

BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP ADDRESS JANUARY 9, 2018

Good evening, and welcome to the third annual state of the township address. We would especially like to thank our residents that our here, it is a privileged to serve you and one we do not take lightly. I also want to thank the board members and planning commission for allowing me to do this address.

As I thought about the past year and look forward to the new year, the one thing that always tops my list are the great employees we have in the township. That starts with Brent in the office that oversees our building department as well as zoning. He also covers for each of us when we are not here as well as being the front-line person when people come in. Brent has been here over four years and is the perfect person for this position. Along with Brent are the building department inspectors. George Dietrich has been doing our building inspections for over six years now, Steve Campbell has done our electrical inspections for the past four years, and Jerald Antor, who was new to us this year, does our mechanical and plumbing inspections. The inspectors all go strictly by the book and some may think they are too strict, but this is the only way to make sure everyone is treated equally and the township has well-constructed buildings.

Brandon Maneke is on his second year with us as grounds and cemetery manager. Brandon is doing a marvelous job with his part-time summer help. Scott Winget has been helping in the cemetery for over 23 years now and also opens and closes Highbanks Park. Brandon also had Temi Fadayomi for a second year this past summer. In the winter months Brandon keeps the snow plowed as well as other maintenance that is put off until winter. Again, he is the perfect person for this job.

Over the past four years our fire department has been managed by Chief Jim Tubbs and Assistant Chief Perry Douglas. Together these guys have over 40 years of experience with our department and do a wonderful job of training and overseeing a part-time paid volunteer staff of 25. Their team trains at least 3 evenings a month plus some Saturdays. This past year their average response time to the hall was 3 minutes 4 seconds with trucks rolling. They were at the scene within 7 minutes 49 seconds of the call coming in. For a rural area this is very good and one of the reasons we have such a good ISO rating. Other reasons for a great ISO rating are the training they go through and the way they keep their equipment up. I would like to take this time to thank all of the men and women that serve on our department for protecting us as well as our property. We are certainly blessed by many of you that hang out here to work or study. Thank you for risking your own lives to help others.

Others that I need to thank are many of you who serve on the various advisory committees we have. As a board we take your recommendations very seriously. A couple of committees that put in a lot of hours are the planning commission and board of review. What a blessing it is to have individuals on these committees that really care about our township. The planning commission is led by Phil Keating and the board of review is led by Greg Videtich. Thank you for all the hours all our committees put in serving our community. A couple of people that don't very often get recognized are the deputy clerk and deputy treasurer that work behind the scenes, thank you Sherri Gilbert and Mary Bechaz.

This year we have had a lot of new members on the board, and I would say it has taken some time to know how each one fits in. As a board I think we have all learned a lot this year and are working very well together. Thank you for your patience with me. We are seven different people with seven different ideas, but everyone has shown respect for each other, and together we are moving ahead.

When I came on board five years ago there were several things hanging in the air that needed to be done. We have been whittling away at these each year. Some of them were lowering our debt, a sidewalk on Perry Street, support for the community library, relining some our sewer system, and a lot of smaller items. One of those items that I was faced with

when I first came on was the need for expanding this building. Thirty years ago, when this building was built our township was smaller. Since then, the township has added a lot of student housing, some big box stores, a couple of churches, a couple of motels, and many restaurants as well as other businesses. Our fire department saved up the money for four years so we could do this without borrowing money or using general fund money. This finally became to reality this fall. We are now able to keep all of our equipment inside as well as our plow truck that Brandon uses. As we put on the addition we also put metal roofing on the entire building as well as a new heating system in the building. We were able to use the door openers off the old doors for the new addition. In the new addition we have all LED lights. We hope to gradually change over the others in this area and the rest of the building. This not only gives us more room for equipment but allows us to do more training inside. Kevin Defever was the general contractor and did a great job on this building. Before you leave tonight please walk through and check it out.

Another big accomplishment this past year that I have been working on for the past two years is a new contract with the city and Green Township for our sewer operations. The contract that was put into place 40 years ago expired at the end of last year. Like the need for the addition to the fire hall, things have changed a lot in the township over the last 40 years. The new contract will direct us for the next 25 years. This was an important contract, and, even though it took a lot of time, it went smoothly. There was a lot of giving and taking, and we were able to work well with the city. Thanks to city staff, Mayor Warba, and Green Township officials. One thing that made it even more difficult was the passing of Bob Baldwin, the supervisor of Green Township. Bob was very instrumental in getting this new contract. This new contract is flexible and will be looked at every five years to see if changes are needed. With the old contract we were limited by the amount of sewage we could add to the system. With the new contract this is open to allow for additional growth. We have set into place the criteria for the amount each entity will pay. This will be determined each year. A sewer contract may not allow for the most interesting conversations, but it has been a great learning experience for me. I hope we have simplified it enough for a lay person to read. We have even included definitions in this contract. The old one was full of legalese and was very hard to understand, and each entity interpreted it to meet their best interests. It also had several amendments. This is a new clean contract that we started on from scratch.

Along this same topic we have moved ahead this year with the SAW grant we received last year. This is a three-year grant to locate and assess the sewer system within the township. It has been encouraging to see what our engineers have done so far. It will be very exciting to see it all on computer. They have measured and located all the manholes and lift stations in the township. The height of the inlets and outlets were measured as well as the size and depth of each manhole. They are now putting everything on overlays on each screen so we will be able to locate problems. Currently they are contracting with a company to camera the older sewer lines. This information will then all be available by clicking on a manhole, lift station, or line. The system was added onto so many times and very few as-built prints are available, so we never even knew how and where the sewage flowed. We also have a lot of water in the sewage that we can't account for. We hope to be able to find out where this is coming from. There may be a leak in a line or a bad line. Before running for the supervisor position, I never realized how much of my time would be spent thinking about sewage.

One other item that I have wanted for five years was to computerize the burial sites in the cemetery. This past year we have purchased the software, and many of us are working to get everything on the computer. Thanks to all the volunteers that helped on this. This winter as we have time Brandon, Rene, and I will be working on more of it. In the past we had volumes of books with owner's names and burial information---over 140 years of information all hand written.

This past year has been a busy year, and I hope we can accomplish as much next year. We currently have a task force set up to do fund raising for the old building that is at the entryway to Highland View Cemetery. Over the past year this task force has looked at many options of what could be done with this building. With wonderful input from a university design class, the task force and board has come up with a plan. We will be keeping the façade and replacing the rest of the building on the same footprint. This building will then be used as a small chapel or just an area for reflection. At some point we hope to add some columbaria to the walls. This building is almost 100 years old and has been and will be the

focal point when entering the cemetery. The cemetery is owned by the township, but it is a community cemetery. The task force includes people from the city, township and community. They are starting to put a plan together for fund raising to get this on task. I would like to thank the board for getting behind project. At last week's meeting the board set up a restricted fund so that money in this fund could only be used for improvements to cemetery buildings. The board also showed a strong support for this building by placing \$10,000 into this account. This will be a wonderful improvement to the cemetery. I would like to encourage each of you to do what you can not only as a board but individually. Carolyn and I have talked this over and we are ready to commit \$2000 personally to this project. This task force is being led by the city mayor, Tom Hogenson, and they will be having a meeting January 23 at 5:00 pm at the Big Rapids library, if anyone would like to help on this committee I am sure they could use you.

This past year the planning commission put together a capital improvement plan that we have been try to get for several years. This is a great plan and something we will be improving on every year. One item in that plan for this year is to remodel the restrooms at Highbanks Park and turn them into ADA accessible restrooms.

Three years ago, we went before the people and requested a road millage of 1.5 mills to be used for roads. At that time about \$100,000 were being put into roads each year, and that board promised to continue putting money from the general fund into roads. Over the last four years over a million dollars has been invested by the township in its roads. This year the board has put some reserve money into the budget for roads also. With the millage and additional money, we should be able to put another half million into roads this year. Our roads committee has been very careful to recommend projects that will benefit the township the most by trying to take care of the roads that are in decent shape so they will not have to be completely redone and then be redoing some along the way. This year the committee requested estimates from the county. More estimates were received than we can handle this year, but, the committee will review this and then make recommendations to the board. We have gained a lot but still have a long way to go. I will be recommending to the board that we place on the August ballot a renewal of the road millage. The County Road Commission helps by taking care of the primary roads in the township as well as helping a little with their labor on roads we redo. They also have money available to work on 15 Mile by the high school for 2019. We were hoping that it would be this year. We do have a lot of paved roads in the township. 73% of our roads are paved, and it would be nice to have some more, but first we need to take care of what we have. Roads are vital to any growth in a community.

Another thing that is very important to every community is high speed internet access, and Jerry is work on that. I would encourage the board to get behind this and make sure everyone has access. In this day and age, it is hard to even do school work without internet service.

One other item that has been on my bucket list for five years is to improve our working relations with the city. We have come a long way, but we need to keep working on this. It has been a privilege to work with Mark Gifford. We both have the same goal in mind to improve relationships. Mayor Warba has also been excellent to work with, and now we are looking forward to a great relationship with Mayor Hogenson. Tom and the commission have always been great. I have tried to attend at least one meeting a month to show our support.

Coming up in two years is the 2020 census. This is very important and something we have already started working on. Brent is taking the lead on this and has already been working on some boundaries for the commission. It is very important that we count everyone that lives in our township. This helps with the money we receive from the state as well as other revenue opportunities. We have a very hard community to count because we have so much student housing that is empty in the summer. An accurate count is up to us. No one else will take care of us. It always bothers me when we have more registered voters than we do residents. We will need all your help over the next two years to make sure this is accurate.

This past year we had several businesses open that increased our tax base as well as more need for services. Restaurants and hotels use a lot of water and produce a lot of sewage. This year the Hampton Inn opened, Culver's opened, and we

added 33 duplex student housing units at Campus Creek. All this with extra traffic also increased our fire/rescue calls by almost 30% over last year. In the next couple of years, we will have more student housing, 13 more for sure at Campus Creek this year, and other businesses as well as another hotel. We received the land division request for the hotel this week. Our building/zoning department has had a couple of good years with no sign of any slowdown. The township tax base continues to increase even though a lot of property is capped very low, but this is starting to change as the economy improves and more land sells. Ten years ago, we had a taxable value of 135 million, this year we are over 144 million, all this when most property assessments are down between 12 and 18 % from the high years of 2005-2007.

One other area that I would like to encourage the board as well as the planning commission to look at is the Industrial Park and what we can do with it. What can be done to get more water customers?

Personally, I have had a good year health wise. I have been cancer free for a whole year. Other than the minor health problems that old age brings, the golden years, I have been doing well. Many of you know that I try to get into the office around 7:00 a.m., I am here kind of like the firemen that study here. I like to have time in the morning to check my e-mail, read the newspaper and read my Bible. By being here I am able to answer the phone or talk to people that come in and I am ready to start working by 8:00. This morning as I was reading in Matthew it talked about always looking at yourself before judging others and I think for me that has been so important in this position.

Financially the township is in very good shape thanks to each of the board members. The 2018 net budget is a little over 2.1 million, with a total operating reserve of over nine months.

I would like to thank you fire department for allowing us to use this building again. I know this is one of your scheduled training nights.

The State of the Township is very good.