

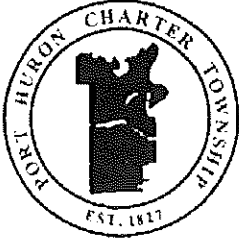
# TALK OF THE TOWNSHIP

## News You Can Use from Port Huron Township

Fall 2010

[www.PortHuronTownship.org](http://www.PortHuronTownship.org)

Volume 9 Issue 1



### TOWNSHIP OFFICE

3800 Lapeer Road  
Port Huron, MI 48060  
**(810) 987-6600**  
Fax: 987-6712  
Office Hours:  
**Monday-Friday**  
**8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.**

### BOARD MEETINGS

Public Welcome

Township Board  
1st & 3rd Monday 7:00 p.m.

Park Commission  
1st Wednesday 7:00 p.m.

Planning Commission  
1st Thursday 7:00 p.m.

### TOWNSHIP OFFICERS

**Robert G. Lewandowski, Jr.**

*Supervisor*

**Benita E. Davis**

*Clerk*

**Nancy G. Collins**

*Treasurer*

*Trustees*

Bill Johnson

Frank L. Colby, Jr.

Mark T. Reilly

Peter Shonka

### SUPERVISOR'S MESSAGE

It's been nearly 2 years since I first took office, and we continue to try to weather the economic storm that has befallen Michigan. The Board of Trustees and I are dedicated to cutting costs wherever possible in an effort to maintain services at their current level. Thank you to each and every one of you who responded to the Township's letter to residents regarding the Fire Department. Your input is important, useful, and greatly appreciated.

Bakers Field work has begun. The area has been cleared of debris and mowed. Park construction will begin in spring, 2011. The full plan is available for viewing in the Township Administrative Office.

The 2010 road resurfacing projects are complete. The Township applied for and was awarded nearly \$70,000 from the Local Road Funding Assistance Program through the St. Clair County Road Commission. The Atkins Road and Strawberry Lane projects were completed utilizing funding provided under this program.

I hope that everyone had a happy and safe summer and that this upcoming holiday season is an enjoyable one. If you have questions, concerns or suggestions regarding the Township, please contact me so we can set up a time to sit down and go over your ideas.

### CLERK'S MESSAGE

#### ELECTION NEWS

The next election to be held in Port Huron Township will be the **General Election on November 2, 2010**. Polls are open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. To be eligible to vote, you must be a **registered voter no later than October 4, 2010**.

#### PRECINCT CHANGE REMINDER

**Precinct #1 has moved to St. Paul Lutheran Church at 3790 West Water Street**  
**Precinct #4 has moved to the Girl Scout Building at 2186 Water Street**

If you did not receive your new Voter I.D. card indicating the above precinct change or if you have any questions please call our office (810) 987-6600.

The Port Huron Township Board of Trustees has voted to have the following proposal on the November 2<sup>nd</sup> ballot:

*Shall the Charter Township of Port Huron levy a millage in an amount not to exceed one and one-half (1.5) mills (\$1.50 per \$1,000 of State taxable value) on all real and personal property in the Township not exempt by State law, for a period of four (4) years, commencing in 2010 through 2013 inclusive, for the purpose of continued 24-hour per day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks per year fire department protection for the township, thereby raising an estimated \$410,000.00 in the first year the millage is authorized and levied?*

*Shall this proposition be approved?*

### INTRODUCING PAUL G. MAXWELL

Paul G. Maxwell, our new DDA Director for the Charter Township of Port Huron. Mr. Maxwell, or Paul as he likes to be called, is the former Director of Public Affairs for Acheson Ventures as well as the former Director of Public Affairs for SEMCO Energy. He replaces Bill Thompson, who retired early this month. Paul was on our DDA Board for more than 13 years. "I look forward to the new challenges here in Port Huron Township. I truly believe that the Township and the DDA have a bright future to grow and prosper," Paul said.

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**TREASURER'S OFFICE****CREDIT AND DEBIT CARD PAYMENTS**

In order to better serve our residents Port Huron Township will soon be able to accept credit and debit cards. We are currently working with Chase Bank to set up a program that will allow us to accept credit and debit card payments for taxes, water/sewer bills, assessments and permits. We will charge a 2.5% convenience fee on all credit card transactions, and a flat fee of \$3.95 on all debit cards. These fees will show up as a separate line item on your statement. You can use your debit card as either a credit or (pin necessary) debit card. All payments must be made in person at our office and we cannot offer any cash back. We will accept Visa, MasterCard and Discover and are hoping to be up and running by November 1<sup>st</sup>. If you have any questions regarding this program please don't hesitate to call either Nancy or Jennifer at 810-987-6600 ext. 22 or 23.

**PARTIAL PAYMENTS**

Partial payments are accepted on taxes, water/sewer bills and assessments. If you are unable to pay a bill in full, you can make as many partial payments as you want. After the due date, any penalty or interest would apply to the unpaid balance only. We can accept tax payments through Feb. 28, 2010. Delinquent taxes are sent to the St. Clair County Treasurer for collection on March 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

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**ASSESSOR'S OFFICE**

It's been 16 years since the passage of Proposal A by Michigan voters. Its passage changed the way that property taxes are determined. Also, the new term "Homestead Exemption", now known as "Principal Residence Exemption", was introduced. This Principal Residence Exemption (PRE) term is used to designate a parcel of property for the exemption from the 18 mil "School Operating Tax".

In order to receive the 18 mil exemption the individual, or individuals, must **OWN** and **OCCUPY** a property by May 1 of a year. This ownership and occupancy will reduce the summer tax bill and will have no effect on the winter tax bill. These 18 mils relate to a reduction of \$18.00 per \$1,000.00 of taxable value. For a \$100,000.00 home the savings in taxes would be \$900.00 a year. The reduction will begin on the summer tax bill in the year the property was owned and occupied by May 1. Buying a property and occupying that property on a land contract also qualifies for the exemption. Also, a vacant lot **adjacent** to property with a house that qualifies for an exemption also qualifies for the exemption.

The "PRE Affidavit" should be given to you to complete and sign at a closing on the property. The burden of proof of both ownership and occupancy rests with the filer of the affidavit. Questionable affidavits **will** be denied with a form sent to the filer. Appeal of the denial must be made to the Michigan Tax Tribunal within 35 days of the denial.

When you receive your tax bill or Assessment Change Notice it will state on each form the percentage of Principal Residence Exemption you are receiving. If the form says "**PRE 100%**" then you are receiving the exemption. If not then you should contact this office to get it corrected. Corrections can be made if you met the May 1 deadline but for some reason the exemption wasn't processed in time for the bill. We can go back up to 3 years for those that qualified 3 years previous to the current year.

If the ownership and occupancy is after May 1 and the property didn't have a PRE then you should qualify for a reduction on the next year's taxes by the 18 mils. For those properties that were foreclosed on, put in a mortgagor's name, and the PRE taken off this is very important when the escrow is being determined. Your escrow, or proposed escrow, **may** be higher than it needs to be.

The township has no knowledge of individual's mortgages other than if we are to send the tax bills to the mortgage company or individual when they are printed in July and December. So it is the responsibility of the property owner to look at the yearly Escrow Statements sent to them to make sure that any changes in taxes or house insurance are correct on the statement. If not you need to contact the company to get it straightened out. I realize it is sometimes a very daunting task to try and talk to someone with all the changes going on with mortgages. Just keep trying until you get the answers you need.

Contact this office if you have any questions about PRE's or anything, other than mortgage questions, concerning your property and we will do all we can to assist you. Best wishes for safe fall and winter seasons.

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**WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY?**

Are you interested in becoming more involved with your local government? The Township Board makes appointments to various Boards and Commissions in December and we have various openings throughout the year. Please send a letter of interest or call the Township Clerk for more information. No special skills or education required, just a commitment of your time and an interest in our community.

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FALL FESTIVAL – SAT. OCTOBER 2<sup>ND</sup> 12:00 – 3:00 • BEACH ROAD PARK • HAYRIDES, GAMES, FOOD, FACE PAINTING, ORCHARD PRODUCE!

HOLIDAY LIGHTS CONTEST – JUDGING ON MON. DECEMBER 13<sup>TH</sup> 6:30 P.M. • NOMINATE YOURSELF OR YOUR NEIGHBORS!

EASTER EGG HUNT – SAT. APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup> 1:00 – 3:00 • MAGIC SHOW, INFLATABLES, CRAFTS, PICTURES WITH EASTER BUNNY & MORE!

## WATER OFFICE NEWS

The Marcotte Waste Collection Calendar that was enclosed with our Spring newsletter indicates that they will run one day late after the holiday. However, if the actual holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday, they will run as usual and not a day later. Any questions regarding your trash collection can be directed to Marcotte Disposal at (810) 985-9818.

It's that time of year again when the snow birds get ready to head to warmer climates. Before you go, don't forget to apply for your refuse suspension. If you will be absent from your home for a period of 3 consecutive months between November 1, 2010 and May 1, 2011, you may qualify for the suspension of one quarterly refuse charge (\$33.79). Forms may be obtained by calling the water office at (810) 987-6600 or by stopping in at the administrative office.

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## DPW NEWS

DPW staff will be flushing the fire hydrants in the coming weeks. You may notice a temporary change in your water pressure during this time. Pressure will be restored once they have finished flushing the hydrants in your area.

Protect your water meter! It is the owner's responsibility to keep the water meter free from harm. You may want to take a few extra minutes to be sure your crawl space is air tight and your meter insulated to help prevent freezing. A few extra minutes now could save you a \$200 frozen/broken meter fee later! Although there is some debate as to how much snow we will get this year, one thing is for certain-we will get snow. For everyone's safety, please be mindful of pedestrians and drivers when plowing snow and remember that blocking the sidewalks and plowing into or across the street is prohibited. Also, if you have a fire hydrant in your yard, don't forget to clear the snow from around it. Precious time can be saved in the event of an emergency if the DPW and fire department have clear access.

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## EXPIRATION OF BUILDING, ELECTRICAL, PLUMBING AND MECHANICAL PERMITS

One of the areas that we regularly receive questions about is "When do permits expire and how can we receive extensions if we need one?" The State of Michigan Codes that have been adopted by Port Huron Township read as follows: "Every permit issued shall become invalid unless the work authorized by such permit is commenced within 180 days after its issuance, or if the work authorized by such permit is suspended or abandoned for a period of 180 days after the time the work is commenced. The Building Official is authorized to grant, in writing, one or more extensions of time, for periods not more than 180 days each. The extension shall be requested in writing and justifiable cause demonstrated." While this may seem complicated, it basically means that the homeowner or contractor who has applied for and received a permit has 6 months to start the work and 6 months to complete the work, or generally one (1) year before the permit expires, if work has gradually been progressing. If the applicant has not called in for an inspection during that time, an inspection will need to be scheduled and made to verify the condition or status of the existing work. At that time, the department will determine if the permit can be granted final approval, whether an extension will be granted or what other specific action needs to be taken.

The building department is currently in the process of contacting the holders of all expired permits to set up an additional inspection. If the permit is not ready to final, sometimes an additional inspection charge needs to be assessed for the additional inspection. After the inspection, a letter may be sent out to the holder of the permit and copied to the owner, if necessary, describing what requirements the department will have for the holder of the permit and/or the property owner to take to resolve the issue. It is also important to remember not to cover up any work, whether building, electrical, plumbing or mechanical, before it is inspected. If you currently have a permit that was issued more than one year ago, please feel free to call the Building Department Secretary Amy Hurd, or myself, Kirk Lavigne, if she is not available and we will be happy to help finalize the permit or answer any other questions you may have.

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## INVASION OF THE PHRAGMITES

Unfortunately this is not the name of a new science fiction movie. **Phragmites** (frag-MY-teez) are the tall grass that is growing in drainage ditches and along the highways with the purple brown seed head. Phragmites have taken over Stocks Creek, and are invading the 40<sup>th</sup> Street Pond and the Oxbow section of the Black River. They are probably also somewhere in your neighborhood. Phragmites are dangerous as well as a nuisance. They block visibility along road ways. The dry plant material is extremely flammable and is a serious fire hazard. They destroy wetlands, crowd out native species and reduce drainage. Phragmites can be controlled with a combination of cutting, herbicide spray and burning. The plant spreads from the roots which make up 80% of the plant. Digging it up will only make it worse and mowing will only contain it for a few years. Now is the time to start taking action. If the plants are on dry ground and not near an open water way they can be sprayed in the early fall with a systemic herbicide. As they go dormant the herbicide travels to the roots and kills 80% the plants. Over the winter the dormant stalks should be removed by cutting as close to the ground as possible and removed. Doing this over a several year period will eliminate the plant. If you have phragmites along an open water way a permit must be obtained from the DNRE before spraying. The deadline for permits has passed for this year. But, the plants should still be cut during the winter to make controlling easier next year. Phragmites are invading! They spread up to 30 feet a year. Now is the time to begin an aggressive control program in the township. More information on herbicide types and securing permits is available at [phragmites.org](http://phragmites.org) and the DNR website. *Amy Miles, B.S. Horticulture*

## FIRE FUNDING

On Wednesday, July 21, 2010 an informal open house was held at the Port Huron Township Office to help residents better understand the financial crisis we are facing in funding our fire department. As many of our residents know, the Port Huron Township Fire Department has been serving our community for 50 years. They respond within minutes when an emergency arises. Whether a fire, accident, injury or medical emergency, you can depend on our highly trained and compassionate EMT/firefighters to be there for you. Currently the fire department is staffed with one full time EMT/firefighter ready to respond 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, along with the paid on call volunteers, as needed. The fire budget for 2010 is \$742,500.00. We have been able to reduce the budget by close to 10%, but it still leaves a balance of approximately \$668,500.00. Our .50 millage for fire generates roughly \$140,000.00 and has not increased since 1981. The balance of the fire budget is paid out of the general fund. With the dramatic decrease in State shared revenue and lower taxable values, the general fund is also suffering. We feel there are four options which would help reduce cost and/or increase revenue:

**1. REDUCE HALL HOURS**

This option would require closing the fire hall at 8:00 pm. Between the hours of 8:00 am and 8:00 pm the hall would be open and staffed as usual. At 8:00 pm the hall would be closed and all calls would go through 911. Our EMT/firefighters would have to leave their homes, drive to the fire hall to get the required trucks and equipment then head to the call. This could add as much as 10-15 minutes to their response time; time that is critical, sometimes life saving. This could also affect our ISO fire rating, which in turn may affect your insurance rates.

**2. PAY FOR SERVICES**

In addition to the .50 mills this option would require all residents to pay for the fire department services. Services would include, but are not limited to, medical emergencies, injuries, accidents, fires and burning complaints. We would calculate the cost of the service and bill the homeowner. Unpaid invoices would be added to the winter tax bill for collection. We now charge non-residents for services which can run between \$1,000 and \$3,000, which is typically not covered by insurance.

**3. REDUCE HOURS AND PAY FOR SERVICES**

Another alternative would be a combination of the first two options. We would have reduced hall hours and would charge a flat rate for calls instead of calculating the cost of the run.

**4. INCREASE FIRE MILLAGE**

This option would increase the fire millage from .5 mills to 1.5 mills. Based on the total Township taxable value, this would generate approximately \$407,000.00 in revenue. With the decrease in taxable values in 2010, taxes have gone down. The cost to the homeowner for the extra mill for fire protection is offset by lower taxable values. The additional fire millage would ensure the services we have always depended on would continue.

The majority of the residents that responded to our letter or attended the open house stressed how important it is to maintain the service we have.

### PORT HURON TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT RUN REPORT

AS OF JULY 31, 2010

We wanted to share some statistics with our residents to show the number and type of calls that your local fire department has responded to in the first half of 2010. We are not a fire department that handles only fire calls, we deal with a variety of calls in our day-to-day operation. The highest percentage of calls are medical emergencies. Of our 519 calls so far this year, 299 have been medical related. We average 2.44 calls per day. Here is a breakdown of call types and numbers tallied so far:

Medical Emergencies:	299	Vehicle Fires:	6
Car Accidents:	42	Unauthorized Burning:	19
Weather Related:	13	Mutual Aid:	19
Structure Fires:	10	Fire Alarms:	8
Brush Fires:	9	Burning Complaints:	22
Public Asst/Service:	13	All other Misc. Calls:	57

Any time you're out and about, feel free to stop in. We'll show you around and give you an idea of how things operate. We are here 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Yours In Safety, The Port Huron Township Firefighter's Club*

### FIRE DEPARTMENT

Fall's in the air and cooler temperatures coming our way. The fire department has just a couple of reminders for residents:

**CAN WE SEE YOUR NUMBERS?** Your address must be visible from the street. Homeowners, please be vigilant so that snow, grass or other obstacles do not block your address from view. Green reflective address signs are a great way to insure that emergency personnel can locate you if needed. They are available for \$10 at the Fire Department, call 810-982-3543 for details. Address numbers on a business must be 4 inches or larger and contrasting in color. They must also be visible from the roadway.

Leaf burning is still allowed in the township if you have a valid permit. You must call the fire station to activate the permit when you want to burn. Permit activation may be denied if winds are too high or conditions for an outdoor fire are unsafe. In the coming months, changes to the burning ordinance will be announced as they are updated from the State of Michigan DNRE.

Please join your firefighters for an open house on Sunday, October 3<sup>rd</sup> from 10 a.m. till 2 p.m. The annual Pancake Breakfast will be held this date in conjunction with our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration!

And most importantly, never forget that the best way to survive a fire in your home is working smoke detectors. Put them up, test them weekly!! Last year six people lost their lives in home fires in St. Clair County where there were no working smoke detectors. Don't become a statistic.

**NEVER SLEEP...WITHOUT THE BEEP!!!!**