capital Improvement Plan in September. (Also available on the Township website).

In September full time firefighters formed the Oshtemo Professional Fire Fighters Local 5240.

Due to the delay caused by utility conflicts, the Township will finish the Drake sidewalk from West Main to Green Meadow in 2020. And given a recent MDOT decision on phasing, the path from Green Meadow to KL Ave will also be built.

Unfortunately, due to lack of County participation, the West Main Corridor Improvement Authority was disbanded in October. Transportation safety goals remain, however funding is a big hurdle.

HR recruited a new Planning Director, Iris Lubbert, and Assistant to the Supervisor, Josh Owens. Both begin work at the Township in November. Recruitment for IT is ongoing.

What is upcoming?

The Township is participating in a local 2020 Census "Complete Count Committee", working with the County and Census Bureau and other municipalities.

Streetlight conversions to LED lighting in the Stadium Dr corridor have begun.

The Supervisor and others continue to field questions concerning the sewer expansion. Additional "Frequently Asked Questions" are in the works to add to the FAQs for the sewer expansion project. <https://www.oshtemo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-8-3-Sanitary-Sewer-FAQs.pdf>

I've communicated directly with some residents, but this newsletter has a broader reach. The sewer expansion was in the works since the 2010 first draft of the sanitary strategic plan. The Township faced tough decisions over those ten years, made at public meetings and conveyed through newsletter updates, etc. To the Supervisor the effort seems like a very long haul, but I understand that it only becomes real when an individual receives a connection notice letter.

The Supervisor lives in the Westport neighborhood, which is part of the Phase II USDA sewer expansion. Thus I am in the same boat when the Phase 2 expansion is constructed in two years. My own inclination is to take the mortgage the Township offers, and then negotiate any remaining balance with a buyer if I sell my home. I am aware of homebuyers in the area doing similar, negotiating the sale price down to cover part of the connection cost. This has already been going on completely outside of Township notices, due to banks and lenders often requiring sewer hookups at the time of home sale. In the biggest picture, the public sewer will be less expensive vs the cost of replacing septic systems operating at varying degrees of functionality, tearing up yard landscapes, rebuilding the neighborhood roads, etc. Some homes have replaced septic systems twice, and are out of room. The Township could not extend sewer only on an emergency basis, as individual homes face septic failure. The Board took the long view.

Please stop in during the next Supervisor Open Office hours—Monday December 2nd, 3-5 pm, or call 216-5220 to set up appointment.

Sewer Expansion

Second USDA Loan Application Approved!

In September the United States Department of Agriculture offered "Phase 2" loan financing of Oshtemo's long-planned, neighborhood sanitary sewer extensions. This culminates a long and hard search by Township Officials to provide favorable project financing for affected homeowners. The loan offer is \$19.48 million over 40-years at 2.125% interest. This complements the USDA's July 2018 offer of \$8.35 million for Phase 1 (40-years at 2.375%). The Michigan office of USDA's Rural Development program requested Oshtemo undertake its sewer project in two phases, and thereby spread the agency's obligation of federal dollars over two budget years. The Phase 1 loan agreement will be finalized this fall, and the construction work should go out to bid in December. For both phases, property owners can self-finance their sewer connection fees, or elect an installment payment plan financed by the Township. The Oshtemo Board will offer financing terms derived from the interest rate resulting from the USDA's actual sale of bonds. The USDA guarantee assures homeowners will receive benefits roughly twice that of the financing currently available. With the federal subsidy, the Township will be able to offer a rate between 3.1% and 3.7% (vs. 6.5% currently). The loan period (40-years) will also be matched. (Current policy is a 20-year maximum, with interest rate set annually at the January 1 prime rate plus 1%.)

Environmental Benefits.

A rule-of-thumb is that homeowners consume 250 gallons of water per day. Most home-use passes through the septic system. Large solids will drop-out into the septic tank, where anaerobic activity continues to break-down waste into smaller particles. We learn in school that water is an efficient, universal solvent. Therefore, about 250 gallons of water are daily washing through the collected wastes, carrying into the surrounding soils all dissolved solids and many smaller suspended particles. Within dense communities this is both an environmental and a public health risk. The County Health Department estimates that 59.1% of the septic systems in our project neighborhoods are out of compliance. The concern is also regional because all drinking water in Kalamazoo County comes from groundwater wells. Do any of us really know what is being flushed through these systems and into the soil? In contrast, public wastewater treatment plants are constantly monitored and tested. Additionally, many older homes have well established landscaping, mature trees, and other long-tended private property aesthetic improvements. It is not uncommon for septic system repairs to require significant removal of such features.

Respite for Older Neighborhoods.

For the past 7-years the Township Board has wrestled with the need to extend public sewer into older neighborhoods. The Board is committed to keeping homeowner costs to a minimum. Many options were explored in pursuit of lowering homeowner costs. Oshtemo retained the services of a leading Michigan municipal finance advisor, Bendzinski & Co., to develop a schedule of connection fees, debt service and financial coverage. This has been submitted to USDA to demonstrate the

Township's financial capacity to repay the loan. The schedule includes an annual contribution of \$250,000 out of general funds. This contribution lowers debt service costs to homeowners, and is consistent with Oshtemo's policy change to use general funds for roadway restoration. Prior to this change, roadway reconstruction was financed through special assessment districts (SAD). Therefore, rather than spread the full sewer project costs onto the benefiting properties, the Township is providing a supplemental contribution in deference to its new roadway policy. This contribution is further justified because many streets in the sewer project area are in need of reconstruction, regardless of the new sewer extensions.

Traditional Sewer Financing vs. Oshtemo's Creative Solution.

Townships commonly finance public sewers through creation of a special assessment district. Once a need is established, the project cost can be fully assessed onto the benefiting properties. Oshtemo has created a half-dozen sewer SAD's—the most recent being 27 years ago. SAD amounts are assessed regardless of whether the property is developed or not. In recent years, the Township has used what could be called a "build-it-and-they-will-come" strategy. A major benefit is that developers are required to include, in their project, sewer extensions at private cost. When completed by developers, these public sewer extensions become Township-owned, public infrastructure assets. In lieu of traditional SAD financing, the Township adopted a utility ordinance as an alternate means to fund new sewer infrastructure. The needed revenue is collected as a utility "connection" fee. Additionally, the mandatory connection requirement provides for these costs to be collected only if the property is developed. (An assumed fifteen-year life expectancy for new septic systems can defer mandatory sewer connections for up to 15 years.)

A Decade's Reflection.

Faithful followers of local government will appreciate Oshtemo's efforts to address lingering sewer infrastructure was explicitly exposed in a 2010 draft of a sanitary sewer strategic plan. An all-day retreat held April 2013 by the Township Board resulted in prioritizing the need to extend sanitary sewer service into older neighborhoods. As residences age, individually owned private septic systems become a growing public concern. Board members were aware some homeowners were installing their fourth septic system. At the time, the cost to repair a failed system was approaching \$10,000. Because septic systems fail individually, homeowners lacked options other than to bare these unplanned, and unexpected costs. A subsequent W.E. Upjohn Institute comparison between septic and sewer systems confirmed a long-term (30 to 40 years) cost inflection point; with annual cost savings compounding thereafter. When combined with road reconstruction, the cost competitiveness occurs about 10 years earlier. The study also identified that sewer service positively affects home resale value, and thereby can further shorten the cost recovery time-period.

Please contact Linda to get a sign for \$10. Call 375-4260 or email lpotok@oshtemo.org



Is Your Streetlight Out?
Contact Consumers Energy at: 1-800-477-5050

Hiring a contractor or making improvements on your property? Decks, pools, sheds, and roofs need permits and might be subject to setback rules. Contact the Southwest Michigan Building Authority to find out which permit you need: (269) 585-4150

Fire Prevention Day 2019 Enjoyed by the Community

On Saturday, October 12th, 2019 Oshtemo Fire and Rescue hosted their 3rd annual **Oshtemo Fire Prevention Day**. The event took place at Flesher Field on South 9th Street from 11:00 am until 3:00 pm. Oshtemo Fire and Rescue built this event to be focused on a handful of key initiatives. Our goals of Fire Prevention Day are to give tips to prevent fires, educate our citizens about fire safety, and build community relationships.

This year at Fire Prevention Day, OFD had approximately 12 members attend to engage the community in various activities. OFD firefighters displayed our fire apparatus, tools, turnout gear, and more. OFD firefighters also educated children by showing the importance of making a fire escape plan using a simulator, organizing an obstacle course for kids, and conducting the “Close Before You Doze” burn cube demonstration.



This year OFD proudly took a step forward by teaming up with multiple local partners. During the event we had participation from Life EMS teaching hands only CPR, The Rotary of Oshtemo who handed out books to children, and we were privileged to experience West Michigan AirCare’s helicopter flying in and landing at the event. These were great opportunities for our citizens to gain a better understanding of our resources and partners in the area. Other partners that made up the event included Motor Mouth Food Truck, Section 1776, The Kalamazoo Pipe Band, and local Boy Scouts.

Despite the cold weather and the blowing wind, the 3rd Annual Oshtemo Fire Prevention Day hosted around 200 people. From adults to children, it is our hope that people of all ages were able to take something away that will help promote fire safety. In the end, if one family changes their smoke detector batteries, forms a fire escape plan, or decides to sleep with their bedroom door closed at night, then we can say it was a successful day of education at Oshtemo Fire Prevention Day 2019.



Check Your Smoke Detectors

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends that smoke detectors be replaced every 10-years. Both the Ionization and the Photoelectric detectors have components that will degrade over time making them less accurate and eventually nonfunctioning. Most detectors have their date of manufacturer listed somewhere on the device.



Update: Fire Hydrant Flow Testing and Flag Installation

This first ever project for Oshtemo Fire has been progressing faster than initially estimated. As of 10/15/19, our crews have flow tested and installed flags on 644 of the 1,068 hydrants in Oshtemo, which is a 60.3% completion rate. The effort has taken 116 hours which includes travel and documentation of the work. This work will cease for the season no later than November 15th.

As a reminder, with old man winter looming, please remember to clear snow 3 feet around your local fire hydrant.



Snow Route System Reminder

The County Road Commission has designated a special network of roads within the county as a snow route system. Snow route roads receive first attention. When winter weather affects road conditions, the goal is to provide the maximum level of service to the greatest number of people as quickly as possible.

Snow Removal Priorities:

1. Snow route roads
2. Balance of primary roads
3. Local Roads
4. Subdivision/plat streets
5. Dead-end and cul-de-sac roads

Every day, service is provided to priorities 1,2, and 3 during snow events. Every other day service is the goal for plat streets, dead-end and cul-de-sac roads.

(If a storm is long lasting or a second storm starts before clean-up on priorities 4 and 5 have been completed, crews will return to priorities 1, 2 and 3.)

Sidewalk Snow Removal

Sidewalks must be kept free of debris, yard waste, branches, vehicles, animal excrement, etc. by the abutting property owners and occupants. When snow accumulates or ice is formed upon the public sidewalk in front of a house, building, lot, parcel or building site, it is the responsibility of the owner or occupant of the abutting premises to remove the snow or ice within 48 hours after it has formed. Please do your part to keep sidewalks clear and to maintain a safe path for our pedestrian neighbors and children this winter. Ord. No. 468, Part 294.007 Sec. VII., B. & C.

Thank You Rain Garden Volunteers!

Our rain gardens at Oshtemo Township Park, Flesher Field, and Grange Hall looked better than ever this year thanks to help from volunteers! Working rain or shine in summer and fall, they pulled aggressive plants, dug out invading trees and shrubs, and added more native wildflowers to our rain gardens. Many of the volunteers are in the Master Rain Gardener program sponsored by the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council. Please join us in thanking Kelly Burt, Belinda Cygan, Karen Halsted, Gina Jones, Carolyn Kennedy, Charlie Livingston, Shelley Metz, and Megan Osetek. If you'd like to help next year, contact Karen High, Parks Director, at khigh@oshtemo.org or (269) 216-5233.



Oshtemo Township Park



Grange Hall



Flesher Field

Yoga at the Community Center

Join us for drop-in Community Yoga every Wednesday, November 6 through December 11, from 7-8 pm. \$10 per session, sponsored by Oshtemo Friends of the Parks. The Oshtemo Community Center is located at 6407 Parkview Avenue. All ages and levels of experience welcome, bring a yoga mat or blanket.



Yoga Instructor Samantha Schaefer completed her 200-hour teacher training in the ParaYoga tradition with Karina Ayn Mirsky. She has

since practiced in a wide variety of styles, including studies in Anusara yoga in Rome, Italy, and Ashtanga yoga in Chicago, IL



people to the Oshtemo Village core. The site will also include a walking path with respite stops and pedestrian benches. There will be several trees added to the site that are both native and ornamental. Large flower beds and rolling landscape will also include native perennials and ornamental grasses.

The DDA is currently in negotiations with the United Methodist Church on the construction of the second property to the west of the township site, where the old car wash was located. That portion of the site will include additional flower beds and a small parking area.

Drake Farmstead Park to Open Soon!



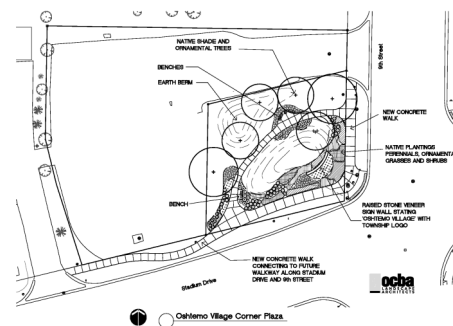
Construction continues at Oshtemo's newest park! Located at 927 North Drake Road, the 26-acre park will soon be open for visitors. A new gravel parking lot is graded, the path of the crushed stone walking trail is cleared, and the

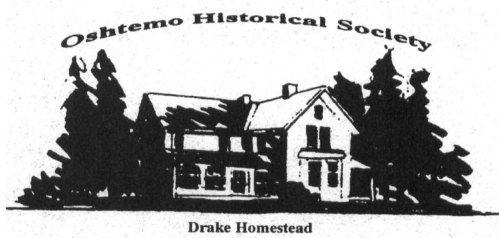
picnic shelter pad is staked and ready for concrete. Inside the carriage barn, final touches are being installed. Work is expected to be complete in late November. A grand opening celebration will be held in the spring. Stay tuned for details!



Gateway Feature in the Village Area

The Oshtemo Township Downtown Development Authority (DDA) has been working over the past five years to make improvements to the northwest corner of 9th Street and Stadium Drive. This fall we broke ground and we are hoping to have the Township portion of the site completed by the end of the year. The new gateway feature will include a large stone veneer sign welcoming





OSHTEMO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Visit our website for more information.

www.oshtemohistoricalsociety.org

As the year 2019 is drawing to a close, we have one final presentation to offer to our members and community. Our meetings are open to the public at no charge and everyone is welcome. They are held on the third Thursday at the Oshtemo Township Hall, 7275 W. Main ST, unless otherwise specified, and begin at 7:00 p.m.

NOV 21st – **“A comprehensive view of Tillers International, our local hidden gem”** Presented by a senior staff member. Hear about their mission, changes, and the scope of their outreach. Tillers International is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of people in rural areas around the world. They work with farmers and artisans to create effective, innovative, and sustainable solutions to their problems.

For more information about the Oshtemo Historical Society, please visit our website at

www.oshtemohistoricalsociety.org

www.oshtemo.org
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