

# 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 2012-13

**SUPERVISOR:** TIM WITTENBACH  
**TREASURER:** JEAN HOFFMAN  
**CLERK:** MARI STONE  
**TRUSTEES:** RICK GILLETT  
ALLAN BAIRD

*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*

### Elections 2012

The best news is – they're over! No more political ads, robo-calls or junk mail galore. The equipment and paperwork is packed away for a while, and I am happy to report out voters turned out heavily as usual. I could not have done it without the help of staff and our wonderful precinct workers. Heather Hoffman was indispensable to me this year, starting out in February with the Presidential Primary, the GRCC mileage question in May, and the Primary in August. By the time we began work on the November General in September, she was well seasoned and knew the ropes. We had more than 400 absentee voters in November. The procedures and processing of Absentee Ballots are complicated and demanding, and Heather handled it all superbly. Thank you Heather for a great job! I would also like to thank all of our Precinct Inspectors for their service and commitment.

Precinct 1 – Chair, Molly Heemstra, and her team of Doug Wester, Dale Minier, Audrey Rasch, Janine Mork, and Carol Rockwall.

Precinct 2 – Chair, Shantell Ford, and her team of Barb Porter, Bev Anderson, Warren Johnson, Bravot Morris, and Kendra Ford.

Also, a big thanks goes out to the members and staff at the Vergennes United Methodist Church for their willingness to host our Precinct 2. It's great to have good neighbors.

### Internet Service Providers

We have been receiving calls to the township offices asking about the regulations and requirements for the

towers that internet service providers use. One of the local providers who has been asked to comply with state and local codes and ordinances, has been telling customers that the township is restricting them from upgrades or somehow inhibiting the quality of their signals. Residents need to know that this is not true – the Board has been trying to work with this provider for 6 months regarding the state codes and township ordinances that they have ignored. It is our hope that this situation can be resolved before their lack of compliance affects our residents.

### "911" Reflective Address Signs

If Emergency Services can't find you, they can't help you! Is your home address prominently displayed? You can order your own "911" reflective address sign from the Lowell Area Fire Department Cadets. They are only \$15.00, and if you order more than one the rest are \$12.50 each. To order your sign, or to purchase a sign as a gift, click on the link on our web site home page, or call 897-8135. Proceeds from all sign sales go to the purchase of equipment for the Lowell Area Fire Department.

### Notary Services

The Township offers free Notary services to our residents. Jean Hoffman, Treasurer, and Janine Mork, Receptionist and Deputy Treasurer, are both Notaries. If you are wondering what notarization actually does, the Notary is simply certifying that the signature on the document is that of the identified person. That is why you must show ID to the Notary, and the Notary must witness the signature. Should you need a document notarized, please call the township during office hours to make sure one of them are there. Appointments can also be made.



## INFORMATION FROM YOUR TOWNSHIP ASSESSING OFFICE



### Mailing address updates

Please contact our office within thirty days after a change of address occurs to update your mailing information. This will help with the delivery of assessment change notices and tax bills. Our office number is (616) 897-5671.

### Field Inspections

The assessor's office will be working on all open building permits for the year as well as those permits pulled for new construction since January 1st, 2012. The assessor's office will also continue to be working on neighborhood reviews. We will be in a marked vehicle and will have identification.

### Assessment Change Notices

Towards the end of February the assessment change notices will be mailed. Hearings by appointment with the Board of Review will be held in March. These appointments will be scheduled after the notices are sent. When you receive your Assessment Notice in February, review the information and call with any questions or to schedule an appointment with the Board of Review. Sales data and

comparative assessment information will be available for your review in the Assessor's Office after the notices have been mailed.

### Did you know?

- Your taxable value can never exceed your assessed value.
- It is your responsibility as a taxpayer to review your property record card periodically to be sure the information is accurate with all the information that is currently on record.
- The assessor is not permitted by State Law to automatically set your new assessment at one half of your purchase price.
- The assessor is available Monday 9:00 am to 4:00 pm and Thursday from 9:00 am to noon. Feel free to come in or call (616) 897-5671 if you have any questions on your property. You can also send an e-mail to [clerk@vergennestwp.org](mailto:clerk@vergennestwp.org), and the clerk will forward your questions. Assessing law and the process used is quite complex, and we are always willing to help our taxpayers understand how it all works.



## SHAKE YOUR MAILBOX



Kent County Road Commission urges homeowners to shake their mailbox.

Grand Rapids, Michigan - The Kent County Road Commission is asking residents to prepare for winter by shaking their mailbox. Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Kent County Road Commission have policies in place regarding replacement of mailboxes that have clearly been hit by snowplows. These provisions do not apply when damage is caused by just the force of the snow against the mailbox and/or post.

"In most instances where mailboxes are damaged the snowplow truck doesn't actually hit the mailbox," said Jerry Byrne, KCRC Director of Maintenance. "The force of snow thrown from the roadway is enough to knock down a loose mailbox. Damage to these posts and

receptacles can often be prevented by proper inspection and maintenance."

"Taking time now to check and secure mailboxes and posts can prevent serious headaches later," Steve Warren, KCRC Deputy Director said. "If the mailbox moves when shaken, the mailbox and/or post may not withstand standard snow removal operations and should be repaired or replaced prior to the onset of winter."

The Kent County Road Commission and U.S. Postal Service remind residents that this is also a good time to replace loose hinges on the mailbox door and to replace or add reflective house numbers to allow postal workers and emergency responders to easily find your home.

For additional information about KCRC's mailbox policy and design guidelines, please visit the KCRC website: [www.kentcountyroads.net](http://www.kentcountyroads.net).



## CHAMBER DATES 2013



The following community event dates for 2013 are courtesy of Liz Baker, Executive Director of the Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce. More information can be found on the chamber website at [www.lowellchamber.org](http://www.lowellchamber.org).

- Lowell Community Expo applications go online January 1st
- Chamber Annual Winter Gathering of the Membership and Awards, February, date TBA

- Lowell Community Expo, Saturday, March 23, Lowell High School, 9 am to 3 pm
- Girls' Night Out, Thursday April 18
- Lowell Showboat Sizzling Summer Concerts, June – August, Thursday evenings, 7 pm to 9 pm
- Lowell Area Farmers Market, June – August, Thursdays, 11 am to 3 pm, Tractor Supply Parking Lot
- Lowell Riverwalk Festival and Cruise-in, July 11, 12 and 13

- Membership Golf Outing, Friday August 9, Location TBA
- Harvest Celebration, Saturday, October 12
- Girls' Night Out, Thursday, October 17
- Christmas Through Lowell, November 15, 16 & 17
- Christmas Festivities and Annual Santa Parade, December 7
- Santa Visits on the Lowell Showboat, Month of December

❄️ ❄️ **DOG LICENSES** ❄️ ❄️

**PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO KENT COUNTY TREASURER**

Dog Licenses will be available in the township hall from December 1, 2012 - March 1, 2013. You may also purchase licenses at the Lowell City Hall on Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. if this would be more convenient for you.

Rabies vaccinations and dog licenses are required in Michigan for all dogs four months of age or older.

**YOU WILL NEED:**

- **PREPRINTED APPLICATION FORM FROM THE ANIMAL SHELTER**
- **UPDATED RABIES VACCINATION (IF NEEDED)**
- **PROOF OF SPAYING OR NEUTERING (IF NEEDED)**

If you do not have preprinted form from the animal shelter, you must have a rabies certification and proof of neutering. Call the shelter at 632-7300 if you have any questions.

**HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS WISH LIST**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Request from the Kent County Animal Shelter | & towels   |
| *New bags of dog/puppy food                 | *New dog or cat treats (bring them in personally and hand them out to the animals) |
| *New bags of Cat/kitten food                | *Pet store gift certificates   |
| *Bleach                                     | *Pet toys (new or gently used)   |
| *New collars and leashes                    | <b>PLEASE CALL AHEAD to deliver your items.</b>                                    |
| *Laundry detergent                          | <b>616-632-7300</b>  |
| *Brushes and pet shampoo                    |  |
| *New or gently used blankets                |  |

❄️ ❄️ **WINTER TAX 2012-13** ❄️ ❄️

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year** – The office will be closed on Friday the 21st thru Wednesday the 26th for the holiday. The last day to pay your tax bill in 2012 will be the 27th of December.

**Taxes are due Thursday, February 14, 2013.** Please mail early. Postmarks are not accepted for due date!! We are not responsible for delays in the postal system. Please use the return envelope provided with your tax statements. If you would like a receipt, please enclose the entire bill and a self-addressed envelope. We will stamp the upper part and return it to you. You may also use the mail slot in the door if paying by check, but please do not leave cash.

Remember that you can make partial payments for Summer and Winter through February 14th. You will then only have interest added to the unpaid balance. Payments received after February 14th must include the penalty and interest. State law prohibits the township from waiving these charges. You may pay summer and winter 2012 taxes at the township through February 28th. All unpaid taxes will be turned over to the county treasurer on March 1, 2013.

**Make checks payable to:** Vergennes Township Treasurer. Please do not include dog licenses in the same check.

**ONLINE PAYMENTS** must have the parcel number printed on them.

— Jean Hoffman, Treasurer

❄️ ❄️ ❄️ **NEWS FROM LOWELL AREA TRAILS** ❄️ ❄️ ❄️

**North Country Trail**

Jeff McCusker, Manager of the North Country Trail headquartered in Lowell, passed the following news along regarding progress being made to the local portion of this National Trail. Action is being taken to officially change the route of the North Country Trail so that it continues north from Fallasburg Park through various County and Township parks and trail systems to Rockford, and then continue northwest to connect to existing North Country Trail sections in Newaygo County. A purchase is also underway by the State to obtain the Elmdale railroad line south of Lowell, and this will officially become part of the North Country Trail in the next few months.

They are working with other trail groups such as the Lowell Area Trailway and Fred Meijer River Valley Rail Trails (I will collect information and provide an update on that group's activities in our next newsletter) to develop a trail map showing all the existing and proposed trails in the Lowell Area by next Spring. Another cooperative effort includes working on the Lowell City Signage and Wayfinding project to develop a standard design template and install new directional signs and information kiosks in Lowell.

**Lowell Area Trailway**

It may not look as if much has been done since the trail was officially dedicated last fall, but a lot is going on behind the scenes. Plans to build a "pocket park" with a pavilion and donor display just off the trail west of Cherry Creek

Elementary are coming along. The proposed size of the covered structure will be 20x20, and will incorporate the donor signage and brick tributes that have been purchased.

Benches have been received and assembled. Two being placed on the viewing platforms overlooking the Wege property on the east side of Alden Nash will be installed this fall, with the rest slated for installation in the spring. Way finding signage and quarter mile markers will also be added in the spring, including the addition of bright green "follow the dots" signs on fixtures at the High School site. The City of Lowell is currently working on a project to create unifying signage for the community, and the trail board will work to coordinate with the outcomes. Trash receptacles and dog waste collectors are also scheduled to be installed shortly.

There is a great need for a "Friends of the Lowell Area Trailway" volunteer group. Several interested community members have been working on creating such a group, and have been determining possible roles they could play. Some ideas include: routine maintenance such as emptying waste recepticals and week-whacking along the trail; overseeing art installations, plantings, Scout projects; long term preservation; fundraising events and special programing. If you have a desire to participate to make our trail system better and better, a friends group is just what you need, and the "Friends of the Lowell Area Trailway" need YOU! Contact Mari Stone at 897-5671, or Deb Pavsek at 460-2768, leave your contact info, and we will be in touch.

**J & H Oil Gas Station**

In 2012 the Planning Commission and Township Board approved a site plan and special exception use permit to J&H Oil to construct a new gas station with drive thru restaurant to be located at the SE corner of Lincoln Lake Ave and Vergennes St (432 Lincoln Lake). The building will be constructed of brick with large glass windows. It will contain a convenience store and a restaurant that will have eat in or drive thru capabilities. The company is still looking for the right restaurant type to go into the building. They typically franchise Subway but there are already several nearby and they are looking for something different. They will let the Township Board know when they have chosen the new restaurant type and name. There will be four islands with gas pumps and one island with diesel pumps. There will be an air pump for tires. The property will be landscaped and special vegetation to screen nearby homes. They will build a sidewalk from the corner of the intersection to the parking area to accommodate any hikers or bicyclists that may be using the new trail at the former railroad line. The company has a history of investing in the community and supporting charitable events. They have already sponsored the post game fireworks for the Pink Arrow football game in September. Construction is planned to begin in the spring of 2013.

**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 Vergennes Township Zoning Ordinance contains requirements for 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.

**Home Businesses**

The Township provides in the zoning ordinance for various types of businesses that can be done within the home or using an accessory building. The standards and regulations that go with them are available in chapter 4 of the zoning ordinance. The types of businesses typically affected by this ordinance have 1 to 3 employees, and may be conducted completely within the home, within an accessory building, or the work may be done elsewhere but equipment or supplies for the business are stored on the home site. The provision is meant to accommodate small owner-occupied businesses, and does not allow for larger commercial type operations in residential areas. Another aspect of the ordinance allows renting out older/existing barns for storage of RV’s, campers and boats. The application is on the website and an applicant checks which type they are applying for. Call the Zoning Administrator for any questions.

**What’s on the Website?**

Be sure to visit the Township’s website [www.vergennestwp.org](http://www.vergennestwp.org). Residents and applicants can save time, mailing, and driving for zoning and planning procedures by obtaining meeting schedules, minutes, fee schedule and escrow policy, accessory building information and setbacks and Flat River information on the website. Names and addresses of Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Township Board and other commissions and boards are listed. All of the forms such as building permits, electrical, mechanical, plumbing permits, all types of zoning and site plan review applications are available for quick downloading.

The Zoning Ordinance can be viewed and read online as well as other Township Board Ordinances. Notices of public hearings for ordinance amendments, special exception uses or home-site development applications will be on the web site as well as published in the Lowell Ledger. Residents desiring to write a comment letter concerning a Planning Commission or Zoning Board of Appeals public hearing can email their letter to the clerk ([clerk@vergennestwp.org](mailto:clerk@vergennestwp.org)) or zoning administrator ([zoning@vergennestwp.org](mailto:zoning@vergennestwp.org)), saving stamps, time to put into an envelope, mailing and/or scheduling to drop it off during office hours. This convenience is very beneficial to the residents. Most questions or information can be retrieved in your own leisure time. Please call the Township office if you need further information or clarification as needed.