

## **State of Morton Township**

**June 16, 2009**

Our new Morton Township Board was sworn into office in November 2008. We received the operation in great financial shape, thanks to the outgoing Trustees. An extensive remodeling of the Canadian Lakes Fire Station had been funded and was near completion. A million dollars had been set aside with the intent of purchasing a needed fire truck. The 3 newly elected Board members brought fresh ideas and enthusiasm while the remaining 2 members from the previous Board brought experience and a great work ethic. It has been a great experience so far.

Our initial challenges included the need to re-address a good portion of Canadian Lakes to make response to emergency situations quicker. Work has continued and we now are prepared to have a public hearing on the changes in July. We know this will cause some inconvenience but are confident that the safety it will bring will be worthwhile.

We have been working hard to update our Township Ordinances and our Zoning and Planning. We have new volunteers who bring great ideas to the discussions. They have found significant areas of interest that needed addressing. Part of their work closed a loophole in our system that allowed many people to participate in Township funded benefits. We are currently looking at benefits we pay for retirees and their spouses that can be very costly and may not be justified in this economy.

We are working hard to be involved and interactive with other groups in our area. We now regularly attend meetings of the Village of Mecosta, the Tri-Lakes Association, the School Section Lake Association, the County Road Commission, and the Canadian Lakes Property Owners Association. This effort has led to improved relations with the groups and will lead to joint projects benefitting Township residents. We have joined in efforts of the Mecosta Area Committee and have participated in the Winterfest, Music on the River, and the Summer Mecosta Days. We regularly attend Fire and Rescue meetings.

Improvements in our operation include a more user friendly telephone system, new computer software, more open office hours, an afterhours drop box, and more access to the use of our Town Hall. Alan Metcalf has been retained to service our computer system and to help make sure our information is secure and backed up.

I have begun studying for my assessor license. This will benefit me in assisting residents in understanding the tax system. Our Assessor does a superb job of educating the public and continues to keep herself informed of current changes in the field. She works well with our Board of Review and all take their responsibilities very seriously. The Board of Review held increased hours this year to accommodate the numerous appeals that were made.

Our new Clerk, Yulonda Bellingar, was elected at the Annual Michigan Township Association Meeting to be our District #12 representative for the area that includes Newaygo, Mecosta, and Isabella Counties on the State MTA Board.

Yo has put Morton Township on the map and positioned us for State recognition for a "Township of Excellence" award. We get timely information from her involvement on this Board. Her expenses are paid by the State

Association. She was accepted as a student with the Governance Academy of MTA and her tuition is paid for by a scholarship she was awarded by MTA.

The entire Board has participated in training put on by the Michigan Township Association (MTA). All of us are committed to keeping informed and serving the Township well. We encourage our staff and our volunteers to do the same. Our employees are hard working and devoted to treating everyone with dignity and respect. We are proud of them.

We have begun to utilize Community Corrections clients in various projects in the Community. There is no cost for their services and they save the Township money in our maintenance projects. Community service workers prepared our cemetery for Memorial Day. They assisted us at our successful Community Clean up. We are going to use them for some needed landscaping projects as well.

We are attending the Mecosta County Economic Development Corporation meetings and are promoting our area businesses and industrial park. We are working with the Village on a joint skate park for our youth. We have put \$2,500 in our proposed budget to pay for some equipment for the park.

We held our first Strategic Planning session in February. We had a great turnout. We identified several areas of interest from our residents and have used the ideas in developing our new fiscal budget. Priorities identified included re-cycling, street lighting, youth programs, historical preservation, road repair, and recreation projects such as bike and hiking trails. From this meeting we have begun to work with volunteer committees to help us plan and prioritize. We have accumulated a long list of volunteers that we listen to on a regular basis. The community is interested in our work and is engaged.

Our first major committee was the "Elected Employee Compensation Commission". We felt it was a better idea for the public to set our salaries instead of our setting the salaries ourselves, as had been the practice. The Commission recommended no change in the salary at this time but will meet again in late 2010 to review our accomplishments and work to make any changes starting in 2011. We applaud their work.

A civil law suit involving the theft of some trees from our Industrial Park has been settled out of court. We are very pleased with the hard work of our attorney Eric Williams. He has served us well. Retired attorney Keith Lobert is working with us to resolve getting the burned out remains of a home in Canadian Lakes that was burned by an arsonist 2 years ago, cleaned up and safe. We appreciate his dedication as well.

We have reviewed the need for participation in the National Flood Insurance Program and intend on approving a resolution to that effect this month. This will make reasonable insurance available to our residents which is now required by most lenders.

We have advocated strongly for the needed work at Schrader Creek so that M-20 does not get closed due to water over the road. We are working with the Mecosta County Chamber of Commerce and MDOT in joint meetings to lobby for the money. It looks like Federal Stimulus dollars will be used to engineer the project and we could see the repair in less than 5 years. We have hosted the meetings at the Township hall to keep the public informed of the progress of the M-20 Road construction.

We have had a property owner near Canadian Lakes clean up an illegal dump that was established and causing serious concern for neighbors. This has led to a proposal of a new "Junk Ordinance" for the Township. We will soon hold a public hearing on this ordinance.

We participated in the Mecosta Christmas parade and hosted the participants in our Township hall. Music, snacks, and hot chocolate were served. The village and the Mecosta Area Commission appreciated our support.

A new committee has just begun work with our Clerk to develop a tri-fold brochure that describes our Townships amenities and will promote population and business growth in the area. We have developed a contest to get community designs for a Township flag that best represents all that Morton Township has to offer. We have made contact with the Muskegon Watershed Association to look at cleaning up the Little Muskegon River. We are soliciting volunteers to clean the Little Muskegon River on July 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

Our Building and Zoning Departments are working hard to keep our Township clean and safe. They attempt to educate the public about the importance of using licensed contractors and getting permits. Our inspectors are top notch and assist in assuring that residents are having their projects completed safely and according to State law.

We are probably most proud of the work that has been done with our Morton Township Fire and Rescue Department. Major improvements have been made to our Canadian Lakes Station. We now are in a position to have an emergency shelter available at the center. We are developing state of the art training facilities there. We have implemented their first ever total computerized reporting system to speed up report writing and distribution and given them a system to track equipment maintenance, personnel training, emergency reporting, and grant writing. We are blessed with a fine group of volunteers who work out of both our fire barns in Mecosta and Canadian Lakes. We thank them and their families for the time they donate to us to keep us safe. Our Chief Allen Sutherby is highly trained and motivated to lead. He maintains training credentials that allows us to have most of our training in house. Typically rural fire departments have to travel long distances to secure mandatory training.

When you see our volunteers, please give them your thanks. An average firefighter is reimbursed less than \$2,500 per year. For that, he or she attempts to attend not less than 3 training meetings per month. They leave their homes, jobs, and families to respond to many medical and fire related emergencies at all hours of the day and night. They go into our schools to educate our children. They wash cars to help fund many of their programs. I hope to increase their re-imbusement in the coming year because we think it is just. They have not asked for any additional compensation. They are more concerned that they have the tools to protect our public. Our hats are off to them.

Finally, we appreciate your support and recommendations. Your turn out to our Strategic Planning Session, our Open House at the Fire Department, our regular meetings, and today's Annual Budget Meeting show we have residents who care about the community. We welcome your ideas and hope our new budget reflects your interests and concerns. The additional programs we are presenting will not jeopardize our fiscal position. Our Fund Balance is one of the healthiest in the State according to the MTA. We intend to keep ourselves fiscally responsible. Thank you very much for allowing us to serve.

Jim Quinlan, Supervisor, on behalf of the Morton Township Board of Trustees.