

THE PROFILE

* PLAINFIELD CHARTER TOWNSHIP NEWSLETTER

VOLUME XXVI NUMBER 2

PHONE 364-8466

APRIL 2001

It's almost time to dig out your suntan lotion and bathing suits. The beach at Versluis Park will open May 27, the Sunday before Memorial Day, and will remain open through Labor Day, September 3. Park hours are 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. with the beach open from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.



VERSLUIS PARK BEACH to open MAY 27

Versluis Park offers many amenities for family fun including the sandy beach and swim area, play equipment for the kids, grills and picnic tables, trails, sand volleyball, horseshoes, the fishing pier and boardwalk. Play equipment and the beach are handicap accessible. The picnic facilities at Versluis Park are available on a first come, first served basis for park patrons.

Versluis Lake is restricted to non-motorized boats. Permitted watercraft include canoes, kayaks, non-motorized fishing

times by an adult

boats, wind surfers, and small sailboats. Please be aware that boat trailers are not allowed in the park, due to the limitations of parking. A fishing program may be offered this summer. Call Cathy at the Parks and Recreation office at 364-1197, in June, if you are interested.

If you are new to Versluis Park, it may be helpful to know a few of the park rules before your first visit.

- Food is not allowed on the beach – only in the picnic areas. This helps keep the geese out of the swimming area.
- No alcohol
- No glass
- No rafts or floatation toys – only Coast Guard approved life jackets
- Children 10 and under must be accompanied on the beach at all

D.W. Richardson Park for Warm Weather Fun

D.W. Richardson Park, located on Grand River Drive, has three baseball diamonds, shuffleboard and basketball courts, and play equipment. The Township's Community Center is located at D.W. Richardson Park and is available to rent for private parties by calling the Township Hall at 364-8466. The park pavilion may be rented by calling the Parks Department at 364-1197. Alcohol and pets are prohibited in the park.

What's Happening with the North Kent Sewer System?

CHAPTER 4

This is the fourth in a series of informational pieces on the subject of the sewer system that serves Plainfield Township. Having reviewed the content of the first three articles, I encourage you to re-read or to become familiar with them. Please call or write me at Township Hall if you need hard copies or e-mailed electronic copies sent to your e-mail address. I wish to use this opportunity to provide you a brief summary and update.

- The major sewer pipelines found to be in precarious physical condition are being repaired at considerable expense. The West River Trunk will be completed and operational in the next few months. Plans have been drawn, and requests for bids will be sent out this year for the replacement of the 4 Mile Road Pumping Station. A second Grand River Crossing is being designed, as is the replacement of pipes along the east side of the River to the 4 Mile Pumping Station. These improvements should be completed sometime next year. Plainfield Township and our four partner communities are working with the Kent County Department of Public Works to investigate and fix other problems in the system. The rate increases over the past three years were authorized primarily to pay for these repairs and replacements. A single family home now pays \$16.66 per month for sewer service.

- The five partner communities, organized as the North Kent Sewer Authority, are working on improving our relationship with the County DPW, which manages and operates the entire system under a fifty-year contract that ends in 2016. We are about to begin to renegotiate that contract in a manner that will reflect the communities' ownership and ultimate control over the system. Our overall objective is to provide for the most reliable and most cost effective operation of our sewer system. There are dif-

ferent ways of accomplishing this, and we will be looking at different options. For the past 30 years, the County DPW has had full control. They send us monthly bills, we pay them, and we send quarterly bills to sewer customers to support those costs, as well as payments on bonds, and building reserves for improvements and replacements.

- The North Kent communities (NKSA) were invited to sign a 30-year agreement with the City of Grand Rapids to provide for the continued transport and treatment of our wastewater. We thoroughly analyzed the agreement and found major flaws, which were detailed in April 2000 PROFILE. We have been attempting to negotiate an acceptable agreement, while also exploring the option of building and operating our own "Clean Water Treatment Facility". Grand Rapids indicated that our objections and their unwillingness to address them made it necessary to end negotiations and to leave us to deal with the issue when our current (acceptable) agreement expires in 2007. Be assured that we do not intend to wait until then to resolve this matter.

To have a choice—building our own plant, we must acquire sufficient land to build. We have identified the only realistic site on Coit Avenue about a quarter mile north of Woodworth. The five communities acquired an option to purchase 28 acres of property. They authorized the purchase of the property on March 21, because the option expires in April and cannot be renewed. Property owners in the general area are understandably very concerned and upset about the possibility of a clean water facility being constructed. Plainfield Township officials are not at all eager to build the plant. We would much rather continue to send our wastewater to Grand Rapids, as we have since 1968. But we must protect the interests of our sewer cus-

tomers and the interests of the larger community, while acknowledging and addressing the concerns of nearby property owners.

No decision has been made. No decision must be made for perhaps a year or two. Meanwhile, we continue to ask Grand Rapids to consider reasonable changes in their proposed agreement. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the agreement and has determined that major provisions of it are flawed and contrary to federal regulations. The EPA suggests that Grand Rapids continue to provide services based on the current cost-sharing method agreed upon and blessed by the courts many years ago! That system began when the courts denied Grand Rapids the ability to make customer communities pay for part the reconstruction of the City's local sewer system.

Now Grand Rapids appears to have found another way to shift its financial burden to its neighbors. Those communities that have signed the agreement have experienced clear and substantial increases in their costs, while only Grand Rapids has experienced a decrease. Realistic projections show that Grand Rapids' charges to the North Kent Communities would more than triple by 2008 and would surpass the annual costs of building and operating our own plant in 2011.

Continue to be informed about what is going on as the NKSA communities struggle with these difficult issues. Your elected leaders ask for your support and understanding in the coming months and years. No final decision will be made without informing the community and providing opportunity for public input and discussion.

Robert C. Homan, Township Manager

Kent County Sheriff Department Community Services Unit Community Policing Update

The Community Policing walk-in office at North Kent Mall has been closed for demolition. We are grateful to the owners of North Kent Mall and manager Kim Ellis for allowing us to use that space for the last four years.

Deputy Marnie Mills and Deputy Marc Burns have temporarily relocated to the Community Services Unit Main Office at 701 Ball Avenue, (616) 336-3118. Deputies Burns, Mills, and Deputy Roger Parent are continuing their problem solving missions throughout central Kent County.

We have received very generous offers for a new walk in office in the Plainfield area. We are examining our options, checking into funding, staffing and other issues. In the interim, our services will continue without interruption. Our community policing officers will be willing to meet with any resident at their home, business or perhaps at the Plainfield Township Hall. The Plainfield Township board has made

space available for our community policing officers to sit down and meet with any resident that has concerns, suggestions or questions.

The public education programs such as Boating Safety, Hunting Safety, Snowmobile Safety and Neighborhood Watch, will continue to be offered throughout the township. Check our website for a list of available classes at www.co.kent.mi.us.

With the beginning of spring, warmer weather, and dryer roads, our neighbors will be walking, riding their bikes, and moving about our neighborhoods in much larger numbers. We all have to adopt a driving safety attitude that calms us and slows us down. It is also time to learn about severe weather planning. Information is available by contacting the Kent County Sheriff Department Emergency Management Division, (616) 336-3111 or by checking the Kent County Sheriff's Department website.

Plainfield/Rockford Fire Department



CONSOLIDATION REVIEW

You may have read or heard that the consolidation of the Rockford and Plainfield Fire Departments is being reviewed. The intent of the review is to determine several aspects of current and potential operations of the department. Those aspects include the degree of success of the operation of the department, the administrative success of the consolidation, potential goals from a continued relationship, the options that are available to continue the relationship, and what is the next move. The options for the future include continuing operations as a consolidated entity by contract, forming a more permanent relationship, or disbanding the consolidation and revert to two separate departments.

Both communities researched the current operation for nearly a year with the assistance of Emergency Services Consulting Group (ESCG), a consulting company that is based in Oregon. A feasibility report was submitted by ESCG that recommended the initial consolidation. ESCG further recommended that a study of the alternatives for the formation of a single fire department should be developed and presented to the governing bodies with the goal in mind of merging into a single department. The merger recommendation includes the qualifier, *if additional benefit for the communities could be derived*. We have arrived at the point where we should make these decisions based upon the evaluations.

ESCG's 1996 report lists the following advantages to operating a consolidated fire department:

- Increased depth of coverage – more apparatus and personnel
- Improved efficiency – better utilization of available resources
- Improved support programs – fire prevention and training

- Cost avoidance – fire station construction, purchase of apparatus, hiring of personnel, materials and services.

It has been my observation that these advantages are real. I also believe that we get a faster response and service implementation due to the consolidation. This may be another way of saying improved efficiency, but I emphasize it because time is so important when responding to emergencies.

What are the disadvantages to a consolidated department? A list of perceived disadvantages would include

- Loss of local control – the consolidated department is concerned with providing equal coverage for all 40 square miles
- Cost sharing – the contract has a cost sharing formula that some question
- Disparity of representation of the labor force – Rockford has non-union fulltime and paid on call (POC) firefighters who operate under Rockford's personnel policies, while Plainfield has unionized full time employees operating under a contract and non-union POC who operate under the Township's personnel rules
- Two sets of purchasing policies – there are two sets of purchasing policies with two different accounting systems utilized and loss of name recognition – very similar to the local control issue.

What are the advantages of a single merged department?

- One set of personnel rules, one purchasing system
- The ability to do long term planning, eliminating the need to have two elected bodies approving purchases or program changes that affect both communities
- Equal distribution of the cost over all properties

A merger is not the only way to accomplish this; there are other alternatives that will be reviewed. Some change is necessary to best utilize the advantages that the joint operation presents.

CENTRAL DISPATCHING – A NECESSITY

I have previously mentioned the importance that time plays in the delivery of emergency services. Four minutes is a very important benchmark for fire department operations. It is the time that we use to judge our success in responding to both fires and EMS calls. Our goal is to respond at least 90% of the time to all calls within four minutes from the time dispatch receives a call for assistance. We are meeting that goal. Unfortunately, there are times

when calls take longer than one minute to reach the fire department from dispatch. The Kent County Sheriff's Department does our dispatching and their capabilities have not kept up with the population growth and need for service. The Kent County Fire and Police Chiefs' organizations both agree that there is a need for a central dispatch center serving all of Kent County. Currently, there is no way other than face to face, for the police and fire units to communicate. The Kent County Board of Commissioners has spent some time reviewing the issue, and has had a study done that indicated central dispatching was needed, but nothing has happened yet. We in the public safety business hope that the new county board will give this issue a high priority this year.

David J. Peterson, Chief

Express Bus Service to Continue

In an effort to make commuting trips easier, Plainfield Township and *The Rapid* (formerly GRATA) have partnered to continue express bus service to downtown Grand Rapids. For the low fare of \$1.00 per ride, you can park at one of two park and ride lots and ride into downtown Grand Rapids without having to worry about finding a parking place.

The Express service is designed for commuters traveling downtown—there are no stops in between the park-and-ride lots and the downtown area. Stops in the downtown are located along the loop of Ionia, Michigan, Ottawa, Fulton, and back to Ionia. Stops are identified with a Downtown Express sign. The outlying park-and-ride lots are located at North Kent Mall, near K-mart, and at an MDOT-sponsored carpool lot at Northland Drive and 7 Mile.

As the S-curve construction came to a close, many Express riders asked that the service continue, even if it meant a fare had to be paid. (All express services during the S-curve closure were free.) Surveys were done to assess the potential for continued ridership and to help

set the fare. Plainfield Township was approached to pay the local share of the service, because, according to the surveys, the biggest segment of the ridership was coming from Plainfield Township (48 percent). Rockford was close behind with 22 percent. Plainfield Township agreed to support the route, so the Express



bus continued to roll, giving downtown commuters an alternative. Fares are set at \$1 each way; monthly Supersaver passes can also be used.

Buses run only in the morning and afternoon peak times. A guaranteed ride home program is in place if riders need to get back to their cars during the day or miss the last bus due to unexpected overtime. Riders who register for this program are eligible for a \$15 voucher towards a cab ride.

If you would like more information on the Plainfield Express service, please call *The Rapid* at 776-1100 or visit www.ridetherapid.org.



White Pine Trail Update—Spring 2001

Since the first pavement was down on the trail in the Plainfield area in the fall of 1998, this promises to be the most exciting season yet for trail users. Here are a few of the developments:

- **There will be no fees on the trail this year** nor on any State Park rail-trails and you will not need a trail pass. This is wonderful news for all users especially for families, children, retirees and physically challenged people who may have had a special hardship with the fee system.

- **The trail bridge over West River Drive** is due to be placed in early April. Completion of the approaches will follow shortly. Pavement into Comstock Park to connect with the Riverside Trail at North Park Street has been delayed pending completion of the North Kent Sewer project, yet we still hope to see that this season.

- **The stretch from 13 Mile to Russell Road** will be paved later in April or May. This will extend the length of paved trail for a total of 9 miles from south of the Township offices to one-half mile north of M-57 in Algoma Township.

- Algoma Township is now constructing a small trailside park at the historic railroad trestle over Stegman Creek. This will be an ideal rest and picnic spot for trail users and is located 3 miles north of Rockford.

We encourage all people to make use of the trail. For those unfamiliar with the area the best point to access the trail in the Belmont area is at Rogue River Park on Belmont Road just north of the Township Building. There is parking for over 100 vehicles and restroom facilities. There are a number of areas in Rockford to park with easy access to the trail. The most convenient is in the community lot off of Main Street at 10 Mile Rd. From the parking lot, just follow the paved path under the 10 Mile Road Bridge to the trail. North of Rockford there is a parking lot off 12 Mile Road located along the trail 1/2 mile west of Northland Drive. A very large DNR parking lot is also located at the trail on Russell Road

again one-half mile west of Northland Drive and 4 miles north of Downtown Rockford.

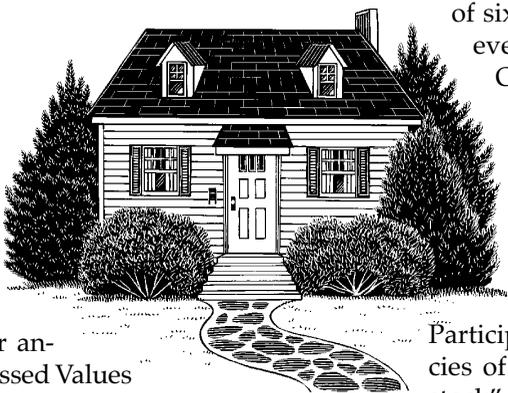
With the heavy trail use it is very important to follow some simple rules. Private property rights must be respected, so it is important not to wander off the trail in these areas. Be careful to avoid litter-

ing and follow proper trail etiquette. Bicyclists and roller bladers need to keep speed under control when the trail is congested or small children are near. Parents should keep children near them to avoid collisions. Vehicles should park in authorized areas only, never on or immediately adjacent to the trail. In this way, everyone on the trail, even at the busiest times, can have a safe and enjoyable outing.

Friends of White Pine Trail
Meetings:
April 10, 2001, 7 p.m.
Cedar Springs Municipal Building
66 Main Street, Cedar Springs
May 8, 2001 7 p.m.
Krause Library
Monroe and Courtland Streets, Rockford
June 12, 2001 To be determined

The *Friends of the White Pine Trail* is the public trail advocacy group working with the Department of Natural Resources and local communities to develop and enhance the trail. We are particularly interested in cooperating with the DNR to maintain the trail, since the maintenance budget will be limited due to abolishing trail fees. Please call our information line at 866-8464 if you would like to help or desire more information. You can check out our website at www.whitepinetrail.com. or come to a monthly meeting. New members are always welcome.

FROM THE ASSESSOR'S OFFICE



Board of Review is over for another year. Assessed Values have increased an average of 6% township wide. Taxable Value has been capped at 3.2% unless new construction or field inspected new value was discovered. This spring and summer, the neighborhoods that we will be reappraising with field inspection are: Rogue River Meadows, Belmont Farms, Northgate, Western Plains, Secluded Lakes, Park Forest, Rezen Plat and Samrick Hills. The sales to assessment ratio is low in these neighborhoods, in other words, the properties are selling higher than assessments. It is important that we make sure our records are correct and that the assessments are uniform. If there is no one at the property when we visit, we will leave information to be completed by the homeowner and returned to the Assessor's office. If you have any questions regarding this, please contact our office at 364-8466. As a reminder, if you have not completed a Homestead Exemption Affidavit, the deadline is May 1, to qualify for the 2001 tax year.

Free Bushes

Plainfield Charter Township's Free Tree program will have a new branch again this year!! In 2001, bushes will be given away instead of trees. A variety of bushes in one-gallon pots will be given to residents who call to place an order.

Bushes MUST be preordered by calling 364-8466 beginning at 9:00am on April 24, 2001 until all bushes are reserved which usually takes less than 2 hours!! NO FAX ORDERS OR WALK-INS WILL BE ACCEPTED. The random use of six telephone lines will be a fair way for everyone to have a chance to get a bush.

Only ONE order per address per call. Two bushes will be given to each order. The bushes will be available for pickup on Friday, April 27th between 2:00pm and 5:30pm **ONLY**. Bushes, which are not picked up, will be used in township projects.

Participants will not have a choice of the species of the bushes. All the plants are "park stock" from a reputable nursery in the area.

SPECIAL NOTE FOR BUSH PICK-UP LOCATION

Bushes will be distributed from the Township Office located at 6161 Belmont Avenue.

Please enter the Township Office driveway and follow the directions of the people assisting with the traffic flow.

The Officers and Trustees of the township encourage interested residents to participate in this program, which is in its twelfth year.

*Susan L. Morrow, MMC
Plainfield Charter Township Clerk*

TOWNSHIP/ OFFICERS

TOWNSHIP HALL HOURS

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Phone: 364-8466

TOWNSHIP BOARD

David Groenleer, Supervisor

Susan Morrow, Clerk

James Stover, Treasurer

Wendell Briggs, Trustee

Robert Heindrichs, Trustee

William Parris, Trustee

Chartles Weldon, Trustee

MANAGER

Robert Homan

TOWNSHIP BOARD MEETINGS

7:30 P.M.

First and Third Mondays

www.plainfieldchartertp.org

Help, Help, Help!



Kids on
wheels—
mainly
roller bladers
and skate boarders

—are damaging the curbs, asphalt, picnic tables, railings and walkways at Township Hall. Parents, please remind your children that bicycles, roller blades and skate boards are prohibited at Township Hall – seven days of the week. The new Rogue River Park at the White Pine Trail may be more suitable.

Remember... at Township Hall.

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID

Grand Rapids, MI
Permit No. 1