



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
cbell@oshtemo.org

Kizzy Bradford
kbradford@oshtemo.org

Kristin Cole
kcole@oshtemo.org

Zak Ford
zford@oshtemo.org

Welcome new Fire Department employees!

Erin Phillips—

Fire Department Admin Assist

I'm excited to join the OFD team, it is a welcomed change of pace after working for several years in the finance/ insurance setting. I grew up and still live in the Gobles area. I like to spend my time with my husband Dwayne and my kids, Eric (17) & Elena (16). I enjoy golfing, concerts, photography & finding new adventures with my friends & family.

Cody Schuiteboer—

Full Time Firefighter

I have been employed by the OFD family for over three and a half years before this full-time position was offered as a paid-on call. Being in this career field allowed me to continue my family lineage of being the fifth generation in the fire service. Outside of work I enjoy spending my time playing golf and softball with close friends.

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



**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



Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/oshtemochartertownship/> or sign up at www.oshtemo.org to join the email list



From Clerk Dusty Farmer—

We held another successful election on November 2, 2021. Absentee ballots have become quite popular in the Township, providing more access to voting than ever before. Thank you to Township staff who assisted with the election, and also to the election workers who are dedicated to ensuring a smooth election. We are always looking for more election workers. 2022 will be a big year for elections. We provide training and the positions are paid. Please contact my office at clerk@oshtemo.org if you are interested in learning how to become an election worker!



From Treasurer Clare Buszka—

****Taxes are due February 16, 2022****

Winter tax bills will be mailed out the first week of December. Summer taxes that have not yet been paid are accruing a 1% interest fee every month that they go unpaid. If you still have an outstanding summer tax bill you will receive another one in the mail in addition to your winter bill.

The office will be closed during the winter tax season on the following days:-

Christmas eve, Christmas day, New Year's Day, Jan 17th (MLK), and Feb 21st (President's Day)

Payments can be mailed or placed in the drop box during business or non-business hours. Online payment options are also available. Visit www.oshtemo.org for the online option.

Taxes paid after February 16, 2022, will be charged 3% late fee. Any uncollected taxes will be sent to the Kalamazoo County Treasurer for collection on February 28th, 2022.

****Postmarks will not be accepted****

Please have a wonderful and safe holiday season!

Clare Buszka, Treasurer
cbuszka@oshtemo.org



From Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell—

So much happening at the Township!

Pandemic Impacts

Employees able to do their jobs remotely continue to work flexibly from remote/home locations. An in-person schedule coordinates work at the office a minimum of one day per week. Given the ongoing pandemic and the effectiveness and efficiency of remote work, the flexibility learned from necessity will likely remain an option for some positions for the foreseeable future.

We are grieving the loss of two longtime Oshtemo residents, both Township volunteers, who recently succumbed to COVID-19. Sincere appreciation is felt toward them for their service, including the 2008 committee that interviewed to hire Oshtemo's current Fire Chief Barnes. One attended every Township Board meeting since moving to the Township in 2006, offering constructive, attentive, insightful feedback individually to Board members.

Police Protection

The recent spate of shootings in Oshtemo is certainly a concern. The Township continues to work with the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) to amend our existing four-year police protection services contract to increase the number of officers patrolling Oshtemo. Earlier this month, Kalamazoo County, the Sheriff's Office, and Oshtemo Township added an additional Sergeant position to the police contract. The Township welcomes **Sergeant Bryan McLain** who joins Oshtemo **Sergeant JuVon Johnson**. The KCSO continues to recruit and train new officers, a lengthy process in the best of circumstances, but a longer process now given the lower number of individuals choosing police work.

Fire Chief Hire

A nine-member hiring Committee is working to review applications and conduct interviews to hire the next Township Fire Chief. In forming this committee, the Township focused heavily on creating a committee reflective of the community. The committee includes three Oshtemo elected officials, three Oshtemo Fire Department members, two Residents, and one Peer Professional. There are both long term and newer-to-the-community members who will serve.

Road Millage

The Board acted to adopt a 1.08 road millage that is included for the first time on your winter tax bill. The millage will be used for local road maintenance and reconstruction work. Some of the road reconstruction will be associated with utility expansion work but will not be used to pay for the utility expansion in the projects.

Annual Budget

The Board formally adopted the 2022 budget at the regular November 9th Township Board meeting. The Township has made the 2022 budget available for anyone to view online by visiting <https://oshtemo.org/about-oshtemo/budget/>. No public comment was received about the draft budget in October or November, nor at the public meeting on November 9th. The Board voted unanimously to adopt the 2022 budget.

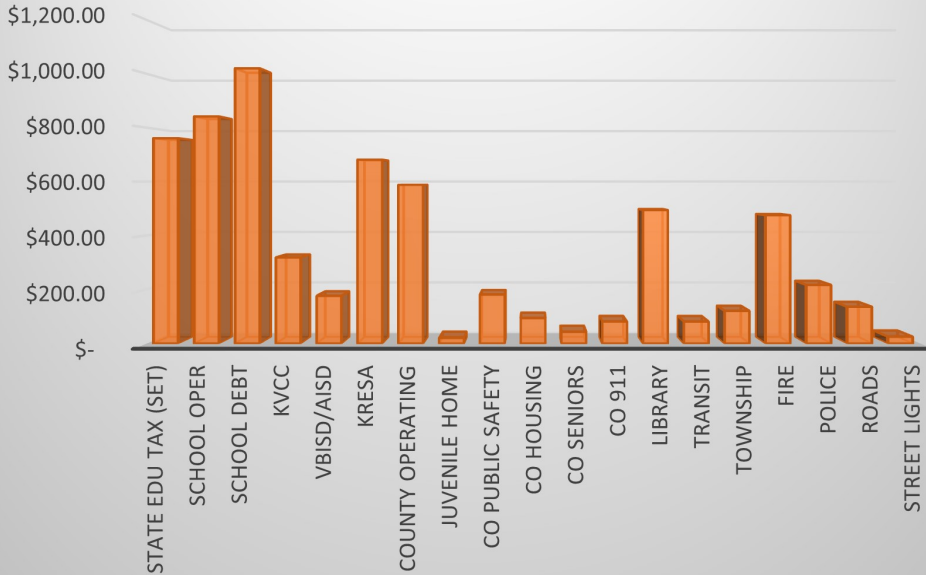
Development Projects in your community

Planning Director Iris Lubbert compiled a clear summary of Oshtemo development work for a recent Oshtemo Rotary Club presentation. The overview is shared on the Township's website and can be found at <https://oshtemo.org/officials-and-departments/planning-zoning-department/>

Please call or email with any questions or concerns

Where do my taxes go?

Average Taxes To Be Paid by Residents and Businesses in 2021



Are you planning to improve your property?

With Winter around the corner you may be starting to think about outdoor projects to tackle in the Spring. To assist you in planning your project Oshtemo now offers a number of informational handouts that can be found at <https://oshtemo.org/frequently-asked-zoning-questions-2/> or Township Hall. Handouts currently available provide information on accessory buildings, fences, pools, and setbacks; with more to come in the future! Please do not hesitate to contact Oshtemo's Planning Department at 269-216-5223 or chutson@oshtemo.org if you have any questions on the viability of your project idea for your property.

Please note that most improvements require a permit. Contact the Southwest Michigan Building Authority (SMBA) at 269-585-4150 for details.

Have you heard about the new Road Millage?

The Public Works Department with support from the Road Commission of Kalamazoo County, presented during public Township Board meetings in April and May on long term planning and needs for the Local Road network in which the Township is responsible for maintaining.

These presentations and related maps, describing which roads are considered local, can be found on the Township website: <https://oshtemo.org/officials-and-departments/public-works-department/>

The Township board and staff professionals recognize that there are currently many failed roads that need larger investment like complete reconstruction (new sand, gravel, and asphalt) and many other roads are aging and will have various needs at differing times. Using Asset Management Process, currently preventative maintenance treatments like chip seals, crack seals, and mill and fills, are done annually as funding allows based on condition and age.

Townships receive no direct road funding from the federal or state government or gas tax. The RCKC matches (called "PAR funds") a portion of the Township's financial contribution to local road maintenance. In the past the Township has had to use General Fund dollars for road projects.

Between the RCKC PAR Funds and the Township General Funds, there was not the appropriate amount of money being spent to adequately meet all the anticipated work needs and the overall condition Township wide of the 77 miles of local roads was steadily declining.

The projected annual investment, based on a roadway life cycle cost analysis done by road commission, is estimated to be \$1,000,000.00. To equitably assess this among users, the millage approach (vs community wide special assessment district) was determined to be more favorable by the Board.

The 1.08 mils for road funding will be on the 2021 Winter Taxes. This amount will be reviewed annually. This funding is restricted to road related work. All residents use these local roads, and this is a long term strategy to protect our road asset.

Start your next bike ride at Oshtemo's Grange Hall

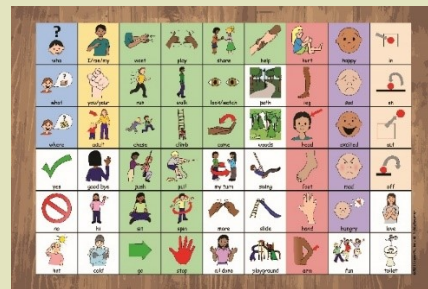
Thanks to a grant from Bike Friendly Kalamazoo, bicycling in Oshtemo Township just got even better! Convenient amenities for cyclists are being installed behind Oshtemo's historic Grange Hall, located at the corner of H Avenue and 3rd Street. Dubbed the 'road cycling staging area', amenities include a Fix-it Station with air pump, access to water, bike rack, and a message board displaying bike route ideas and cyclist safety information. The Grange also has parking, a picnic area, a small playground, basketball court, horseshoe pits, and nature trail. A portable toilet will be available during the warmer months. The rolling hills and tree-lined country roads of Oshtemo's west side are popular with cyclists. If you'd like to try it out, click on this QR code for an easy, family-friendly three-mile ride that starts and ends at the Grange Hall.



Trustee Bradford leads effort for Playground Communication Boards in Parks

When new Trustee Kizzy Bradford joined the Oshtemo Township Board last November, she jumped right in with ideas for making our parks more inclusive for all, especially for kids with special needs. Thanks to Kizzy's leadership and a grant from the Michigan Recreation and Parks Foundation, playground communication boards will soon be installed in the Flesher Field and Oshtemo Township Park playgrounds. The boards are to help non-verbal students communicate and play freely. Children can point to pictures on the board to express their thoughts and feelings. It will create a more inclusive, equitable play environment for children with learning and communication differences. The board was designed with a website called

www.lessonpix.com. Symbols were selected by local Speech and Occupational Therapists specifically for use on our playground. Special thanks to: mParks Foundation for funding through their 'Play is Essential for All' grant, Oshtemo Friends of the Parks and Arcadia Occupational Therapy for additional funding assistance, Kizzy Bradford, Oshtemo Township Trustee, Heather Lewis, Speech/Language Pathologist, and Wendy Horton Bierema, Occupational Therapist, for their leadership to make our community more inclusive for all.



Scouts work to uncover, bring attention to the woodland trails at Flesher Field



Volunteers with Boy Scout Troop #292, led by Eagle Scout candidate Spencer Schettner, are enhancing and expanding trails in the 12-acre wooded area at Flesher Field. In addition to removing fallen trees and cutting back vegetation and overhead branches, they are creating a new, more visible trail entrance at the north end of the park, just west of the Chime Street park entrance. Because many visitors to Flesher Field aren't aware of the woodland trails, a trailhead sign and map will be posted in the spring. If you haven't explored this lovely patch of woods yet, it's worth a visit!

Oshtemo's Parks and Recreation Endowment Fund pays dividends

Established at the Kalamazoo Community Foundation (KZCF) in 2009, Oshtemo's Parks and Recreation Endowment Fund has grown substantially. As an endowment fund, the earnings of the fund, and not the principal, are available for spending. This ensures the longevity of the fund. Annual earnings are used to maintain and improve Oshtemo's parks or are rolled into the fund to make it grow.

Special thanks to all who have supported our Endowment Fund. If you would like to make an end-of-year gift in honor or memory of a loved one, here's how:

- Visit the KZCF website at <http://www.kalfound.org>
- Select the **Give Now** button in the upper right corner of the screen
- Enter 'Oshtemo' in the search bar under 'Search for a Specific Fund'. 'Oshtemo Township Parks & Recreation Endowment Fund' will appear as an option.
- Click on 'Oshtemo Township Parks and Recreation Fund'
- Enter the amount you'd like to give and indicate if the gift is anonymous or in memory or honor of a loved one.
- Enter donation amount and payment information. Enjoy the parks for year to come!



The Kalamazoo Conservation District is pleased to announce it's 2020 Conservation Awards and a "Friend of the District Award" will be presented to **Karen High**, Oshtemo Township Parks Director.

Karen facilitated the use of Oshtemo Township locations for several Kalamazoo Conservation District programs including the Citizen Science Program which took place in February 2020 at the Oshtemo Community Center. Initially a tree planting workshop and the Woodlot & Forest management workshops were to be held at the Drake Farmstead before they were forced to move to a virtual format. In addition, Karen assisted KCD by locating equipment for programs, created a PowerPoint presentation, worked with KCD staff to film at the Farmstead as part of the fall woodlot and forestry program. She also participated in the live Q&A session of the webinar. Congratulations!

Sewer Expansion— from Supervisor Libby Heiny-Cogswell

The issue of sewer expansion is certainly the most divisive in my long tenure serving our community. Some strongly want municipal sewer and see the need, some are out of options and desperate as their septic system are near complete failure, while others voice broad opposition. I have met with residents who were opposed and through constructive dialogue, answering questions, explaining the intent, stories, and changes made by the Board, understand there is no easy way forward. Some accept the reality and, as I do, see the long term interest of the Township as a whole is to move forward.

I ask those opposed to refrain from threatening professional staff at the Township. If you have an issue with any Board policy or decisions, please contact your elected officials directly.

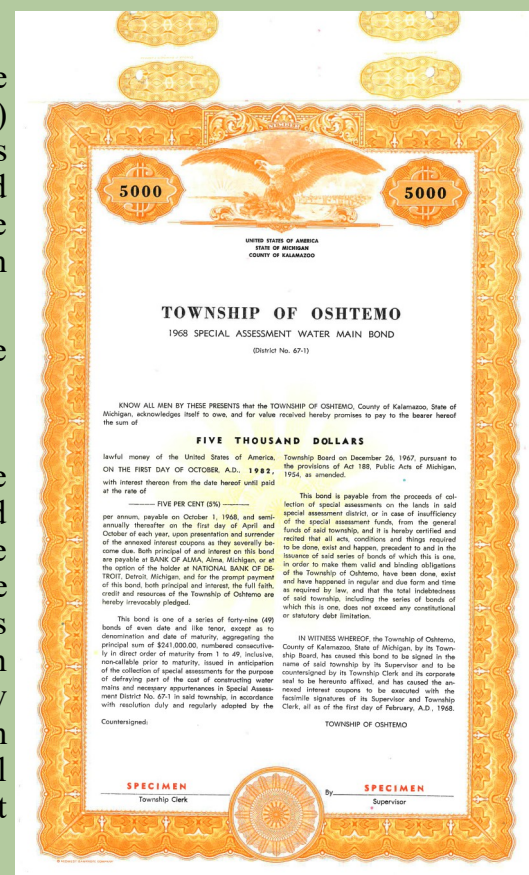
The professionals working on the project, and community partners, recognize Oshtemo has and continues to use “BMPs” (Best Management Practices) throughout the effort to find a path forward to the problem of sanitary waste. This includes the County Health Department, on the front line in dealing with individual residents that face the septic failures, the Road Commission, who recognize the need to fix aged roads and to coordinate utility work at the same time. The City of Kalamazoo provides the expertise to treat the waste in a manner that is light years ahead of what is happening in the back yards of what started as rural neighborhoods, but are now urban. The State of Michigan realizes municipal sewer systems are a public necessity. The State is wrestling with the problem of failing septic systems in Michigan. <https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-government/thousands-failed-septic-tanks-threaten-michigans-waters>

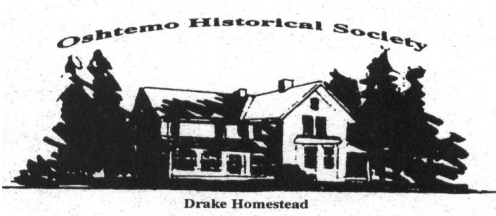
The eastern side of our Township is growing and developing. This comes with the reality of modernizing infrastructure and change, which is hard and expensive. The Township through the decades has extended sewer lines—there are 17 miles currently. The system is here to stay. The system was designed for expansion, to relieve the burden to residents of the unknown but inevitable timing of failure of the underground septic, and also save them the economic cost of paying for multiple systems. The County data shows some neighborhood homes within the proposed areas have replaced their inground systems 2, 3, some even 4 times. To not find a solution for this is to bury one’s head in the sand. It is not an issue, or topic, that any elected official wants to deal with. Why would they? It is easier to ignore the problem and the long-term costs. The work to date provides a path forward, to ‘bite the bullet’ and lead the community past the issue. It is what so many Boards have needed to do throughout the decades. For perspective, attached is an image of the 1968 bond the Township took out for public water expansion.

All municipalities with public water and/or sewer charge the users for the system. The Township’s system costs are broken down into 1) connection, 2) use, 3) maintenance, and 4) financing fees. Historically, Oshtemo Township’s fee structure has always been based on the advice and input of our legal and financial advisors, engineering consultants and bond counsel. Some municipalities may be able to afford putting off connections until system failure, as some township residents favor, however, Oshtemo Township cannot.

The Township is balancing the interests of users of the sewer system and the community at large to structure its sewer financing within our means.

Note: The terms that Oshtemo uses like Connection Fee and Surcharge are standard terms that are used when talking about utilities however can be applied differently within the law by different communities. And like other terms, there are multiple names that can mean the same thing. There is no state-wide standard for applying them in only one way. There are professionals in this line of work because it is complex. Caution must be used as it is dependent on the individual community’s needs and situation. Making sure to follow the law and reasonableness was and continues to be the goal. There has much constructive input from residents provided and incorporated in the past several years. Yet not all ideas were incorporated, because for Oshtemo they would not provide for continued financial stability.





OSHTEMO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

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

Contact Us: email oshtemo@gmail.com Check out our FACEBOOK page!

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