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Why We're Special

As a long-time member of our Township Board and editor of our newsletter, I've had a unique vantage point to all our Township has to offer. As one of my last acts before retiring from 26 years on our Township Board, including 14+ as Township Treasurer, I'm sharing a love letter to my cherished community.

For a community with 4,700+ residents, Ann Arbor Charter Township is remarkably diverse with subdivisions, major corporate centers, farms and 1,700+ acres perpetually preserved for open space and farming. We also have apartments, condominiums and retirement and rehabilitation centers. Barton Hills Village is part of the Township, as are Domino's Farms Office Park and Washtenaw Community College.

Our Township is one of 1,240 in Michigan. Townships differ from cities in a variety of ways, but as your Township Treasurer, I see one important defining attribute to be delivering more bang for the buck.

Townships are known for lower property taxes, while still providing high-quality services. The millage rate for city services in the City of Ann Arbor last year was almost 12 mills more than our Township millage rate of 4.911.

To make the most of a smaller budget, we carefully plan, budget and execute. We have committed staff who strive to do their best every day. Like all townships, we aren't led by an executive, but by a board of public servants elected by and accountable to you.

It has been a privilege to serve alongside the other members of our Township Board. Over the years, we've been fortunate to have highly qualified men and women with a wide range of leadership experience to bring to our Board. We care about you and each other. We conduct our business with civility and professionalism.

I'm particularly thankful for the 26-year partnership with Mike Moran and John Allison. In 1996, John asked me to join Mike and him to run for Trustee positions. I ran as a Republican and they as Democrats and that began an enduring commitment to bipartisan cooperation. We don't always agree, but I believe our mutual respect and commitment to listen to divergent views have served our Township well.

Our successful slate expanded in 2000 to include long-time Republican incumbent Dick Dieterle. Together our bipartisan team brought new thinking to Township issues, including environmental ordinances for tree and natural features preservation uncommon at the time.

The most noteworthy is our Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program for farmland and open space. John spearheaded the concept, then controversial, to pay landowners who wanted to maintain ownership while preserving the use and character of their land. After two years of study, we went to voters in Nov. 2003 with a 20-year PDR millage and received overwhelming approval. We were the only township to join forces with the City as it sought approval for its Greenbelt millage.



Della and John hold a green belt as they celebrate with John Hieftje, then Ann Arbor Mayor

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Why We're Special

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Funds raised by our millage as well as City Greenbelt funds and state and federal grants have led to the preservation of 1,284 Township acres so far. About 400 more are under permanent conservation through other voluntary efforts.

Mike left his legal career early to become our Township Supervisor in 2002, a role he performed extraordinarily well for 18 years. Current Supervisor Diane O'Connell also retired from her career in higher education to take on this challenging role. She took over during Covid's early days, jumping in with both feet after years of leadership on our Planning Commission and Board of Trustees.

Our Township does not operate alone. We partner with neighboring units to provide quality services at lower cost. The Washtenaw Resource Recovery Management Authority is one example. We are one of eight local units working together to improve the quality and quantity of our recycling stream. As our Township's representative on the Authority, I've appreciated the shared commitment and varied views that member communities bring to this important environmental concern.

There is a lot of dissatisfaction with politics these days, particularly at the national level. I believe that good governance requires a balance of compassion and fairness. And particularly at the local level, financial stewardship and compromise are critical since we are not allowed to operate at a deficit.

I also believe that our democracy is only as good as the people who are willing to invest their time and talents. There are many ways to get involved locally and make a difference through participation on our committees and commissions which include citizens: Planning Commission, Board of Appeals for zoning

variances, Board of Review for assessment challenges, Farmland and Open Space Preservation Board and the Climate Resilience Committee. Contact supervisor@aatwp.org with your committee interests, and clerk@aatwp.org to find out about being an election worker. Consider moving your energy from frustration into contribution to your community!

Most of all I appreciate you. We are surrounded by residents who care about our quality of life, and support good governance through voting, paying property taxes, and other forms of participation. You have made this job extraordinarily fulfilling. Thank you for the privilege of serving you!

In The News

Voter turnout in the November 2022 General Election was 78% of Ann Arbor Township active voters, exceeding the 70% County average. While in-person Township voters were double the number from two years ago, absentee voting is favored by 65% of our active voters. The Michigan voting rights constitutional amendment passed by voters last Nov. eliminates the requirement to complete a new absentee voter application before every election. The amendment also adds 9 days of early voting for future statewide elections. Early voting allows you to feed your ballot into a tabulator before Election Day. The Clerk has not determined where the Township's early voting center will be located.

The **Michigan Court of Appeals** ruled mostly against Ann Arbor Township in *J.A. Bloch and Company and Sun ACQ, LLC v Ann Arbor Township* on Dec. 22, and sent aspects of the lawsuit back to Washtenaw Circuit Court. The suit involves a proposed 500-unit mobile home park on property off Warren Road and a 1975 Circuit Court Judgment involving the site, then owned by others. The Township Board met recently in closed session to consider attorney advice on next steps.

A new 4-story, 66-foot tall building with office and research and development space has been granted a height variance by the Zoning Board of Appeals. The Township rejected the first proposal from K.I. Properties Holdings, LLC, due to the level of disturbance to the site which has unusual natural features that create practical difficulty. Located at N. Earhart and Plymouth Roads, the site is heavily wooded and has wetlands, a stream and significant slopes. The new proposal decreases site disturbance by more than 1.5 acres and preserves numerous landmark trees by adding floors and placing parking underneath the building. And by preserving slopes, the new proposal helps diminish the perceived height of the building as viewed from US 23, making it look like a 3-story building and not a 4-story building.

The **Climate Resilience Committee** welcomes new members Benjamin VanGessel and Carla Smith. Its efforts have transitioned from providing input on the Washtenaw County Climate Action Plan to focusing on actions for the Township Climate Action Plan. County Commissioners recently adopted an estimated \$2.44B plan with 45 actions to reach carbon neutrality in government operations by 2030 and communitywide by 2035. Resource Recycling Systems is the consultant for both the County and our Township plans, which facilitates regional cooperation and resource utilization.

Welcome Carlene Colvin-Garcia



Carlene Colvin-Garcia has been appointed by the Board of Trustees to fill the vacancy left with the retirement of Della DiPietro. A University of Michigan alum, Carlene moved into the Township last year after 30 years of living in the City of Ann Arbor. She

brings 16 years of experience leading local community boards and commissions.

"I would rather roll up my sleeves and get to work than complain about a situation," says Carlene. "Thoughtful, informed, positive action feels better to me than doing nothing, then having that feeling of 'would-have, could-have or should-have' when things get worse. I love creating teams and working with people."

Her career as a project manager started during her 10 years with Domino's Pizza. While supporting the Company's global expansion, she learned about the Company's different modes of delivering pizza. This sparked an interest in safe, emissions-free transportation.

Carlene brought this interest to AAPS during the years her two children attended there. She worked with officials to introduce Safe Routes to School programming district-wide and obtained federal grant funds to improve pedestrian infrastructure. She also served as Ann Arbor PTO Council's Treasurer and Chair. Also, Carlene and her husband founded Arbor Biofuels Company which produced and distributed biodiesel production equipment globally.

She is the Vice Chair of Ann Arbor's Energy Commission and a founding member of the Ann Arbor Transportation Electrification Committee. She helped write and promote the City's Electric Vehicle Readiness Ordinance which requires new construction to include EV charging infrastructure.

Carlene began work as a project consultant on Ann Arbor Township's escrow management last fall. "I am deeply honored to have this opportunity to serve my Township in a role that requires accountability and experienced leadership," she said. "My work will rest on the foundation of principled stewardship established by Della and other officials. I plan to hit the ground running."

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Dioxane Contamination Update

Ann Arbor Charter Township hired a nationally recognized firm last fall to test for 1,4-dioxane in a sampling of residential drinking water wells in the Newport Road area. Using EPA-recommended testing methodology, one well was discovered with 9.1 ug/L (parts-per-billion) dioxane. The State of Michigan drinking water criterion for dioxane is 7.2 ug/L.

A second confirmational test came in at 1.9 ug/L. The State, using a less sensitive testing methodology, did not find detectable levels of contamination.

Our Township is working with the Washtenaw County Health Department and the State of Michigan on appropriate next steps, including

more testing at that location and in the area. The well is located more than a mile from the Gelman-related dioxane plume delineated by the State. It is about a half mile from Huron River and the plume appears to be moving toward Barton Pond, which is a major source of water for the City of Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor Charter Township purchases water from the City.

The Gelman Site is owned by PALL Life Sciences, Inc., and there are no active plant operations. In the past, the Gelman plant used dioxane as a solvent in the manufacturing of filter devices. An estimated 800,000 pounds of dioxane were used between 1966 and 1986 with most discharged to soil, surface water, and groundwater. The dioxane groundwater plume has polluted local lakes, creeks, residential drinking water wells, and a City of Ann Arbor municipal water supply well.