

Vergennes Township

A Place Where People Like to Live
www.vergennestwp.org



10381 Bailey Dr., P.O. Box 208, Lowell, MI 49331

897-5671

Hours: M, W, – 9–3, Th – 9–Noon

WINTER 2015-16

SUPERVISOR: TIM WITTENBACH
TREASURER: JEAN HOFFMAN
CLERK: MARI STONE
TRUSTEES: RICK GILLETT
DUANE RASCH

*Township Board Meetings are held the third Monday of every month at 7:00 P.M. in the Township Hall.
Planning Commission Meetings are held quarterly at 7:00 P.M. in the Township Hall.*

CLERK'S CORNER

by Mari Stone, Vergennes Township Clerk

Here we are again at the end of another year. After a beautiful summer, and an equally nice fall, I'm hoping the weatherman is right about the predictions of a mild winter. If you compare this November to last, there is reason to hope!

In the course of my job this year we held one election – the failed road funding question back in May. Other than my normal duties, I've been working on reducing paperwork in files that is redundant or unnecessary to retain. Gradually more and more documents are being stored electronically, but the Michigan General Retention Schedule governs what must be retained on paper, and as long as that is in effect we will always need file cabinets.

Speaking of storage space, the Board is studying the possibility of an addition to the hall. In 1998, a feasibility study was conducted on the space in the building, which resulted in a 15 year plan which has served us well. We renovated the upstairs into a meeting space, and added workstations downstairs to conduct township business in an orderly manner. However, as we have grown, the Band-Aids have begun to unravel. The electrical system is frequently overtaxed, the 25 year old bathroom addition is subject to frozen pipes, and there is nowhere to go with any more records and equipment let alone additional workspace. Our receptionist frequently has difficulty conducting business at the counter

when the open office area is at full capacity. The Assessing office is in the vault, an all-cement space which is hard to keep warm with a space heater. The building department is literally located on the reception desk, the election specialist workstation is in a corner on a folding table, and a monthly visit from our pest-management service is a necessary maintenance expense. Did I mention how many folding tables we use to conduct business?

Putting an addition on the building would be a more cost effective solution than relocating the hall entirely. The historical part of the building can be retained for storage and meeting space, and having open areas both up and down would give the community opportunity for uses we can't currently offer. The addition would allow officials and staff to offer residents access to services in a safer, more functional and up-to-date setting.

There will be opportunity for public comment on any proposed renovations. These opportunities will be announced on our website and in the Lowell Buyers Guide as any plans are developed. As always, we welcome citizen participation at our monthly board meetings, which are held on the third Monday of every month at 7:00 pm.



ELECTIONS AND ABSENTEE VOTING



As we approach 2016, we will have elections in the news and on our minds. Dates to put on your calendar include the Michigan Presidential Primary on March 8th, State and Local Primary on August 2nd, and the General Election on November 8th.

Residents 60 years of age and over, or with any disability, may request that their name be added to a Permanent Absentee Voter List. Prior to each election, an application postcard is automatically mailed to voters on this list. Once your signed application is received by the Clerk, your ballot will be available for pickup in person or mailed. (The Clerk must have a signed application on file for each election) You can send me an email or written note requesting that you be added to this list.

In addition, any resident who anticipates they will be away from the community or is otherwise unable to get

to the polls on Election Day may request an application for an Absentee Voter Ballot. As with Permanent Absentee Voters, these ballots are logged in and securely retained for anonymous tabulation on Election Day with all of the other in-person ballots received at the polls. It should be noted that other states have different methods of absentee voting. Please feel free to ask me for more information on this process as regulated by Election Law in the State of Michigan. You can also go to www.michigan.gov/sos.elections to learn more.

You can apply for a one time AV Ballot or request to be placed on the Permanent Absentee Voter List by calling the office at 616-897-5671 ext. 2 and leaving me a message with your name, address and phone number, or emailing me directly at clerk@vergennestwp.org.



HOME BUSINESSES – YES YOU CAN!



The Township provides in the zoning ordinance to allow various types of businesses that can be conducted within the home or using an accessory building. There are several types of regulated businesses. They include types that are completely within the home such as accounting, art production, and various office work, or within an accessory building such as woodworking or welding, and then there are other types that are performed elsewhere like landscaping. There are limits on the number of employees and percent of structure

that can be used for the business, and this is to protect the surrounding neighborhood from the impact of commercial-type activities. Another kind of regulated home based business is renting out older barns for storage of RV's, campers and boats. These items must be stored inside of the barn in a rental situation. The application is on the website and an applicant checks which type they are applying for. Call the Zoning Administrator for any questions.



WEBSITE RESOURCES



Be sure to visit the Township's website (www.vergennestwp.org) to see the vast array of information and services available. You can save time, postage, and gas by using the website to obtain information and various application forms. These include zoning and planning procedures, building information, meeting schedules, agendas, and minutes, fee schedules and escrow policies, accessory building information and setbacks, application forms, zoning ordinance, other ordinances, public notices and Flat River information.

Call the office at 616-897-5671 and ask for Jeanne Vandersloot, Zoning Administrator, or Janine Mork, Building Department Administrator, regarding any questions or applications. You can also email them directly at zoning@vergennestwp.org or jmork@vergennestwp.org.



WINTER TAXES – 2015



- Taxes are due February 14, 2016
Since this falls on a Sunday, interest and penalty will begin on February 17th.
- Mail Early. Postmarks are not accepted for due date. Plan 7-10 days for posting of your taxes. Remember, we are not responsible for delays in the postal service.
- Partial payments can be made on both summer and winter taxes from July 1st thru February 28th. You will only have interest added to the unpaid balance. All unpaid taxes are turned over delinquent to the county on March 1st.
- For a receipt, please enclose the entire bill and a self-addressed envelope. We will send back the upper portion marked paid.
- Make checks payable to: Vergennes Township
- ONLINE (bill pay program) PAYMENTS – must have the parcel number printed on them.
- Dog Licenses may be obtained at Lowell City Offices, located at 301 E. Main.

Last day to pay taxes in 2015 will be December 30th. The township office will be closed on Thursday, December 24th & 31st.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. May God grant you a safe, healthy, and happy 2016.

-Jean Hoffman, Treasurer



GOOD NEIGHBORS



When we talk about being “neighborly”, the dictionary says we mean “obliging, helpful, friendly, kind, amiable, affable, genial, agreeable, hospitable, companionable, well disposed, civil, cordial, good-natured, nice, pleasant, generous, considerate, thoughtful, unselfish, decent.” There is much value in being a good neighbor, and having the best possible relationship with your neighbor has many rewards. It takes away stress and enriches everyone’s quality of life.

Our office receives complaints that could just as easily be handled by one neighbor with another. These include:

- Barking dogs
- Unsightly trash and junk in the yard
- Smoke from wood stoves or leaves and brush
- Loud motor or radio noise
- Fireworks and/or gun fire
- Speeding cars
- Non-operating vehicles in yard or driveway

Sometimes it is helpful to call and find out what is and isn’t lawful, but most of the time an honest and heartfelt talk is all it takes to remedy a situation. Do you know your neighbors? This holiday season, take the time to stop by and say hello.



911 DISPATCH SERVICES



The County of Kent has historically funded Fire Dispatch for the 21 Townships within the county with an allocation from the Kent County Sheriff's Department budget.

The cost to operate the Dispatch Center has risen dramatically in recent years, and the county has requested a cost sharing program with the townships to help with the increasing equipment and operational costs, similar to the arrangement that charges the cities in Kent County.

The Townships understand that there is a need to help fund county-wide dispatch. However, Townships do not have the same budget resources that cities do without having to raise property taxes to fund this service. The Kent County Supervisors Association has recommended the county consider a ballot proposal in 2016 to increase a telephone surcharge already in effect in order to provide sustainable funding for all dispatch services in Kent County. The proposal is expected to be on the August Primary Ballot.



PLANNING COMMISSION



The Planning Commission has had a busy year. They reviewed a new home development that will be located on the east side of Alden Nash Ave between the high school and Foreman St. and adjacent to the Cooper Woodland Preserve. Construction on Phase 1 is planned for the spring of 2016. They conducted a Site Plan Review and recommended approval to the Board on a new facility for Envision Engineering.

The new building is being constructed in the O E Bieri Industrial development park west of Godfrey St.. They have also worked on several updates to the zoning ordinance by adding more uses to the commercial and industrial sections, the parking section and the Private Road ordinance. The Board has adopted all of the recommended updates, which can be reviewed on the website.



PROPERTY OWNERS WITH FLAT RIVER FRONTAGE:



The Flat River is designated by the State of Michigan as a "Natural River". The purpose of a natural river designation is to preserve and enhance the area for water conservation, its free flowing condition, its fish, wildlife, boating, scenic, aesthetic, floodplain, ecologic, historic, and recreational values and uses. The Flat River Zoning District is designated as 300 feet out from and along the ordinary high water mark of the river. The first 25 feet from the ordinary high water mark is called the Natural Vegetation Strip. Setbacks for buildings and structures are 100 feet from the waters edge with an additional 50 feet if a bluff lot. This means that all structures including sheds, decks, pools, etc. should all be located at least 100 feet from the water's edge. The only exceptions are docks and boardwalks in the water and river access stairs down a hill to the water's edge which require a specific permit from the Township.

The Township issues permits for docks, boardwalks, and river access stairs with certain sizes and locations. Stairs, pathways and docks to and from and at the water's edge can be up to 4 feet wide.

The State does not permit cleared areas for the storage of boats and docks and they should be stored above the 25-foot natural vegetative strip. If a public or private boat launch ramp is available, then any desired larger boats should be taken in and out of the water at those locations. Only dead, diseased, unsafe or fallen trees or poisonous plants may be removed in this protected 25-foot strip. Any requested removal of vegetation outside of the above requires Zoning Administrator approval. A small amount of pruning is allowed. Homes should be mostly screened from the river by the natural vegetation.