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The Evolving Role of the Township Clerk: 2004 - 2025

by Rena Basch

As I prepare to retire this month, I'd like to reflect on how the responsibilities of township clerks in Michigan—and here in Ann Arbor Township—have grown and evolved over the past two decades.

When my family and I moved to Ann Arbor Township in the early 1990s, I would never have imagined a future in public service. I had recently obtained my doctorate in materials science and engineering, and my early career was in automotive research. Yet, after becoming engaged in the local community, I ran and was elected Township Clerk in 2004. At that time, the clerk's position was distinctly part-time, enabling me to juggle raising two toddlers with my husband, an engineering career, and township commitments.

Michigan township clerks are legally responsible for internal township business operations, records management, and all aspects of voter registration and election administration. These core duties have expanded dramatically since 2004, especially around transparency, technology, and elections. Leveraging my technical background, I led the transition to an integrated municipal software suite, greatly improving efficiency and public access to tax and assessment data, utility information, and building department records. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I led the adaptation to online, then hybrid public meetings, a process we continue to use.

As the township's archivist, I managed the ongoing transition to digital records, selecting and implementing digital archive systems like Laserfiche, and making essential documents—such as board minutes, building plans, ordinances,

and resolutions—accessible online. I also introduced digital board packets for meetings, further enhancing transparency for officials and the public.

Financial oversight evolved in this period as well. Drawing on experience from both large corporations and running my own small businesses, I modernized key procedures, including early adoption of a uniform chart of accounts and payroll software.

The most significant transformation, however, has occurred in elections administration. When I began, Ann Arbor Township had about 3,000 voters; today, we serve over 4,100, across a complex combination of overlapping jurisdictions, sometimes requiring seven unique ballots for a single election. Election technology advanced with the replacement of unreliable equipment by new tabulators, and led the training of staff and workers on this new technology and law.

More recently, constitutional amendments such as Prop 18-3 and Prop 22-2 have lengthened and complicated election cycles, introducing same-day registration, permanent absentee voting, and early voting. Our permanent absentee voter list has grown from 450 to over 1,700. Managing these complexities while ensuring integrity and voter accessibility has been a priority for our staff, whose commitment to service and innovation has made me proud.

Although I am retiring as Township Clerk, I will continue my commitment to public service as Director of Elections for Washtenaw County.

I am grateful to the electors of Ann Arbor Township for the opportunity to serve this innovative and forward-thinking community for the past 20+ years. It has been a privilege to live my values of "repairing the world" and "thinking globally, acting locally" as your township clerk.

Township Road Projects and Staying Informed with the Road Commission

Four-way Stop Installed at Earhart, Old Earhart & Goss Road

The intersection of Earhart Rd, Old Earhart Rd, and Goss Rd in Ann Arbor Township was recently converted from a two-way stop to a four-way stop. According to the Washtenaw County Road Commission (WCRC), this intersection met the Michigan Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices criteria to become a multi-way stop. Motorists are reminded of the need for additional caution through the intersection since the change has been implemented. For questions, contact Michele Ford, Senior Project Manager – Traffic & Safety, at (734) 327-6652 or fordm@wcroads.org.

Maple Road (Foster) Bridge

The WCRC, along with its engineering consultants Great Lakes Engineering Group, are preparing plans to remove the post-tensioning system from the Maple Road (Foster) Bridge over the Huron River, between Huron River Drive and Country Club Road in Ann Arbor Township. This follows the June 9 discovery of a broken steel cable in the bridge's post-tensioning system, a key structural component. A timeline for construction has not yet been established. The bridge will reopen with a new, lower weight restriction.

WCRC is maintaining the detour route during this closure and will provide updates every two weeks at wcroads.org. To receive email notifications, residents can subscribe online. For questions, contact Aaron Berkholz, Assistant Director of Engineering, at (734) 327-6648 or berkholza@wcroads.org.

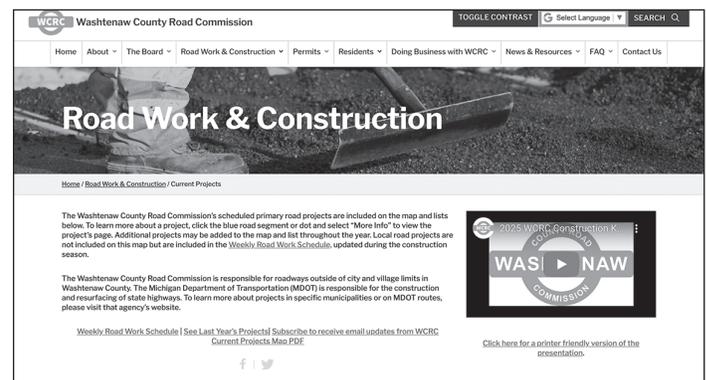
Warren Road

The WCRC announced an upcoming culvert replacement project on Warren Road in the Township. The work, which is set to begin in mid-to-late summer 2025, will replace the aging culvert between Dixboro Road and Thornwood Court with a new bridge. Weather permitting,

the project is expected to be completed and the road reopened to traffic by mid-October. During construction, Warren Road will be closed to through traffic at that location. While motorists will not be able to cross at the bridge site, access will be maintained for residents and those working within the closure area. Utility relocation work is already complete and the next steps will include removing the current culvert and delivering the components for the new bridge. Once those are in place, assembly and finishing work will follow. For questions about the Warren Road project specifically, contact Project Manager Neeko Robison at (734) 327-6660 or via email at robisonn@wcroads.org.

Stay Updated on Road Construction in the Township

For other updates from the WCRC, you can find weekly projects and a map of projects across the county on WCRC's "Current Projects" page at wcroads.org/road-work-construction/projects.



Township Installs a Public EV Charging Station

Ann Arbor Township is taking steps toward a cleaner, more sustainable future. Funded by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy through its Community Energy Management Grant, the township purchased and installed a dual-port Level 2 EV charging station. The EV charger is located at Township Hall, 3792 Pontiac Trail. To cover Township costs to use the charger, the Board of Trustees approved the usage fee of \$0.20 per kWh plus a \$0.50 flat fee. Township residents

can receive a discount of the \$0.50 flat fee by selecting “Ann Arbor Charter Township” in the “Connections” link within the ChargePoint app.



Seeking Input for 2025 Township Master Plan

The Planning Commission is seeking public input to its 2025 update of the Master Plan. The draft Plan is available by clicking on the link in “Master Plan Update” on the home page at aatwp.org. The deadline is September 5. Written comments may be submitted by email to planning@aatwp.org. The Public Hearing will take place at the Commission’s monthly meeting on October 6.

The Master Plan is a long-range policy document that guides land use, development, and infrastructure decisions to promote the community’s health, safety, and welfare. It establishes a shared vision for the Township’s future growth and preservation, coordinates land use and infrastructure planning and supports zoning decisions and capital improvement planning. The proposed amendments include updates to the background studies with recent Census and other population and land use data; and additions to the Plan relating to climate change and sustainable land use practices, groundwater resources and protection, broadband and internet access, accessory dwelling units, and several Special Study areas, among other changes.

The current draft represents the first Master Plan update since 2015. The 2020 update process was suspended owing to difficulties with public engagement during the COVID pandemic.

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Invasive Species Removal Event A Success

On May 31st, Township staff and resident volunteers gathered at the Township Farm to remove invasive species and pick up trash. Folks worked for a couple of hours in the woods east of the barn, filling several trash bags. It was a nice opportunity to gather, learn about invasive species, and enjoy the beautiful property. One major target was garlic mustard, an aggressive invasive plant that spreads rapidly and displaces native vegetation. Removing invasive species like garlic mustard helps protect local ecosystems, support native wildlife, and maintain the health of our natural areas. Learn more about invasive species in Michigan at Michigan State University Extension here: canr.msu.edu/invasive_species/

Township Secures SEMCOG Grant to Enhance Safe, Connected Routes

The Township has been awarded a grant through SEMCOG’s Planning Assistance Program to design and implement a system of non-motorized facilities and safety corridors that will serve pedestrians, cyclists, and other users. This funding will help us design a non-motorized plan that supports safety, accessibility, and connectivity across our community.

The SEMCOG program, launched in 2019, targets projects that advance transportation accessibility, safety, streetscapes, and trails in Southeast Michigan. In the fiscal year 2026 round, SEMCOG prioritized exactly these types of region-enhancing, multimodal planning efforts. We’ll soon share dates and formats for upcoming feedback opportunities. Your voice will shape the future of transportation in the Township!

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Community Gathering: Advancing Sustainability in Ann Arbor Township

Join us on Wednesday, September 18 at 7:00 PM at Township Hall (3792 Pontiac Trail) for a community gathering focused on local climate action. We'll celebrate the installation of our new electric vehicle (EV) charger, share updates on other Township initiatives to reduce emissions and improve energy efficiency, and invite residents to share ideas and input.

Learn about available incentives, upcoming sustainability projects, and how you can get involved in shaping a greener future for our community. Light refreshments will be served, and all ages are welcome. If you cannot attend but would like to stay informed or share your ideas, please contact planning@aatwp.org

Come be part of the conversation!

Members Wanted

Ann Arbor Township is looking to fill vacancies within its Board of Review. The Board of Review (BOR) meets three times per year. In March, the BOR convenes to hear valuation appeals and poverty appeals. Meetings take place over approximately 2-3 days, and one of those days contain a night meeting until 9 pm. The BOR then meets again for a couple of hours in July and December to correct clerical errors and mutual mistakes of fact. No valuation appeals take place at the July or December Board of Review meetings. BOR members are required to take a 4-hour course once every two years and earn a certificate of completion. Ideal candidates are residents of the community with an interest in local property values. Interested candidates should contact Supervisor Diane O'Connell for more information at supervisor@aatwp.org.