

PENN TOWNSHIP NEWSLETTER

APRIL, 2024

"He who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love." St. Basil

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to give you an update on all the things going on in our beautiful Penn Township.

We are thankful that our community continues to maintain its rural characteristics while providing essential services, recreation, topnotch infrastructure, and the lowest tax rates in Cass County.

It will be a busy summer season around those parts of Diamond Lake, that are in the Township. We have approved extensive road improvements on the residential streets surrounding the lake. Please bear with us, as the Cass County Road Commission brings their pavers, rollers and trucks around to those areas this summer. Penn Road and other rural thoroughfares will also get their attention later in the summer.

Next year, we have targeted residential streets around Donnell Lake for re-paving and general improvements.

Many of you have heard about issues pertaining to our ambulance service. The long and the short of it is that the contracted EMS provider ceased operations in our area. This led to many of the surrounding communities having to work together to bring in the service required. The Penn Township Ambulance Board, led by our much-decorated Cass County Sheriff sergeant and volunteer fire man, Jason Pompey, has worked tirelessly to create a new co-operative agreement with other municipalities in the area. We now have a new agreement in place and the same ambulance coverage we had with our prior contactor. Lack of EMT services has become a nationwide problem. Especially for smaller communities that need to contract these services. Thankfully, Penn Township is well positioned to meet challenges going forward in this regard. Last week, we upgraded the ambulance truck operated by our Fire Department, to a newer, much more high-tech vehicle that will serve us for many years to come.

We continue to set aside funding to update our Fire Station. Our Fire Chief, Jim Bogue, has been relentless in seeking outside funding and grants. With our Parks and Recreation director, Lisa Fitzsimons, they have already held one successful fundraiser and plan many more to come.

Our Fire Department is exceptional in every way. Led by Chief Bogue, it is staffed with incredible, dedicated volunteers, many of whom have been with us for decades. We pride ourselves on the quality of our equipment and training. Please look for dates on our website for Fire Department Open House and fundraisers and come take a tour and lend support if you can.

The Township Annual Budget has increased from \$600,000+ to over \$1.5 million in the past four years. This is without increasing any tax millage or levying new taxes. That is how we hope to

continue to operate in the next years. Much of our new revenue has come from fees generated by marijuana growers in our area. Cass County Sheriff's department received substantial funding through marijuana operations, as well. When the voters in the State of Michigan legalized marijuana, we quickly followed suit. Regulating and taxing what had been an illegal activity, has been a boon. Michigan State law provides that marijuana can only be grown on agricultural or industrial zoned properties. Penn Township has almost 15,000 acres of agricultural land. Last year fewer than 200 acres were utilized for marijuana growing but it generated high rents for our local farmers and property owners. It created farm jobs and utilized local farm services. Penn Township well drillers, electricians, builders, and farm machine operating contractors got a boost in arm. Marijuana farms utilize a small footprint, many are organic, all use heavy-metal free fertilizers and natural pesticides. Yet, they are labor intensive and bring much appreciated revenue to local businesses and into our general Township operating funds. Our local Circuit Court has pointed out and ruled that marijuana growing has all the same characteristics of typical crop cultivation and by its nature, is an agricultural activity. This is a good decision for our farmers and landowners, who want to preserve the land for agricultural activity for the foreseeable future.

Penn Township's LISA FITZSIMONS SPORTS COMPLEX in Vandalia has been a smashing success! The six pickle ball courts at the facility are used throughout the day and multiple tournaments and clinics have been held. We will continue to improve the facility to encourage our area residents to come and take advantage of this brilliant park. It is open to the public and if you are interested, look for dates for clinics and tournaments on our website. Pickle Ball is the fastest growing sport in the world and one of the easiest to play. There are picnic tables, shaded areas and facilities at the Park. Come join the fun.

Our building and zoning departments continue their dedicated support and guidance in helping our property owners maximize the enjoyment of their respective properties. Property values continue to rise in the Township as more and more people discover the magic of Cass County and Penn Township in particular. Balancing our farming heritage and agricultural land utilization, with economic opportunities and push for housing growth can be tricky at times. The current Township Board feels that maintaining the agricultural characteristics of our Township is important and taking land out of cultivation and replacing it with industrial and residential developments, should be a careful analysis done without haste. That being said, the MEC Smart Park's first business is already generating valuable revenue for the area and providing high-paying jobs. We will continue to encourage careful, selective business development within the confines of this industrial zone.

It is exciting to support the proposed improvement of the Diamond Lake Yacht Club. The Yacht Club is a beloved institution on Diamond Lake, that has provided and promoted great leisure and youth activities throughout the years. We look forward to working with local business owner and long-time resident Rosemary Leonard, Yacht club volunteers, and the board as it embarks on their facility improvements.

We want to thank Dave Bolen and Mike Guinane with the Diamond Lake Association for their selfless commitment to looking at ways to improve the Diamond Lake community and Penn Township in general. Their positive and constructive input regarding our community is much appreciated. Mike along with Bob Price of Diamond Island are generous and dedicated supporters

and commentators at Township Board meetings. Their kind and gentle demeanor while advocating for their respective neighbors, is a great catalyst in building a wonderful community.

There are ongoing discussions regarding a non-motorized trail from Cassopolis to Dr. Lawless Park. The proposed general route of the trail is from downtown Cassopolis, then south of K&M along the old railroad bed, to Calvin Center Road, then south to Bonine Street, then east to Paradise Lake Road, then south to Donnell Lake Street and then east to Lewis Lake Road. We would love to hear thoughts from our residents on this proposed trail.

Our new Township Clerk, Chelsa Greathouse, is embarking on her first year of presidential elections. Election laws and demands put a lot of pressure on our staff and volunteers. Please be kind and respectful to our dedicated officials, as we strive to provide a meaningful, seamless voting experience for our citizens.

Please visit our website at: <https://www.penntwpmi.org> for list of Township services, ordinances, and directory of Township personnel.

All my best,

Oli Olafsson
Penn Township Supervisor