

2010 Park Township Annual Report

Reports to the citizenry are annual events at the national, state and county levels because it is important that we inform our residents of the previous year's actions and to chart a course for the next year. Therefore, we present the 2010 Park Township Annual Report.

Context

The last six months of 2008 and all of 2009 were difficult times for the country, Michigan as a state, and the Holland-Zeeland area in particular. Our unemployment rates in Ottawa County hovered near 14% percent, and many manufacturers/business owners were laying-off, cutting hours, and cutting employee compensation.

Township Governance

In the spring of 2008, the Park Township board of trustees voted to change our form of government from that of a full-time paid Supervisor to that of a part-time Supervisor with a full-time professional township manager. Stu Visser, decided not to seek re-election and was hired on an interim basis as the township manager at the end of his term.

With the November 2008 election, the board welcomed **three new members**: Skip Keeter, clerk, and trustees Jerry Hunsburger and Michael Toscano. Former clerk Jeff Ebihara did not seek reelection as clerk choosing instead to run for a trustee position, and Trustee Amanda Price was elected supervisor. Incumbent treasurer Jan Steggerda and incumbent trustee Doug Dreyer rounded out the remainder of the board elected in November 2008.

In May of 2009, trustee Jeff Ebihara accepted a professional position in Raleigh, North Carolina and tendered his resignation effective in August. The board asked residents to apply for the open trustee position, interviewed all applicants and appointed Bob Ellis as trustee in August.

In January 2009, the Board began the search for the permanent township manager. After an extensive search process, the Board interviewed four candidates and offered the job to Jerry Felix who began his role on May 19.

Jerry has served as a city manager in Greenville and Harbor Springs and as the executive director of the Grand Valley Metro Council. He clearly understands local government and is able to work in a collaborative manner with other units of government in our area. Jerry is very happy to meet with township residents and can be contacted at jfelix@parktownship.org or 616.738.4229.

Strategic Planning

One of the first orders of business as a new board was to hold an off-site retreat at Camp Geneva in December of 2008. At this meeting, the board took the opportunity to discuss the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to the township in a common practice know as a SWOT analysis. We also identified areas where we felt we needed to concentrate our efforts for the upcoming year.

Master Plan Process

In 2008, the Planning Commission reviewed the township's current Master Plan document and determined that it needed to be updated. Prior to updating the Master Plan document, the Planning Commission recommended that a Citizen Survey be completed to gain input from our citizens.

With the election of a new board of trustees and the hiring of Mr. Felix, the Board put the Citizen Survey on hold in anticipation of an Integrated Master Plan (IMP) process. This process will involve citizens in a futuring exercise, the development of a master plan and park plan, will focus attention on distinct areas of the township (i.e., Macatawa, Southside, Ottawa Beach, Waukazoo, Park Central area (fairgrounds, airport, dog park and skate park), and involve branding for Park Township.

A Request for Proposals was issued which asked for innovative approaches for the delivery of the IMP in which Engineering and Design firms work together to deliver a master plan that is specific to neighborhoods, integrates our Parks Plan, discusses green infrastructure and greenways, and brands Park Township as a destination.

Planning Commission

In 2008, the Board of Trustees discussed the possibility of reducing the size of our Planning Commission from a nine member board to a seven member board. In 2009, the terms of two Planning Commission members expired in the same month and the board voted to reduce the Planning Commission to seven members. Part of this decision was based on the reality of the number of building permits applied for at the township. From May of 2007 to May of 2009, Park Township saw a 38% reduction in building permit applications which resulted in sporadic planning commission meetings. While not large, we estimate this resulted in a savings of \$1,500 per year.

Groundwater Issues

In June of 2008, our area was drenched with several inches of rain that saturated the water table in many areas. That following December, Park Township received several inches of snow followed by a thaw which resulted in more groundwater than many homes could handle. This thawing only added to the severe problems experienced in several areas of the township and impacted large numbers of residents.

To address the issues of groundwater inundation, the Board appointed a citizen's subcommittee to investigate the causes of the groundwater and to make recommendations to the board about possible causes and solutions. The committee met for three months and made a series of recommendations to the board regarding hiring professional engineers to evaluate the groundwater issues.

Key recommendations and findings were:

- The Wyoming Water Treatment Plant was not the cause of the groundwater inundation.
- The water table in Park Township was at extraordinarily high levels.
- Drainage throughout certain key areas of the township did not exist
- Certain areas were found to be without positive outlets for flows from excess surface water or from water being pumped from basements to the roadside.

Estate Drive and Quincy

While many areas of the township sustained water damage in the spring and December of 2008, it was not until spring of 2009 that water began covering the areas of Estate Drive and Quincy in the northern part of the township. The Board voted to fund a temporary pumping system to remove water off the road.

Affected areas

Following the June 19, 2009 rain event, a 500 year downpour, many more of our residents sustained ground water flood damage. Water was over Estate Drive, Quincy, Greenly, Riley, 168th near Lakewood School, Ottawa Beach Road, Post, South Shore Drive, and a portion of 32nd Street was washed out completely. Other locations with major damage included those neighborhoods in the area of 168th/Lakewood and Perry and the Waukazoo area.

Residents, businesses, and church facilities were all heavily impacted by the amount of June rain on top of the already high water table in the northwest area of the township. From information that was collected, new drainage routes were outlined and discussed with engineering firms and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. The recommendation was that a new drainage district should be constructed from Quincy to Lake Macatawa near or along 168th.

Lessons Learned

During the June 2009 rain event, the utility lines from Holland City to south Park Township were cut off when flood waters washed out 32nd Street near Old Orchard. The jointly operated Holland City/Park Township Fire Station lost power and was without a backup generator. Staff subsequently issued an RFP for generators at both the north and south side fire stations and generators were installed in November of 2009.

The June rain event also caused some environmental contaminants to be released above ground. Park Township did not have a policy which allowed clean up of the contamination and DEQ was contacted for possible cleanup alternatives. A new ordinance has been enacted to address cost recovery for environmental or hazardous contaminants.

Budget

Park Township, like all governmental units, has experienced a decrease in state revenue sharing, a decrease in investment income and a drop in property tax revenues. We have taken many steps to reduce our costs but note that the Park Township has not raised its general fund millage rate in more than twenty years. This conservative fiscal trend will continue in the Fiscal Year 2010-2011 budget.

The board implemented many cost saving mechanisms.

- The Board of Trustees froze all staff salaries for the 2009-10 budget year. Additionally, the board decreased the per-meeting payment for Trustees from \$85.00 per meeting to a total of \$150 per month. Cost saving: \$2,000 to \$3,000 (Prior to the \$150 per month amount, trustees could attend up to six meetings a month which would have resulted in a payment to them of \$510).
- Staff conducted a thorough review of our health care benefits and rebid our health insurance for employees. Cost savings: \$105,000
- Due to rebidding of employee health insurance costs, the township costs for the retiree health care fund was adjusted. Cost savings: \$250,000
- Reduction in size of Planning Commission. Cost Savings \$1,500.
- RFP for new audit firm was hired and new auditor hired. Cost savings: \$5,000.

Internal Changes

Our exemplary township staff has implemented several new changes at the township. Among them:

- Budgeting processes that comply with GAAP accounting practices
- Employee Performance Evaluation System
- Integrated new accounting software
- Conducted an inventory of all township property and the board referred this “Places and Spaces” inventory to the Planning Commission for recommendations as to future uses.
- A new outdoor ice skating rink at the entrance to the Fairgrounds Property

Communications

- The Park Township website was redesigned and reformatted early in 2009 to be more user-friendly to our residents. The website was used extensively in 2009 to update residents in high water areas on the status of committee meetings, engineering and drain commissioner findings.
- Quarterly newsletters continue to be sent to residents.
- Beginning with resident meetings in the Estate Drive area of the Township, Board representatives intend to meet regularly with other groups within our Township. Meetings have been held with Park Township based business owners, Park Township blueberry farmers, Superintendent Brian Davis of Holland Public Schools, and Superintendent Pat Koeze of West Ottawa Public Schools,

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In 2010, the Board anticipates the following:

- The total assessment on Park Township will decrease by 1.5% which will affect the overall general fund budget.
- Approval of budget.
- Both the Bike Paths and Police/E-Unit Millage fund will be up for a renewal millage vote.
- The Ottawa County Drain Commissioner's office will oversee the Park West Drain construction.
- The Integrated Master Plan process will begin with input from Park Township residents.
- The overall number of building projects is projected to remain low.

The entire Board of Trustees considers it a pleasure to serve the residents of Park Township as your elected representatives. If you have comments or questions for the board or individuals trustees, please call us at 616.399.4520 or email us at the email addresses below.

Amanda Price, Supervisor
(aprice@parktownship.org)

Skip Keeter, Clerk
(ekeeter@parktownship.org)

Jan Steggerda, Treasurer
(jsteggerda@parktownship.org)

Doug Dreyer, Trustee
(ddreyer@parktownship.org)

Bob Ellis, Trustee
(bobellis@parktownship.org)

Jerry Hunsburger, Trustee
(jhunsburger@parktownship.org)

Mike Toscano, Trustee
(mtoscano@parktownship.org)