

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 2020

SUPERVISOR:
TREASURER:
CLERK:
TRUSTEES:

TIM WITTENBACH
JANINE MORK
SHANTELL FORD
RICK GILLET
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 Shantell Ford, Vergennes Township Clerk

Goodbye 2020!! Haven't we wanted to say this for quite a while now?! Yet, each day is a gift, and as I write this the sun is shining and the leaves are gently falling to the ground. The beautiful view out my window of the peaceful Bailey Cemetery, the bright white fence with autumn's colors surrounding it all gives no clues to the stormy year that has led up to now. I'm trying to enjoy today, it is what has been given to me!

The Clerk's office has been nearly 100% focused on the past two elections. I cannot even express how grateful I am to everyone who came together to put on these last two elections. I didn't realize fully until stepping into this job, but we have amazing county guidance and support in Lisa Postumus Lyons' office,

and with Gerrid Uzarski as Elections Director. Former Clerks Heather Hoffman and Mari Stone saw us through this year and were priceless. Election days ran smoothly despite life's issues thanks to excellent Election Inspectors, support staff and parking help. Thank you to everyone!

Let's count our blessings, not just our challenges, and don't forget during this holiday season to give thanks for life's many gifts!

~Shantell



NEW TOWNSHIP HALL BUILDING UPDATE

The Township owned building at 69 Lincoln Lake has been a blessing already. It has served as the polling location for both precincts for two elections now. The Township opened 11 construction bids on October 21 and by the time this newsletter goes out, a General Contractor will have been chosen and hopefully soon work will be in full swing on the office addition. Construction deadline is completely dependent on our winter. We are excited about our move. When it happens, we will announce it in the Lowell news sources, Lowell's First Look and The Lowell Ledger, along with our website (vergennestwp.org) and facebook page.

DROP BOXES

We have added an official Vergennes Township business drop box at the 69 Lincoln Lake NE building. This drop box is secured to the ground, locked, and available 24/7. It is checked regularly and will be checked at all official deadlines for ballots, property taxes, etc. There is still a drop box at 10381 Bailey and will be as long as our offices are at that location. Both drop boxes can be used for ALL official township business.



ELECTION NEWS

What a wonderful turn out by Vergennes Voters!! County wide voter turnout was 72.25% but Vergennes Township turnout was over 86%!! The state's Qualified Voter File breaks down the vote by the following age groups; 18-21, 22-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-59, 60+. Can you guess which age group consistently has the best turn out by percentage? The answer is elsewhere in this newsletter!

This year saw an influx of new Election Inspectors. Huge thanks are due to these workers who put in 16 hour+ days on August 4th and November 3rd!! It was exciting to see, our Election inspectors were from a broad spectrum of society. We had a great split of men and women, college students to retirees, and various career backgrounds, all representing either the Republican or Democratic parties. Thank you to each of them!!

Thank you to the voters who took the time to reach out and speak words of encouragement to our Election Inspectors. The thank you letter to the board was so touching and meant the world to us. Thank you for taking the time from the busyness of life to reach out and bless us.

PAWS PUPPY!

If you have been to the office recently you may have noticed our Paws With A Cause puppy, Linus. Linus is a red/yellow lab, and simply put, is the cutest puppy in the world! He is learning some very important things right now so that he can be a special blessing to just the right person someday. Even though he is adorable, we ask that you help him by abiding by the rules to not look at him, speak to him, or touch him. We totally understand how difficult this is! Thank you for your help!

VETERAN'S DAY

This is a time of year when, along with counting our blessings and looking ahead to blessing our loved ones at Christmas, we remember and honor our veterans. This year, the Alton Cemetery completed the new Veteran Memorial just in time for Veterans Day. While a formal dedication won't happen until spring, the Cemetery is grateful for those who worked so hard to complete this by Veterans Day. The Memorial Marker, just west of the historic church building and right in front of the Flag pole, pays "honor to those who served and sacrificed to protect and defend our freedom and liberty." The memorial is the result of several years' worth of rummage sales of donated items and special financial gifts. Many thanks are due Lee Godfrey, Pam Kamphuis, Peggy Covert and the Ford family for labor and organizing the sales. Financial help was given by descendants of the Covert, Godfrey, Condon families and area veterans. The park benches at the memorial were installed as an Eagle Scout project by Steven Moore. Thanks to Ken and Kim Wittenbach for the tree, Tim and Ken Wittenbach for overseeing the project and to Jeff Wilterink and everyone at Lowell Granite for the loving and dedicated work on the monument.

The Alton cemetery is a private association run community cemetery, first begun in 1846. Veterans buried here have served dating back to the War of 1812.



VOTER TURNOUT

Vergennes Township's best voter turnout by percentage was in the 60+ crowd, with a 91.75% turnout!!



ZONING UPDATE

The Planning Commission is in the review process of two new PUD home developments proposed in the Township (preserved land with clustered home sites). Watch for public hearings in the future months. The Board has adopted several zoning ordinance amendments in 2019. Most are summarized below as well as other responsibilities that people need to be aware of.

RECENT ZONING AMENDMENTS:

Temporary Residence – This section has been amended to allow temporary dwellings such as an RV, existing home or mobile home to be lived in during construction of a permanent home. A permit is required.

Bed and Breakfast – This use was also added to the R-2 and R-3 Zoning District with the same language as exists in R-1 and R-A Districts. Bed and Breakfasts require a special exception use permit.

Visitors with RV's – The rewritten section on travel trailers/motor homes are designed for people visiting other persons in the Township. A visitor can stay at a parcel with a dwelling on it for up to 30 days. A visit over 30 days requires a zoning permit and is valid up to 12 months. Setbacks must be met and a plan for water and sewage must be submitted. RV's cannot be rented out to the public.

Fences - The adopted language is to regulate the construction of fences. A site plan and a zoning permit are required. There are height limitations and location requirements. Fencing must be of common fencing materials and be kept in good repair. Fencing for farm uses is exempt if they comply with the State farming regulations.

Grade Levels - This section was rewritten. New construction on land with proposed grade changes will now need to submit a grading plan with their building permit. Grade levels may not be built up to block the views of neighboring homes or cause water to flow onto neighboring properties or cause flooding. The Zoning Administrator and the Building Inspector will review an existing grade level and a proposed grade level plan.

Flat River - The Land Alteration section for the Flat River District was amended to protect the banks. A path to the river may only be by footpath or stairs. Woodchips may be placed on the path. The bank and hill/slope along the river may not be altered. No structures or sidewalks are allowed in the 100 foot river setback. The path through the protected 25 foot natural vegetation strip may be up to 4 feet wide. Docks or stairs require permits.

Murray Lake - The amendments consists of items on lakefront lots such as bird feeders/ baths, boat racks, shore stations, small decorative items or landscaping elements and these items must be a minimum of 5 feet from a side lot line and 30 feet from the shoreline. Any of these structures must not unreasonably obstruct views from neighboring property owners or impact their properties. Winter storage of shore stations and docks may be within the 30 foot setback but must meet the 5 foot side setback.

EXISTING ORDINANCES:

Unlicensed Vehicles and Junk - Vehicles in the Township must have a current license and be operable or be stored inside of an enclosed building. Partially dismantled vehicles and junk and scrap are not permitted unless stored inside of an enclosed building. If not stored inside of an enclosed building, they must be removed from the property.

Home Business - If you have a business or want to start a business headquartered in your home, you must apply for and receive approval for a home business permit. The zoning ordinance allows for various types of businesses that can be conducted within the home or using an accessory building. They include types that are completely within the home such as art, office work, architect, or within an accessory building such as woodworking or other types that are performed elsewhere like landscaping. Another type is renting out older barns for storage of RV's, campers and boats.

Signs: Do not put portable signs along the road side and on power poles at intersections. These are in the road right of way, on private property and not allowed per the sign ordinance section. These portable signs detract from the looks of the Township and distract drivers. Most other typical sign require a permit and all signs have setback distances.

Call Jeanne Vandersloot, Zoning Administrator, for any questions or applications at 616-897-5671 or email to: zoning@vergennestwp.org Visit the Township's website at: www.vergennestwp.org Applications for zoning permits are on the website or at the Township Hall.

FROM THE TREASURER, JANINE MORK

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, whenever possible, please mail your tax payment or leave it in the drop box. While cash payments are accepted, you are encouraged to use a check, cashier's check or credit/debit card. Do not leave cash in the drop box.

Winter taxes are due February 15, 2021.

Normally, taxes are due on the 14th. Because that date falls on the weekend, they are due on the next business day, which is the 15th. They are considered on time if received by the end of the day (5pm) on February 15, 2021.

PLEASE, review your check for accuracy. The amount in the box and the written amount should match. Please make sure to fill out the check completely. If it is not, I will be contacting you.

If you mail your taxes via US Mail, allow 10 days for the payment to arrive in the Township office, postmarks are not accepted as an "on time" payment. This means it should be in the mail by the 5th of February.

There is a locked drop box outside by the flagpole. You can leave any payments or correspondence there and they will be picked up the next business day. You don't even have to get out of your car. Turn around in the upper lot and pull up to the box. Please do not leave cash in the drop box.

Credit/debit cards or e-checks are accepted to pay taxes. There is a fee which goes directly to the administering company. The Township only gets the tax amount. This option is available online, in office or over the phone. Check with your bank for online bill pay, as well. Allow 10 days for this option.

Partial payments can be made toward your tax bill through March 1, 2021. Anything owing after that will be turned over to Kent County for collection. Any interest or penalties will be accrued on the unpaid balance only.

If your mortgage company is paying your taxes through an escrow account, you will receive a white information only, bill in the mail. Follow up at least a week before the due date to ensure the bill was paid. This allows time to correct any errors or omissions. It is ultimately YOUR responsibility to make sure the taxes are paid timely.

Add your phone number to the remittance part of the bill. This makes it so much easier to contact you if there is an issue with your payment. This information is not kept on file in the Township.

It is Vergennes Township policy that if your payment is returned for non-sufficient funds (NSF) for any reason, the Township will charge you \$30 to cover our bank fees and the time it takes to reverse the payment, etc. If you fail to pay this fee, it will be added to your next tax bill and it will be sent to the County as delinquent in March if it remains unpaid.

OFFICE CHANGES

As we look ahead to our physical offices changing, our internal make up has also changed significantly this year. Since the last newsletter;

- We welcomed Marjorie Mayhew as our new Receptionist and Building Administrative Assistant this past July.
- Our longtime friend of Vergennes Township Mari Stone is retiring at the end of the year. Not only did Mari serve as the clerk for over 23 years, she has been a steady rock through these uncertain times. We've appreciated Mari's leadership and humble sharing of her knowledge and experience. While we are excited for her and her upcoming adventures, things will certainly be different here. Thank you Mari!
- The hunt is on for a new Assessor as long time Vergennes Assessor Debbie Rashid and her assistant Lisa have also resigned. Debbie's smile, knowledge and experience will be greatly missed and we wish them the best.

