

## **2020 STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP**

### **January 14, 2020**

Good evening, board members, planning commission members, residents and guests. Welcome to the fifth annual state of the township address. It is hard to believe it is 2020 already, and we are in the last year of this term of office. Tonight I want to reminisce a little but mostly look at where we go from here.

As most of you know, we are currently in the process of updating our master plan. This has been an exciting process to watch. It has also given me some extra ideas to talk about tonight. Thank you to all who have been participating in this process. It is so important to have a good plan that can be followed. Even though we must look at the plan every five years, it is not always necessary to make changes. This time we hope to make some changes, some additions, and just clean it up. Any township with its own zoning is required to have a master plan. When I came into office we did not have one, even though it had been worked on previously. We revised an old one that had never been adopted and at least adopted something so we were compliant with the law. Hopefully this one will be good for five or ten years. Dave Bee, our consultant, has done a great job of getting the community involved and getting information. All of your ideas are very important as we move forward in the planning process.

Something that has been on my mind for the last several months is the 2020 census. Until I was in office, I never paid much attention to the census, even though I always filled out my form. I just thought it was something the government wanted and never really knew just how important it is. For our state, it determines how many representatives we have in congress. Much of the federal funding that a state receives is divided up by population. This is passed down to the counties and then to our local municipalities. As a county, our representatives in the state government are determined by population reported by the census. The township revenue sharing money that we receive from the state sales tax is based on our population. One thing I didn't realize is how many businesses and organizations use the census. Will we have more students in school in five years, or what size classes may be expected? Do we need more child care in our area--or maybe more senior living facilities? Do we have additional skilled labor in our community? Businesses looking at expanding or relocating look at these figures. A lot of grants that are available to municipalities are based on population. The idea of a census is not new; it is referred to in the Old Testament of the Bible in Numbers and many other books, so it goes back long before Christ came to this earth.

In the U.S. the main census is done every decade in the year ending in a zero, so the one we are currently using is the 2010 census. For every person that was not counted in 2010 census, Big Rapids Charter Township lost \$750.00 just in the state revenue sharing. This is why it is so important to get a complete count. The count is done by address, so we have been making sure every new address is in the Census Bureau's system. The main thing we need to do is educate people as to how important it is that everyone in their household be counted. We need to educate college students and snowbirds that if they are living here over six months they need to be counted here. A college student that is here for four years is worth at least \$300. The three hardest groups to count in our area are college students, snowbirds, and children under five years of age. This year the census will be done in three ways for the first time. You may report information on line, by phone, or the usual paper form. The census bureau hires workers to go out and get as much information as they can. We need to somehow encourage the residents to see that they are counted and counted here. Census day 2020 is April 1<sup>st</sup>. For the next three months we need to do everything we can to help educate everyone on the importance of the census.

The biggest issue that I hear about in the township is not marijuana, but roads. Over the last few years we have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. This is not only a problem in Mecosta County but in most of the state. Six years ago 11% of our paved roads were in good shape and 51% were in really bad shape. Today we have improved to 51% of our paved roads being in good shape and 36% in bad shape. This is a big improvement, but if you live on one of the bad roads, it is hard to see the improvements. Our millage is helping, but we still need more help from the county and the state. I would like to encourage you to do what we can, but it is also crucial that we also take care of the ones we have been investing money into so we don't end up in the same bad situation. It is much less expensive to keep the maintained ones up rather than having to redo them. Last year we spent almost \$100,000 less than we expected to on roads because the road commission came in way under what they estimated. Let's continue to make roads a high priority for the people of our township. Once we get the current paved roads in good shape we need to start on some of our gravel roads. We have way too many gravel roads in this township. In 2019 we paid to have a little over 2½ miles redone. The state also paid to have a mile of 15 Mile Road redone as well as paying for a New Mill Pond Road bridge. The county covered the cost of spot paving a few of our roads.

Seven years ago when I started as your supervisor, we had a budget of 1.1 million and a fund balance of 1.35 million. Today we have 2.33 million in fund balance and a little over two million dollar budget. When I started we also owed over a million in debt. Today we are down to a \$295,000 debt and can pay it off after June without penalty if we so choose. I have it in the budget to pay off the loan and encourage the board to do so. It is recommended that a municipality have at least a three months' balance; we have almost a year. We need to be very careful how we spend the taxpayer's money, but we do not need to keep this big of a balance. We need to either supply a service or tax less.

This year we will have the opportunity to make a big change to the building you see as you enter Highland View Cemetery. We have had a great team working on this and have raised some good money to go toward this building. This has been a good example of how we can work together with the city. The city convinced the engineering firm they use to help put some plans and specs together so we can bid this out. They are using the concept drawings that the students at Ferris put together. They are concerned about the estimate we had because construction costs have really risen in the last couple of years. We will put it out to bid with a couple of options so we can cut back a little. The stone on the inside could be done at a later time if we want. The heat pump could be put off for a while, but I would not suggest taking it out of the bid. My hope is that we can use the funds we have collected with the pledges, use some of the available perpetual care money, and then see if we can split the difference with the city.

Another project where we have been able to collaborate on with the city, county, and Ferris was the road safety study that MDOT did for us on Northland Drive between Knollview and Golfview. This will be an ongoing project that we will need to continue working together on. We have a big problem with traffic coming off Gilbert Drive and 14 Mile as well as at Knollview. We have had a lot of accidents in this area. Last spring we had a near fatal accident. MDOT paid for the safety study, but other studies will need to be done, and we will be asked to share the cost of some of these. Let's work together to not only improve the safety but to make it easier for cars to get around. I have had many calls from businesses as well as residents telling me traffic is backed up all the way to the end of Gilbert. The same is true coming off 14 Mile Road. It's not a problem when I come to work, but in the past I have counted 30 cars ahead of me at different times of the day when Ferris is in session. When you have to wait so long, you are late for work or class. You get impatient and take chances you should not normally take, and then we have an accident. We need to work together to solve this problem as soon as we can before there is a fatality.

Other projects we need to collaborate on are renewing of the library millage, helping the city as they look at expanding the airport, and some of their other projects. When the city adds a recreational facility or an additional park, it directly benefits our residents as well. If it is good for the city, it is usually good for the township and visa-versa. For the

residents of our community there should not be a big distinction when they cross that boarder. Thank you, city leaders for the corporation you have shown us. We need to make sure we show you the same.

Another big expense that we have coming up together is the sewer system along Perry Avenue. This line is getting close to capacity. We have added a new hotel as well as other businesses that use that line. The city added an apartment complex. We would like to be able to extend this across the expressway someday. Before that can be done, we will need to look at an additional route or enlarging the lines we have all the way back to the wastewater plant. The current line handles the high school, Menards and The Brook, Venlo apartments as well as Meijers and Walmart, and everyone else out that way. This line carries about 1/3 of the township's sewage to the plant.

Over the years we have been improving our own sewer system. We have relined a lot of the lines on Northland Drive; we have added generators to three more of our lift stations. Seven of our ten lift stations now have generators. We have added better controls that have saved us money in phone lines as well as maintenance costs. We have also added end point readers to the water supply so we can read usage for billing purposes. Three years ago we received a grant to look at our system and see if we are charging enough to be able to sustain this system in the future, and we are. This study did find out where we were lacking and what we need to concentrate on to fix it. To no surprise, we need to look at one of our oldest areas of the system. The Sheridan Street lift station needs major repairs or replaced. This is our oldest lift station and the only one that does not have Gorman Rupp pumps and controls. We had to replace one pump this past year and have another one down for repairs now. I'm recommending to the board that we replace this lift station and add a generator at that time. We also have a few bad manholes on this line that need some major work or replacement.

Part of the grant money was used to do a smoke test. This uncovered a lot of minor problems, and most of these have been taken care of by the property owners or Northwest Kent. The SAW grant was handled by our engineers, Progressive AE out of Grand Rapids. They have done a wonderful job for us and continue to do so. Our operators, Northwest Kent, have also been doing a great job. We own a big thank you to both of them. The sewer system is like the roads or any other infrastructure we have. We need to do the proper maintenance to keep them up.

One thing this board has done a great job of is keeping up our infrastructure. This is something that past boards have not done so well on, either because of a lack of money or knowledge. Thank you for seeing the need to keep things up. I have already mentioned roads. The fire hall expansion, parking lot here, and the office steps and carpet are some examples. We need to be good stewards of what we have before we reach out and add new projects.

I would like to take a few minutes to thank the fire department for all they do. Under Jim and Perry's leadership we have a great team that work hard together. We get a lot of great comments from the community. You folks are really appreciated. As I travel around I hear a lot of stories about different fire departments, and usually there are more negative than positive comments. We have a group of people serving us that we can be very proud of. Over the last seven years the department budget has increased by 14%, and a loan on the last truck purchased has been paid off. We have added on to this building, put a new roof on this portion, added a new heating system to the old bays, and just finished switching all the lights over to LEDs. We have a new chassis being put under the tank we have, so it will be basely a new tender that should be here in about a month.

This fall we have had a lot of changes in personnel. This has allowed us the opportunity to add some new faces to the office. Brent Mason stepped down after seven years as building/zoning/office administrator. He has taken a new job working evenings. This opened up the opportunity for me to hire him as my deputy, which I haven't had for a long time. He has finished up some changes we needed on building forms and also done some special projects. This will also allow

me the chance to get away more. I am planning to be gone a couple of weeks in February. I will also be gone ten days at the end of March to go back to Spain. I have been leading mission trips over there every other year.

With Brent leaving, at the board's request we have split up his job to two part time positions. This will save the township a lot of money, and so far it has been working fine. We have two great people in the office, and both are doing a wonderful job. We have started them out slowly, but they are gradually picking up more of the work. Tim is handling most of the building department and has started doing some of the zoning. Jamie is handling the office well and has filled in by helping with some of the building department work and also helping David enter some of the historical information in the computer for assessing. They are both very dependable and serve the township well. Welcome Tim & Jamie.

We also received a resignation from Brandon at the cemetery. Brandon has been with us for over three years and has done a very good job at the cemetery. He will be greatly missed. Brandon's position has been primarily the cemetery sexton and other maintenance duties. I am recommending that we hire a maintenance person and have that person oversee the cemetery. I think this is what this board expected out of Brandon but maybe not what we hired him for.

Someone that the board does not see very often is our assessor, David Kirwin. David is contracted through BS&A, our software supplier. He grew up in Big Rapids and now commutes from Jenison. He is here two days a week, some in the office and some out in the field. As an assessor, one of his jobs is to look at every parcel in the township at least every five years. Just about every municipality in the state uses BS&A software for assessing. For many townships and municipalities this is the only BS&A program they use. We use eight other BS&A programs. Besides our township, he serves a couple of other smaller communities on his own. Most of his time, when he is not here is spent teaching assessing using BS&A software. We are very fortunate to have one of the best assessors in the state of Michigan doing our assessing. Please let him know he is appreciated. This year there have been several changes to the assessing laws. One is to add more training for board of review members. We are fortunate that all our members have been to some training and under David have also learned a lot. It is a privilege for me to be the secretary to such a well-run board of review.

This may be my last state of the township address. I have not decided if I will run again, and, even if I do, I would still need to be elected. When I ran seven years ago my goal was to be here one or two terms maximum. Over the last few months I have been weighing my options. I have really enjoyed serving here, and I'm very thankful to this board, as well as the previous board, for allowing me to take so much training. It has been so valuable for serving in this capacity. Even though, when I came into office, I had a lot of experience leading different boards, most of my experience was from over 40 years of business. Little did I know how much government agencies do not run at all like businesses and how little use that experience really was. We are very fortunate in this state to have an organization like Michigan Township Association that offers a lot of training. What I have learned through them has been invaluable. It helped me to learn my responsibilities as supervisor compared to those of a clerk or treasurer, or even trustees. I was so naive when I took office I didn't know the difference between the duties of supervisor for a charter township compared to a general law township. Thank you for allowing me to spend the money on this training.

As I look at whether or not to run again, one positive thing is that we have strong leadership on the board. Sometimes I have looked at this as hindrance, but as I look at stepping down it is a very positive position. This board will survive and be in good shape whether I am here or not. Thank you. Another thing I need to consider is my health, and I will wait until April to decide that. On the other side is the fact that I have really enjoyed being here for the people of this community. Thanks to everyone that has asked me to run again. Before running for office and after being in office, I set some goals for myself to accomplish. Number one was to carry on with the good that the previous supervisor had

started. Number two was to improve the relationship with the city and other agencies. Number three was to really learn how the township operates, and number four was to get the township out of debt. Number five was to improve our roads. Other goals that were added after being in office was to see the fire department improve and adding on to the fire hall, repairing the building at the cemetery and maintaining our infrastructure. Most of these goals have been reached. This will be a hard decision that I will be praying about over the next several weeks.

Before I finish up I would like to recap some of the activities from 2019. The fire department made over 445 runs again this year. To each of you I say thank you. For the last ten years we have averaged 36 burials a year. This year we had 49 burials, 22 of them being full burials and 27 being cremains. Thank you, Brandon and team. Norwest Kent has done a great job of maintaining our ten lift stations and about 12 miles of sewer lines. We have contributed over 56 million gallons of sewage to the city system this year. Even though the water plant is not used a lot, Kevin Cushway has had to have at least 20 water samples done, and all have come back good. Thank you, Kevin Cushway. We know the treasurer's office collects all the taxes for the township and invests our money, but it also sends out and collect over 2500 sewer bills a year. Thank you, Penny. We have over 2000 land parcels that the accessor is responsible for. The Board of Review this year heard only five assessment complaints and changed only three of them. They also granted two poverty exemptions and 14 disabled veteran exemptions. Thank you, Mr. Videtich and team. The building department issued over 275 permits this past year. That is an average of 1.1 per work day. All of these require at least one inspection, many two or more. Thank you, Brent, Tim, and entire team of inspectors. This department has been very busy. This past year the clerk's office issued over 85 checks per month, including accounts payable and payroll, each one must have supporting documentation which takes a lot of time. Besides this they are responsible for all our records and all elections. With all the news the last couple of weeks about townships, cities, and even counties not having a fully accredited election official, it is good to know that we live in a community that takes elections seriously. When the state audit was done last May our county only had one township listed without a certified election officer and she was actually certified. State-wide there were 290 townships (23%) without certification, 12 counties (15%) were also shorthanded. Thanks, Rene and Hannah, for doing such a good job. Speaking of Hannah, welcome, Hannah was appointed by the board to fill the clerk position when Rene Fountain resigned at the end of the year.

It is because of the people just mentioned that I can say that **the state of Big Rapids Charter Township is very good.** Thank you for allowing me to serve you.

1-13-2020