



Summer 2013

Columbia Township

News and Events

The Supervisor's Update

Another fiscal year has come and gone. Our budget for our 2014 fiscal year was finalized in May. I want to take this opportunity to thank our Board of Trustees and our staff at the Township who helped prepare the budget, and also help us to stay at or below our projected expenses for the year. Our upcoming budget includes a number of special projects the Board has recognized as important projects to try and tackle in the new budget year. Some of these projects include repairing and repaving our parking lot, purchasing a new squad car for our police department, purchasing a few new sets of turnout gear for the fire department, and several updates at the Township Park.

We are also looking forward to working with Jackson County and partnering with them in making improvements to the County Park located at the East end of Clark Lake. Many years ago, the County Park was a very popular park and visited by many people each summer. We are confident that partnering with the County will allow the park to become a recreational destination for Township residents and visitors to our area. Recreational opportunities boost our local businesses and economy.

If any of you have been following our legal proceedings with Leoni Township, oral arguments are scheduled to begin later this summer. At this time, there is no new information to report on the lawsuit, except that the Township is still involved with it and looking forward to finally resolving the contractual issues in dispute.

Please feel free to contact me with any and all problems or concerns you might have.

Bob Elrod, Supervisor

(517) 592-2000 ext. 210

Police Department Update

With summer upon us, your Columbia Township Police Department continues to provide full-service police protection 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our officers continue to handle approximately 95% of all the calls for service in our township, with the Sheriff's department and State Police handling the remaining 5%. We take pride in our quick response times as well as the vast majority of calls for service that we handle.

We watch our budget very carefully, and continue to operate our Police Department primarily on our millage and other revenues, taking a small portion of our funding from the General Fund. Our staffing levels are still stable, with myself (Chief), five full-time officers, a part-time secretary, two part-time officers, and two reserve officers.

We are preparing for another busy summer with races at MIS, (and several other new events at MIS), the Clark Lake Run, summer parades and festivals, and many other events throughout our community.

We continue to provide police services to the Village of Cement City pursuant to a contractual agreement with them. We are fully paid by Cement City for this contract, and with their small geographic area and shared border with Columbia Township, we have developed a relationship with them as if they are another part of Columbia Township. This contracting agreement enhances their police protection, provides some funding to help with our budget, and helps to make our community a safer and better place to live or visit. It is a win-win for both communities.

We also provide extra directed patrols within the Village of Brooklyn, in addition to our second officer that patrols our remaining area of responsibility. These patrols in Brooklyn are typically during the peak call times, and do make a difference. These extra patrols have historically been compensated for by the Village of Brooklyn.

Fraud complaints continue to persist, with a never-ending number of variations on suspects preying on our elderly and more vulnerable. I attribute the fast-moving technology to much of this, with the internet and simple phone calls accounting for much of the attempted fraud. Residents are cautioned to not give out personal information over the phone, like credit card info, social security numbers, bank account numbers, etc. If something sounds too good to be true, it usually is. Don't be afraid to ask a friend or relative for advice, or call your local police department if you have any questions.

Please feel free to visit our website at www.twp.columbia.mi.us, where you will find a link to our Police Department, as well as a variety of forms such as tip sheets, **vacation check forms**, and Freedom of Information Act requests. Additionally, you can feel free to email me at delwell@twp.columbia.mi.us. If you have a need for a police officer, you should call 911 for emergency and non-emergency complaints, and you can request a Columbia Officer respond. Our main number is 517-592-3122. When we are out of the office, you can leave a message, and we will return your call.

Sincerely,

David K. Elwell, Chief of Police

Assessor's Updates

As in past years, the Assessing Department will be spending a lot of time out and about completing field work. We will be spending most of our time in the Village of Brooklyn this summer. Besides our regular efforts to visit all properties every five to six years, we will also be out visiting properties that have sold, as well as all commercial properties this year. In both cases, it will be important to try to contact all owners of these two types of property. The reasoning behind this is to collect financial data to begin looking at the possibilities of applying an Income Valuation approach in appropriate situations for commercial properties. In regard to touching base with the new property owners, it is important to get as much information to determine if a sale is a true arms-length transaction. The type of information we look to verify is proper market exposure, structure condition reflecting the current assessment (typically important only in foreclosure situations), or related parties, just to name a few. This is important to ensure that Sales, Economic Condition Factors and Land Value studies are done accurately with the absolute best data.



There will be two significant changes for the upcoming 2014 assessment year. The first is related to personal property. If commercial or industrial personal property's state equalized value is \$40,000 or less as of December 31, 2013, it will be exempt for 2014. If the ballot proposal in August 2014 does not pass, the personal property tax exemption is automatically repealed and 2015 will revert back to the current law. More information will follow in our next newsletter if necessary.

Secondly, there will be a significant change to transfers of ownership starting December 31, 2013. Public Act 497 of 2012 states a transfer of residential real property is not an uncapping situation if the transferee is related to the transferor by blood or affinity to the first degree and the use of the residential real property does not change following the transfer of ownership. Affinity to the first degree includes the following relationships: spouse, father or mother, father or mother of the spouse, son or daughter, including adopted children and son or daughter of the spouse. There will be no limitations on the number of parcels transferred. There are still some unanswered questions related to this and more information will follow in our next newsletter if necessary.

The door is always open in the Assessing Department to answer any questions related to assessing at any time. We take pride in being as transparent as possible in trying to achieve an accurate and fair valuation for all property. We look forward to working with all property owners in the future.

Hope everyone has a great summer!

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The Clerk's Corner

As you may have heard, Columbia Township was awarded a Helping America Vote Act grant, which allowed us to upgrade our doors at the Township Hall to Handicap compliant automatic doors, thus making it a more accessible voting precinct for residents.

We would also like to thank our Sexton, Richard Schiel and the assistance of the Leadership Class of the Columbia Alternative school for their help in making our cemeteries really shine for the Memorial Day holiday.

As a result of the recent approval by the Township Board of Trustees, we are in the process of improving our Jefferson and Cement City cemeteries with driveway upgrades and fences.

Barry Marsh, Clerk
(517) 592-2000 ext. 230

Cathy Hulburt, Deputy Clerk
(517) 592-2000 ext. 231

The Treasurer's Thoughts

Recent State legislation now mandates a reminder message for all previous years delinquent taxes held by Jackson County. The message is on your tax bill if you owe taxes prior to 2013. This is the result of one taxpayer complaining to a legislator and the resulting legislation being passed without thinking about the unintended consequences. Although the legislation affects a very few taxpayers, the resulting programming (merging databases from different government entities) wasted untold thousands in meeting the requirements of the law. How does this streamline, improve, or provide a necessary service to the taxpayer? Again, legislators should think before they vote.

On a positive note, both the Lake Columbia and Vineyard Lake bond refund and pay-down projects were successfully implemented. Our Controller, bond counsel and Treasurer were happy to reduce the interest rate and future obligations by over \$2 million on the sewer bonds.

I would also ask that you take a look at our Township Park on Hyde Road at Clark Lake. We have improved the parking lot, beach area and have planned for construction of a gazebo for sheltered picnics. The DNR Recreation Passport Grant for permanent restroom construction has been submitted and the DNR site review was completed on June 4th. Private contributions to park projects are welcomed and would also apply to improvements at the Township boat landing on Hyde Road. Please submit any ideas on what you would like to see added to our current playground equipment or park facilities.

John C. Calhoun, Treasurer
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Debbie Toburen, Deputy Treasurer
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