

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, F – 9 A.M.–3 P.M.



SUMMER 2010

SUPERVISOR:
TREASURER:
CLERK:
TRUSTEES:
ALLAN BAIRD

TIM WITTENBACH
JEAN HOFFMAN
MARI STONE
VERN NAUTA

*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 the first Monday of every month at 7:00 P.M. in the Township Hall.*

CLERK'S CORNER

by Mari Stone, Vergennes Township Clerk

At the Crossroad....

Changes in Elections.....Again

Seems that every election year there are more changes to manage. This time around they promise to actually save us money and increase efficiency as well. I have elected to participate in a program with the state to use laptop computers in our precincts that will take the place of the handwritten poll book our Elections Inspectors keep on Election Day. This "electronic poll book" is being funded with a grant from the Help America Vote Act passed by congress back in 2001. It includes the computer, barcode scanner, flash drives and various other accessories needed to administer voter check in at the precinct.

We piloted this program during the May Election for the school district. Our Precinct Chairs, Dee McKendrick and Barb Porter, worked this election, and they loved the electronic poll book. In August, each of them will have this experience to share with our other election workers, who will continue to perform the rest of the election processes in the same way we always have. You should see a speedier check in process when you come to vote on August 3 and November 2. By scanning your drivers license, you will be checked in at the precinct and added to the "poll book" at the same time. The down side is that the rest of the processes will stay the same, so there may be a short wait to actually get into the voting booth!

Here are some important dates to keep in mind for elections this year:

Primary Election – Tuesday, August 3, 2010. Last day to register (if not already a registered voter of Vergennes Township) is **July 6.**

General Election – Tuesday, November 2, 2010. Last day to register (if not already a registered voter of Vergennes Township) is **October 4.**

Absentee Ballots will be available for these elections by **June 19** and **September 18.** If you should need to vote absentee in either of these elections, send me an e-mail at clerk@vergennestwp.org or give the office a call, and we will send you an application.

August Primary - The August ballot will be a partisan ballot and contains the names of many candidates running under their respective party headings in order to narrow down the field. The ballot contains partisan columns that voters may not "cross-vote". In other words, if you vote for a candidate in one party, you may not vote for candidates in the other party(s). This is called "spoiling a ballot", and at the polls you can receive another should this happen. With absentee voters, we are not allowed to do that, so be careful to follow the instructions on the ballot if you are voting AV in the primary.

November General – The November ballot will be full, with the positions of Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, State Senator, State Representative and County Commissioner. There will also be several State-wide proposals ranging from casino licenses and uranium mining to the decision of whether or not to hold a Constitutional Convention.

If you want to make sure you are registered to vote, you can go on-line to www.michigan.gov/vote, or contact us at the township offices.

A Big Thanks – I would like to publicly thank the James and Judy Sterling Family, and especially Aaron and Jacob, for their many years of service in placing flags on veteran graves in our cemeteries. Aaron and Jacob took on the responsibility as cub scouts, and both of them now have achieved Eagle Scout status and are in college. James and Judy have assisted them over the years, and their community service deserves recognition as well. A new generation of scouts placed the flags this May, and it is my hope that they will achieve success through this service as Aaron and Jacob did. Many thanks to the Jeff and Carol DeVito Family for their time this year.



FLAT RIVER FRONTAGE



Property Owners with Flat River Frontage:

The Flat River is designated by the State of Michigan as a “Natural River”, a program administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). 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 are 100 feet from the waters edge with an additional 50 feet if a bluff lot.

At the time of designation of the Flat River as a Natural River, there were some properties that had lawns up to the rivers edge and docks different from the current ordinance. These properties were grandfathered by the State and can maintain their docks and lawns to the waters edge.

The ordinance requires permits with certain setbacks from the waters edge where buildings can be erected and the location and size of docks, boardwalks, and river access stairs.

The Natural Vegetative Strip is a protected area to be left nearly in its natural state. According to the Natural Rivers Administrator from the State, if a person takes a boat trip along the river, the shoreline should have a relatively consistent look to it. This means each property line should not be clearly visible by means of changes in the trees and shrubs and plant life. It is preferred by the State that minimal impact stairs, pathways and docks to and on the waters edge be not more than 4 feet wide when established. 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. A small amount of pruning is allowed. Homes should be mostly screened from the river by this natural vegetation. Call Jeanne Vandersloot, Zoning Administrator, for any questions or applications.



HIGH SPEED BROADBAND



High Speed Internet Study Builds Business Case for Wireless Network

For a long time, our residents have been asking about the lack of high-speed internet service in our area. Some of them even expect that the township will provide it as some municipalities around the state do. Vergennes Township has never been in a position to provide such a service. It is extremely costly, and it would not make sense financially to invest in the available infrastructure that would rapidly become obsolete. After spending almost a year trying to get AT&T and Comcast to expand their services here, it became apparent that these companies did not see the profitability of investing in expensive hardware and cable/wiring either. Instead, the township has worked with neighboring townships to build a business case to attract vendors to our area who will provide the service wirelessly. If you participated in the survey we distributed last summer, that was part of this project, and we are seeing some results of the marketing report the survey helped to build.

The report is titled “The Next Frontier,” and demonstrates the needs of this area and the viability and profitability of our market. A company called Azulstar was impressed enough with the results that they have submitted an application to the Rural Utility Service for a grant to construct the “last mile,” which would connect the existing broad band network that is not in our area to potential customers using a wireless connection.

This connection would use Wi-Max signals instead of the Wi-Fi that has been used in limited areas of the township. According to Azulstar representative Chris Borek, they expect to be able to serve 90 percent of the township at 3 to 4 megs at all times (with bursts of up to 12) with the much stronger Wi-Max signal.

This is not the first application Azulstar has made for our area. In October of 2009, Borek said they submitted a bid for the first round of federally funded stimulus dollars. That bid was not chosen for funding. “The bids funded in the first round were for fiber and not wireless,” Borek explained, “which makes sense because by funding fiber first, a backbone for the wireless service is established.” Azulstar, a Grand Haven based company, submitted their second bid in March, which includes several counties in West Michigan. A response is expected sometime this summer. If approved, wireless networks will begin being built immediately. Under the terms of the grant the networks must be in place within 36 months, but Borek said they intend to have them up and running within 1 to 2 years.

You might be asking how you would receive this service. Borek said it would be a fairly simple “self-install” model, using a receiver on the property much like a satellite antenna, which is wired to a Wi-Max router in the house. The receiver/ wiring would be about \$99 installed. You would also need to purchase a router, which would need to be compatible with the 4G network and wireless broadband. The Wi-Max signal Azulstar would broadcast would come from an optical fiber “ring” around the state being built by Merit Network, which received \$45 million in the first round of stimulus grants to build the much needed infrastructure. Thereafter, the monthly service charge for the signal would be in the range of \$25 to \$35, according to Borek.

Borek said the Township study was “a brilliant snapshot of the reality of our current needs” and was an integral part of their application. Funding for the survey and marketing report was provided by the Lowell Area Community Foundation.



SUMMER TAX 2010



Jean Hoffman-Treasurer

Taxes are due on September 14th. Please mail early, as we do not accept postmarks as the due date. We cannot be responsible for any delays with the postal service. Please use the yellow return envelope provided for you in the tax statement. Due to the 14th falling on a day that we are not open, you may pay your taxes without interest on Wednesday, the 15th.

If you are having difficulty in making a one-time tax payment, please feel free to make partial payments from July 1st through September 14th. You will then only have interest on the total of the unpaid taxes.

If you would like a paid receipt, please enclose the entire tax bill with a self-addressed envelope. We will return the top portion of the bill with a paid stamp on it.

Make checks payable to: **Vergennes Township**. Any payment received after the due date that does not have interest added will be applied as a partial payment. State law prohibits the Township from waiving these charges.

Office hour are M-W-F from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For your convenience, there is a mail slot in the door for after-hour payments. Be sure to place a check or money order through the slot—please no cash.

It is your responsibility to make sure your taxes are paid. Pay early to avoid any interest being added to your tax bill. You can check periodically on the Vergennes Township website to see if your taxes have been posted. The web page is usually updated every two weeks.
www.vergennestwp.org.

Please check your tax statement for accuracy. If you have a mortgage company, please look under your name for the mortgage company to which the tax bill was sent. If the mortgage company is wrong, please contact me at the Township so that I can correct this and mail a copy of your tax bill to the correct mortgage company.

Under "Tax Detail" on your tax statement, you will find your **Principle Residence Exemption**. Your **P.R.E.** will show you how much your tax bill has been reduced. By **State of Michigan standards**, you must own and **occupy** your property prior to May 1st of a given year and it must be the only property for which you have filed. If you feel you qualify for a **P.R.E.**, please contact our assessor.

Have a wonderful and safe summer.



WHAT TAXES SUPPORT



FOR EVERY \$1.00 YOU PAY IN PROPERTY TAXES...

\$.76 GOES TO EDUCATION
(INCLUDES LOWELL AREA SCHOOLS, KENT INTERMEDIATE & COMMUNITY COLLEGE & State Education)

\$.21 GOES TO THE COUNTY OPERATIONS
(INCLUDES GENERAL OPERATIONS, JAIL, SENIOR CITIZENS & DISTRICT LIBRARY)

\$.03 GOES TO THE TOWNSHIP
(FOR GENERAL OPERATIONS)

Collected for the 2009 Tax Season	\$5,151,495.57
Education:	\$3,905,901.81
County:	\$1,094,338.78
Township:	\$ 151,254.98



2010 CENSUS INFORMATION



By being counted in the 2010 Census, you are standing up for what Vergennes Township's needs are. That's why census takers are so important. A census taker is a person from our area who is hired by the Census Bureau to make sure that our community gets represented as accurately as possible. The census taker's primary responsibility is to collect census information from residences. Most of these residences have not sent back their 2010 Census form.

- The Census Bureau provides the census taker with a binder containing all of the addresses that didn't send back a filled out census form.
- The census taker then visits all of those addresses and records the answers to the questions on the form.
- If no one answers at a particular residence, a census taker will visit a home up to three times and attempt to reach the household by phone three times. The census worker will leave a double-sided (English and Spanish) NOTICE of VISIT in the doorway that includes a phone number for the resident to schedule an appointment.

The census taker will ONLY ask the questions that appear on the census form.

Do I have to talk to the census taker?

Yes. Your participation in the 2010 Census is vital and required by law, (Section 221, of Title 13 of the U.S. Code). However, rather than rely on criminal charges, the Census Bureau is very successful in getting participation by explaining the importance of the questions they ask and how the information benefits our community.

Your privacy and confidentiality is their priority: The census taker who collects your information is sworn for life to protect your data under Federal Law Title 13. Those who violate the oath face criminal penalties: Under federal law, the penalty for unlawful disclosure is a fine of up to \$250,000 or imprisonment for up to 5 years, or both.



QUESTIONS MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED



BELOW ARE THE ANSWERS TO THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR TAX BILLS.

WHEN DO THE TAX BILLS COME OUT? Your summer tax bill is mailed to you the first week in July and your winter tax bill is mailed to you the first week in December.

WHAT MONTHS DOES THIS TAX BILL COVER? Both your summer and winter tax bill covers the whole year from January 1st until December 31st. These tax bills **do not** cover specific months, but rather, collect different taxes due for the entire year. The two tax bills together make up the total annual property taxes due. The **summer tax bill** collects the taxes for Kent Intermediate Schools District, Grand Rapids Community College, ½ of the Lowell Area Schools, State Education Tax and the Kent County general operating. The **winter tax bill** collects the taxes for Kent County Jail and Senior Citizens Millage, Kent District Library, Vergennes Township, and ½ of the Lowell Area Schools.

WHEN IS IT DUE? Your summer bill is due on September 14th and your winter bill is due on February 14th. **We do not accept postmarks.** All payments received in our office after the due date will be assessed interest. State law mandates that interest be added to any payment received after the due date. **Exceptions** cannot be made, so be sure to mail early to allow sufficient time to reach our office.

HOW CAN I PAY MY TAX BILL? Payments may be made at the Township Office on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. There is a 24-hour mail slot located in the entry door. Please enclose your payment in a sealed envelope and never leave cash. If you are paying by mail, please use the enclosed yellow envelope. If you would like a receipt for your property taxes, please enclose the entire bill and a self-addressed envelope. We will stamp the top portion of the tax bill and return it to you. **It is very important that you know you may make partial payments. You may start paying on your bill as soon as you receive it.**

HOW IS THE BILL FIGURED? The "Taxable Value" is multiplied by the "Millage Rates" to arrive at the "Total Amount Due".

WHY DO I RECEIVE A TAX BILL IF MY MORTGAGE COMPANY PAYS MY TAXES? It is impossible for us to know who your mortgage company is and whether they are to pay your taxes or you are. Your mortgage company knows, so they request your tax information to be sent to them. We also send you a copy so that you: 1) know how much your taxes are, 2) know who requested your tax information (**mortgage company will be listed under your name**) 3) can compare your tax bill with the end of year statement sent to you by your lender and, 4) have information you may need to file your income taxes. If your bill does not indicate your tax information was sent to your lender, simply forward a copy of the bill to your mortgage company. **Please keep your copy for future reference.**

WHAT IF I RECEIVE A BILL THAT I DON'T THINK IS MINE? Name/Ownership changes on real property are affected by the recording of the Deed, which is done at the County level and can take several weeks to process. If you receive a bill for a property that you no longer own, kindly pass it on to the new buyer, if possible, for timely payment or return it to the township so that we may redirect it. Personal property taxes are determined by the location of the property in the township on December 31st. For the purpose of **changing a mailing address only, please correct the bottom portion and mail in.**

WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL RESIDENCE EXEMPTION AND HOW DO I KNOW IF IT IS IN PLACE ON MY PROPERTY? You qualify for the Homestead Exemption if you own and reside (by May 1st) in your home. This is a State of Michigan law, not a township rule. This means you **do not pay** local school operating tax. Check your bill...if the Lowell Area Schools operating is \$.00, you are all set.