

State of the Township 2019 - January 15, 2019

What is the state of the township? This is the fourth time that I am addressing the joint boards and the people of this community. The last couple of times I have looked back at what I said the year before, so this year I started from scratch without reading last year's address. The big question is, where are we as a township? What have you accomplished as a board for the betterment of this community? Notice, I didn't say township. I said community, and that is what it is really all about. Yes, first of all we are responsible to the taxpayers. But what is good for the township is also good for the community.

For many years we had a very dedicated supervisor. Maxine McClelland served this township for 40 years and sadly passed away last Thursday. Maxine, Micki as we knew her, is the reason this township is what it is today. She was very involved in starting the fire department and also the industrial park. She was responsible for getting us the nice office building we have. Micki stood up against the city and won against the detachment. We have a lot to thank her for. After so many years you really take ownership in the township and that is natural. That can be very good, but it can also be bad. You can't keep looking inward. You have to look at the big picture, and that includes your neighbors all around you.

My goal when I came into office six years ago was to expand on the good things that the previous boards had accomplished and move ahead with a better relationship with the rest of our community. We don't have to give away the township, but we must work together for the betterment of the entire area. That is why it is so important that we have an excellent relationship with the city. I feel this is one of our biggest accomplishments so far. Each month I meet with people from the city and Green Township to talk about what is happening in each municipality and how we can work together. The city has invited me to sit in on many of their work sessions. The township and the city have a great relationship, and that is important for the residents of both municipalities. Thank you, city officials, for reaching out to us.

Each quarter officials from most of the townships meet as a county township association. This gives us a chance to hear what other townships are doing as well as share what is happening in our township. These meetings allow us to also keep up on what the county is doing. Thank you, board members, who have attended the association meetings.

Six years ago, we had a major problem with our roads, and, honestly, that is still one our biggest problems. If you want to have a community that people will move to, you need three major things: good medical care, good schools, and good roads. We have excellent schools in our area, and we have great medical services in the community. Let's continue to work on the roads.

In Big Rapids Charter Township, we have 96 miles of roads. As my friend, Bob Maguire, always reminds me, the township does not own any roads, and he is right. All roads are either state or county roads. Back in 1931 all local roads were given to the county road commissions. Then in 1951 with public act 51, the basic funding act for road commission, roads were to be divided up as primary and local roads. The act also states that the county road commission may not spend over 50% of the cost of building local roads. It does not say that the money must come from townships, but where else would it come from? I would love to live in a community where there was enough money available to keep up all the roads, but we need to get down to reality. The county does not have the money to keep our roads up. If you want decent roads, we need to work together with the county road commission. In this township there are over 21 miles of state-owned roads. There is over 17 miles of primary all-season roads. The county and state take care of these completely. That leaves 35 miles of paved local roads and 20 miles of gravel. We

also have around three miles of paved private roads in the township. The county road commission takes care of filling potholes, grading, removing snow, salting, and sanding the local roads. When there is major work to be done on the local roads, we work together. The township contracts with the county for the asphalt work, and then the county supplies some of the labor in preparing the roads for the rework. For example, in 2017 we paid \$420,000 and the county spent \$215,000 to do work on 190th Ave. and 14 Mile Rd.

In 2014, 51% of our local paved roads were in poor shape, and only 11% were considered in good shape. Today 41% of our roads are considered to be in poor shape and 43% are in decent shape. The rating of the roads is done by the county using a PASER rating scale. This is a big improvement, but we still have a long way to go.

The past three years we have had a road millage that brought in over \$600,000. That is only enough to redo three miles of roads. When a road is in really bad shape, as many of our roads are, it needs to be ground up and a new base put down. Once this is done, we must keep these roads up. It is a lot cheaper to take care of roads than let them go until they need to be replaced. This is why this board and the previous board have been investing so much of our general funds into roads. Over the last four years we have invested almost a half million dollars from the general fund to help keep up the roads.

It is not often that I totally agree with what goes on at the state level, but last year when they had additional money at the state level, they invested it in roads. I would like to encourage our board to do the same this year. We are not here to build up a nest egg; the township is not retiring. Let's spend some money and fix our roads. That's probably enough talk about roads, but before we move on, I would like to give a big thanks to our roads committee. They make recommendations on roads by need, and that keeps the politics out of the way.

Let's talk about another infrastructure that we have, our sewer system. Our sewer system is funded by the users. We charge to connect to our system and then we charge for actual usage. In this fund we do need to have additional money accumulated in case of emergencies. We have over fourteen miles of sewer lines in the township. We currently have nine lift stations and have agreed with the city to take on a tenth one. We have over 190 man-holes in the township. We contract with an operator to manage this system for us and then contract with the city to process our sewage. This year our utilities committee, with Jerry Everett leading the charge, has recommended and you, the board, have agreed to update the controls on each of the lift stations. This week installation of these units is beginning. Thank you. This will be a big improvement and have a very short pay back. Next, we need to look at the Sheridan lift station. This is one of our oldest lift stations. A few years ago, we relined some of our old concrete pipes. We need to continue to make sure our system is in good shape.

For the last couple of years, we have had our engineers working on locating and checking the condition of our system, thanks to the state grant we received. When this is complete, we should know what we will need to do and the rates we need to charge to assure that our system will be able to be kept in good shape. One area that both we and the city need to look at in the near future is the capacity that we have to move along Perry Street to the treatment plant. With the addition of the hotels, the Brook, and other businesses in the township as well as the new apartments being currently added in the city, it is bringing this line to near capacity. This will be an expensive venture for both of us. Once this is resolved we will need to think about expanding on the west side of the expressway. The utility committee has done a great job this year. Thank you.

The water plant is a bigger issue for us now; for the past ten years we have been losing money on this. We need to do something, and I am not sure what. I would encourage you as a board to study this out this year, and let's make a decision on a solution. Along with this let's look at the whole industrial park idea.

We have an excellent fire department with a lot of great people. The number one concern for the fire department is the safety of our residents as well as our firefighters. But this needs to be balanced with expense controls and common sense. Sometimes it is easy to want things that other departments have or even things that would be nice but may not be necessary. Let's stick to the basic requirements and make sure we can sustain this department for many years to come. The people of this township continue to renew a mill and half to keep this department up. We need to do our part and spend this wisely. Thank you, voters, for renewing both our fire millage and road millage. Thank you to all the firefighters for all the community promotions you do to educate children and adults in making them aware of what you do. But, most of all, thank you for risking your lives for our safety. We are also very grateful to the surrounding departments and the mutual aid they provide. We need them and appreciate that we can work together. Over the last few years we have paid off the last truck, added on to the fire hall, reroofed the original part, and also redid the heating systems in the old part. We now have a nice building that allows us to keep everything inside and also allows for more training space. We do have a couple of trucks that are getting old, and we need to have a plan to update these while staying within the budget. We need to plan now so we don't have to make a quick decision when something dies. Thank you to those that serve on the fire committee.

The cemetery is also a great joint effort. As part of an old detachment agreement, the city is to pay half of the operating costs of the cemetery. The cemetery is in great shape now, but we need to make sure we keep up the roads in the cemetery and the tree work that needs to be done. The most exciting thing going on at the cemetery is the opportunity to redo the entrance building. It will be great to have a building that is functional but yet has the look of the current building. We have a great task force made up of both city and township people working on fund raising. Thanks to all that have made donations or pledges to help with this building. At this point we are around the half way mark. Let's all get behind this and make it happen this year. Another thing the cemetery committee is currently working on is a scatter area for cremains. This would make a great addition to our cemetery. Thank you, Brandon, and your entire committee for your dedication to the cemetery.

One small improvement that the board did this year was to have the office steps redone. Sometimes you get used to something and, until it is changed, you don't realize how hard it was to walk up and down these steps. Over the last few months we have received a lot of compliments on the new steps. Hopefully next year we can recoat the parking lot before it has to be ground up.

The economy has been very good, and that has kept our building department going strong. We may be ready for an adjustment in the near future, but we are in good financial shape in this department. Thank you to all the employees in this department under the leadership of Brent Mason.

Financially the township is doing fine. Over the last six years our debt has been reduced from over a million dollars to \$340,000. This is all on the bonds that were refinanced for the industrial park. Our cash flow was increased by the last board by a little over \$500,000. In two years, this board has increased it another \$400,000. This year the board has decided to go back to the auditor that we had years ago. Even though I was the one that recommended that we switch four years ago, I am pleased that you approved going back to them. And also, thank you, Penny, for investing some of our cash. Financially this township is in the best condition it has ever been in. Thank you to this board and the previous boards. Even though we are in a great financial situation, we have still been investing in the community through roads, sidewalks, and improving our own infrastructure.

The capital improvement plan that the planning commission has worked on the last couple of years has been a great improvement. Thanks also to each of you that serve on the planning commission for all the hard decisions that you had to make this last year. I would like to encourage you to take a serious look at our master plan and see if it needs rewriting.

I appreciate the opportunity the board has allowed me in funds for training. MTA offers a lot of training throughout the year that has been very helpful to me. This is one area I would highly recommend that we encourage training for board members and committees. At a training a month ago one of the speakers suggested that we recommend an X number of training opportunities per term or we do not appoint a person to another term. We cannot force volunteers to take training, but it is recommended letting them know up front that we expect it and are willing to pay for it, and if they do not partake, they will not be reappointed. Thank you, planning commissioners, board members, and committee members for taking the training you have.

Along this same line the state has updated its requirements for assessing. This started out as a nightmare, but after many of us attending a meeting around the state, sharing our concerns, many changes were made and a workable bill was passed. One thing this new law requires is more training for board of review members starting in 2021. Our current members have all had some training and do a fine job as well as our contract assessor. We are fortunate to have one of the best assessors in the state. Thank you, David and all our Board of Review members. Nobody enjoys paying taxes, but we want to ensure everyone that they are paying their equal share as are others in the township, as well as the county and state.

What would I like to see over the next year or two? The list includes: completion of the cemetery building, an updated plan for purchasing fire equipment, the parking lot at the office repaved, the Sheridan lift station looked at to see what should be done to it, a scatter grounds at the cemetery for cremains, a plan to use or decommission the water plant, more money put into roads, and a plan to go ahead with another phase of the sidewalk. We at least need to connect the high school with the one at Perry Street. It would be great to come up with an entire sidewalk plan for the township and a way to maintain it. Something else we need to work on is getting broadband service to the whole township. Most suppliers have gone as far as they can or what is economically feasible with fiber lines. We may have to look at opening up our requirements for cell towers and encourage broad band suppliers to use towers that will reach everyone. Another thing we need to start working on is preparing for the 2020 census. It is important to make sure everyone is counted. This is the only way we get our fair share of the state revenue sharing or any other money from the state.

To the residents that are here, I would like to let you know that you have a great board that is working together for the betterment of your community. We don't always agree with each other, but that is good. We come from different backgrounds with difference experiences. We all have expertise in different areas. We also rely on all you committee members that have expertise in your own area. The committees do a lot of ground work for the board, and together we will accomplish great things.

Personally, for my last two years as supervisor, my goal will be to have everything in place for my replacement coming after me. With that being said, if anyone is interested in giving back to the community and thinking about running for office, I am putting in more time than I originally thought it would take, but it is also very rewarding. If you have an interest, just let me know and I will be glad to help you.

Thank you, board members. Thank you, planning commission members. Thank you, staff, and thank you all for allowing me to serve as your supervisor, I do consider myself blessed to be able to serve, and please stop in any time. I love to hear your concerns and ideas.