

CONSTANTINE TOWNSHIP NEWSLETTER

Volume 2, Fall 2010 Edition

Office

165 Canaris Street, Constantine, MI 49042
Website: www.constantinetwp.org

By: Lou Ann Moord

Regular Meetings

Township Board Meetings: Second Tuesday of
Each Month at 7:30 p.m.

Planning Commission Meetings: First Wednesday
of Each Month at 7:00 p.m.

Officials

Supervisor/Assessor

Jaime Hutson
12472 Millers Mill Road
Constantine, MI 49042
Ph: (269) 435-7268
Fx: (269) 435-8361
jhutson@constantinetwp.org **or**
jehutson@frontier.com

Clerk

Marti Brown
165 Canaris Street
Constantine, MI 49042
Ph: (269) 435-9900
mbrown@constantinetwp.org

Treasurer

Raymond Schmidtendorff
64403 Youngs Prairie Road
Constantine, MI 49042
Ph: (269) 435-4285
Fx: (269) 435-4285

Trustee

Michael Freude
67094 Blue School Road
Constantine, MI 49042
Ph: (269) 435-7737

Trustee

James Paananen
12018 Quaker Street
Constantine, MI 49042
Ph: (269) 435-8500

Greetings from Jaime Hutson, Township Supervisor

I can't believe a year has passed already since our first newsletter. We received enough favorable comments on our first newsletter to

continue. We plan on sending a newsletter with the December tax bills in the future. If you have any subjects you would like us to address, please let us know.

Constantine Township has a web site for those of you who use the internet. The address is www.constantinetwp.org and contains a wealth of information. Minutes, Budgets, Ordinances, Maps and Policies are just a few of the publications on the web site. The Township Board strives to be as open as possible with its operations. This is the purpose of this web site and newsletter.

The Constantine Township Board has a Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals and an Assessment Board of Review. We have transformed our former Zoning Commission into a Planning Commission as required by a new State law. The Planning Commission has been expanded from 5 to 7 members. If you are interested in serving on one of the boards, please send a letter to Jaime Hutson indicating your desire to serve, and you will be considered as soon as needed.

The Township Board and the Planning Commission have completed a Master Plan from the survey performed last year. The Constantine Township Master Plan provides a set of goal-driven strategies and objectives that will promote the health, safety, and welfare of our citizens. The Future

Land Use Map recommends future land use patterns designed to accommodate balanced development while maximizing the quality of life of our residents and minimizing adverse impacts on natural resources and municipal services.

The Township receives revenues from various sources (see Budget at www.constantinetwp.org). Most of our revenues are from State Revenue Sharing. We are expecting about \$130,000 this year, down from \$145,000 a few years ago. State Revenue Sharing is based on our population and sales tax; therefore, we cannot rely on a definite amount in any year. The economic condition of the State has affected the County, Cities, Villages and Townships. The most important is the loss of jobs and decline of income to the residents.

The Township has been spending \$50,000-\$60,000 per year to improve the County gravel roads to paved roads. The St Joseph County Road Commission has changed its policy so they will not share any of the cost to improve their roads unless the road has traffic of 100 vehicles per day. The Township Board decided not to fund any road improvements this year due to the uncertainty of its revenues and the position of the St. Joseph County Road Commission.

The Constantine Township Board suffered a great loss this year with the passing of Trustee Garth Klett.

Garth had been on the Board for over 47 years and always gave calm and considerate direction to the Board. Michael Freude has been appointed to fill out Garth's term of office.

Planning Commission News

Roscoe Hassinger retired from the Zoning Commission after 45 years of service. His experience and dedication will be missed.

The Township Board has appointed James Paananen to the Planning Commission to serve as a liaison between the two boards.

The Planning Commission has been busy adopting a set of bylaws to guide its operation and reviewing amendments to the Zoning Ordinance. The Commission is discussing whether to disallow more than one residence to a property and whether a blighted building ordinance should be considered for adoption.

Assessing Department

The Assessor's Office is responsible for identifying and valuing all taxable property. Each year, we produce the assessment rolls and the property tax rolls in accordance with Michigan's General Property Tax Law.

According to State law, all Cities, Villages, and Townships must employ a State-Certified Assessor to discover, list and evaluate all properties within its jurisdiction. Using mathematical equations (created and regulated by the State), the Assessor then determines a professional estimate of the fair market or "true cash" value for all real and personal property located within the Township boundaries. True cash value means "the usual selling price that could be obtained for the property at a private, non-forced sale." The actual purchase price paid for a property is not its sole indicator of value, according to State law.

The Assessor does not create value. The economic forces in the market determine value. The Assessor studies the sales transactions of the real estate market and appraises all property on the basis of 1) market trends, 2) Tax Commission guidelines, and 3) State law.

Every year, the Assessor's office estimates the value of each parcel of property as of "Tax Day" (set by State law as of December 31), and sends a "Notice of Assessment, Taxable Valuation, and Property Classification" to all property owners in early March. The notice lists three values for each property: Assessed Value, State Equalized Value and Taxable Value. Assessed and State Equalized Values are usually the same and represent 50% of True Cash Value.

These values are determined by market conditions and may increase or decrease accordingly. Taxable Value may be quite different from the first two values and is affected by Proposal A. It is the Taxable Value, however, that determines the property tax when multiplied by the applicable millage rate.

In 1994, Michigan voters passed Proposal A, which places a limit or "cap" on the Taxable Value. Under Proposal A, if there is no sale or transfer of ownership, or no improvements made to the property, its Taxable Value cannot increase more than the consumer price index or 5%, whichever is less. If there is a transfer of ownership, then the cap is removed, and the Taxable Value can increase to the State Equalized Value the year following the transfer. Improvements to a property such as an addition or new garage can also be added to a parcel's Taxable Value.

Every property owner has the right to appeal the value on the assessment notice to the Board of Review, which meets the second week of March each year. The exact times and dates are listed on the assessment notice.

Property owners can schedule an appointment to meet with the board or send a written appeal. Written requests must be received by the first day of the Board of Review. Citizens appearing before the Board of Review are advised to bring information that substantiates their claim of over-assessment, such as photographs, appraisals, and listings of comparable sold property. All persons who appeal are notified in writing of the decision of the Board of Review. Any decision of the Board of Review may be appealed to the Michigan Tax Tribunal. If you have any questions regarding your assessment, please contact Jaime Hutson.

Clerk News

Township Clerk Marti Brown, and dedicated election inspectors, successfully completed three elections in 2010. The General Election, held November 2, saw an outstanding turnout. Precinct 1, out of town, had 587 voters and Precinct 2, in town, had 393 voters for a grand total of 980 voters. Of those votes in Precinct 1, 59 were absentee ballots, and there were 39 absentee ballots in Precinct 2.

Thank you to all the election inspectors serving this year and to those voters who exercised their right to vote!

What Happens with Your Tax Dollars After You Pay the Treasurer

Township Treasurer Raymond Schmidtendorff has received some questions about how the tax dollars are handled after he receipts them in. He hopes the following answers are helpful.

He deposits tax proceeds in the bank. Whatever monies are collected by the 1st and 15th of each month must be paid out to the different taxing units within 10 business days. He writes checks to the affected taxing units for the amount collected in those 15-day periods.

Except for village taxes, all property taxes become delinquent on March 1st of each year. At that time, the township property tax rolls are turned over to County Treasurer Phyllis Bainbridge during a process called settlement. Phyllis and Ray review how much was collected and how much was paid out (these two must balance). She verifies the amount of unpaid taxes and assumes responsibility for collecting the remaining delinquent taxes on real properties. All delinquent real property taxes plus interest and penalties must be paid to the St. Joseph County Treasurer after the March 1st deadline.

She does not collect delinquent personal property taxes and certain other delinquent taxes and returns them to the Township Treasurer with a warrant to collect. Ray collects all delinquent personal property taxes with interest and penalties until all are paid, or deemed uncollectible, as applicable by law.

Property Tax Owners

County Treasurer Phyllis Bainbridge has posted some important information at:

www.stjosephcountymi.org/treasurer

Included are:

1. Property Tax Frequently Asked Questions / Answers.
2. Don't Wait – Pay Delinquent Property Taxes Now!
3. An Application for Property Tax Relief During Military Active Duty. Military personnel – Under the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act, you may qualify to have the interest rate lowered on your delinquent property taxes. View the application for details.

4. Check your tax bill for Principal Residence Exemption (P.R.E.). You may qualify if you live at the property and it is owned by you.
5. You may qualify for the Homestead Credit. This is on the State Income Tax Form. See your tax preparer for details.
6. If your taxes are delinquent, you may qualify for a hardship extension. This is designed to delay tax foreclosure by one year for owners who are actively working to catch up their delinquent property taxes. View the Hardship Extension Page on the County Treasurer's Website for details.
7. A Poverty Exemption may reduce the amount of City or Township property taxes you have to pay on your principal residence for a single year. Poverty Exemptions are granted through the Board of Review. View the Poverty Exemption Information Page at the County Treasurer's Website or contact Township Assessor Jaime Hutson.

20 Energy Efficiency Tips for Heating

1. Install an automatic setback thermostat to lower the temperature to 60° F. at night and when no one is home.
2. Set water heater at 120° F. When you leave on vacation turn down the temperature on the water heater.
3. Fix leaky or dripping water faucets.
4. Clean or replace air filter on the furnace once a month.

5. Make sure air vents are not blocked.
6. Caulk and weatherstrip around windows and doors. Add a sweep to the bottom of doors that let cold air in.
7. Install gaskets behind electrical outlet cover plates located on exterior walls.
8. Install glass doors on fireplaces and keep the flue damper closed when the fireplace is not in use.
9. Plant windbreaks to shield your house from the winter wind.
10. Upgrade ceiling insulation to R-38 and wall insulation to R-13. Install R-19 insulation in rim/band joists and R-10 insulation on basement/crawl space walls.
11. When purchasing new windows or a furnace, look for the ENERGY STAR logo that indicates a high efficiency product.
12. Insulate water pipes so the first horizontal pipe runs off the water heater or provide heat traps on both cold and hot water lines. All hot water pipes located in unconditioned basements/ crawl spaces should be insulated.
13. Install water heater blankets in accordance with suppliers' specifications.
14. Install low flow showerheads.
15. Consider installation of an instantaneous (tankless) water heater.
16. If you use an electric hot water heater, place it on an insulated pad.
17. Insulate and provide joint sealant on all HVAC duct work.

- 18. Plug major air leaks, especially in the attic and basement. Seal around electrical wire boxes and plumbing cutaways. Seal around recessed lighting fixtures, but use caution because insulation should not be placed near lights.
- 19. Caulk around outdoor faucets, wire and pipe holes and where different siding materials meet.
- 20. Get a home energy rating to evaluate home energy improvements.

Check out the St. Joseph County Website for more energy saving tips!

www.stjosephcountymi.org

St. Joseph County's Energy-Efficiency Efforts

Marcia Saunders, County Grant Writer/Project Manager, obtained a grant from the Michigan Dept. of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth (DELEG) earlier this year in the amount of \$267,153. It will go toward the Solar PhotoVoltaic and Solar Thermal Project at the County Jail. With those funds, the County has also conducted an energy audit at the jail and will be conducting an audit at Rawson's Kings Mill.

Marcia advised, "Sheriff Balk and Undersheriff Lillywhite are very proactive. This will include a 20-kilowatt PhotoVoltaic system to reduce electric use and a Solar Thermal System for hot water. As you can imagine with the potential of 160 prisoners, meals, laundry, showers and preparing meals on wheels, a lot of hot water is used. The system is designed to save approximately \$20,000 per year. Mark Lillywhite and his staff are tracking monthly usage, and the County should be able to estimate the savings quite easily. The savings will go into a building fund for use on upgrading county buildings in a more energy-efficient manner."

Weather permitting both solar systems should be completed by December 9th! Look for them on the roof of the jail -- they should be visible from the road.

A Call to Action

Marcia Saunders advised, "The DELEG has recently issued a Request for Proposal for funding. A project like this would have numerous benefits: energy efficiency improvements to homes, energy savings to home owners, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, and actual job creation and retention for implementing the program and for the contractors doing the work."

She reported, "The bulk of funding that the DELEG received will go to entitlement communities based on population. St. Joseph County and municipalities within the County are considered non-entitlement communities, and we will have to fight for a small pool of funds with other non-entitlement communities." She would like to apply to its "Better Buildings for Michigan" program. It is expected that there will be nine awards of approximately \$157,500 for each neighborhood sweep (\$1,417,500 total) distributed to non-entitlement communities. The funding will be used for marketing and outreach services within each community. Marcia said, "Don't let that put you off – all selected non-entitlement communities for the Better Buildings Program will have access to Michigan Saves program services and an additional \$373,033 per neighborhood sweep designated for base package weatherization treatment to the homes in the selected pilot neighborhoods. This funding would go directly to authorized and approved contractors for home energy efficient upgrades. It looks like up to \$1,050 could be available in grant funding for each participating homeowner. The neighborhoods will be identified through the outreach process." Marcia Saunders would like to

apply for three neighborhood sweeps: one for Sturgis, one for Three Rivers, and one that would be county-wide for residences in Villages and Townships. The program is not "income-based". It is not targeted to low-income persons, although low-income families can participate. If awarded, it would bring close to \$1.6 million to St. Joseph County.

Here is where you come in. She needs letters or emails of support from organizations that will be willing to help get the word out to people if the County receives the funding.

As you interact with other people, either through work, the schools, the hospitals, church or any non-profit organizations, please consider how you can help.

Can you send a flyer home with your students?

Can you put a flyer in your payroll checks?

Can you provide meeting space at no cost?

Will you allow a program coordinator make a presentation to your staff?

Will your church put a notice in their weekly bulletin?

Any partners that she can list will strengthen the County's application. Please send her an email or call her if you have any questions or if you can partner in any way. You may contact her at saundersm@stjosephcountymi.org or at 269.467.5653.

Watch for further information in the future.

Season's Greetings

We wish every one of you peace, happiness, and prosperity of all kinds during this Holiday Season and for 2011!