



The Year 2020 in review

As we all know 2020 was a year we will not soon forget, however, it is still important for us to reflect and highlight the major things accomplished this year. So, in no particular order let's take a look at what happened in our little corner of the world.

Road projects are an import part of our annual budget. We work collaboratively with the Mecosta County Road Commission to maximize our budget dollars. This year we installed an overlay on 80th Avenue between 6 and 8-Mile Roads and a chip fog on 100th Avenue from 7-Mile Road to Pierce Road. We worked with the county to add bike lanes to their road projects as they fall within our recreation committee's big plan of connectivity of our Morton Township trails to county and state trail systems. Since it did not happen until the end of 2019, I want to throw in the new flashing light at the Buchanan/100th Avenue intersection as a road improvement for the year.

Benches were added to our Pine Grove Park located on the south end of the Morton Township Business Park. This is a 40-acre non-motorized park that is open year-round for walking/hiking as well as snowshoeing or cross-country skiing.

COVID was the major disruptive force of 2020 as it changed how we did everything. We were forced to conduct our monthly meetings virtually, our fire/rescue staff had to change their practice and protocols for their normal activities, and we all had to comply with the CDC, Health Department and MIOSHA regulations. Sometimes the biggest hurdle was understanding the language and what rule, or law was the most recent and in effect. The township employees all did a tremendous job in operating as normal as possible in the most difficult of times.

Our township supervisor, Dick Wheeler, resigned and left the area to spend more time with children and grandchildren. Dick served as our supervisor from November of 2012 through June of 2020. Thank you, Dick, for all your dedicated years to making Morton Township a better place. Upon his resignation, the Township Board appointed the only candidate running for the vacancy, Mark Klumpp, as the interim supervisor until the election in November. Mr. Klumpp won the November election and has been sworn in as your new Supervisor. The remainder of the board retained their seats through the election: Yo Bellinger, Trustee; Jeff Ratledge, Trustee; Stephanie McNeal, Clerk and Maureen Wolfe, Treasurer.

Speaking of elections, what an interesting year it was for that. Morton Township Clerk, Stephanie McNeal, and Deputy Clerk, Diane Williamson, along with all the election workers ran an amazing election despite all the distractions. We had 81 % of registered voters participate in the election and an absentee voter return rate of 97%.

During the year, the board updated the Township Cemetery Ordinance and then started the process of reviewing and updating the Township's Operating Policies.

The Fire Administration Board, chaired by township resident Joe Lanz, continues to work with Chief Sutherby, to ensure our fire/rescue personnel have the appropriate equipment, gear, and training to be prepared for anything at any time. To start off 2020 we received the new rescue/mini-pumper unit to add to our fleet and we later sold the old rescue unit (blue

and white) to a fire equipment dealer. We purchased a new battery powered spreader (like a jaws of life unit). Also, upgraded/replaced our chainsaw, hoses, helmets, pagers, and tires for the ladder truck. We purchased a few ballistic vests for our first responder staff members as they are often first on the scene and are at risk to potential hazards. As I write this with one week left in the year, the fire/rescue staff have responded to 584 calls, that is an average of 1.6 calls per day all year long. Finally, the Board presented CJ Monsivais, Shawn Fuller, Jill Ray, and Jeff Harvell with lifesaving awards for their actions.

We moved our annual township cleanup day from the Spring until the end of Summer. We had great participation and filled 4 garbage trucks, a couple dumpsters, and overloaded two local scrap metal dealers. We are considering keeping it at the end of the summer for 2021. We continued to operate our recycling center (located in the business park) during 2020.

We sold a lot in township business park to a current RV repair facility as they want to expand into sales.

We received the results of our annual financial audit, with an unqualified opinion. This means we are doing things right and complying with financial reporting requirements. Great work Treasurer, Maureen Wolfe, and Deputy Treasurer, Vicky Esch

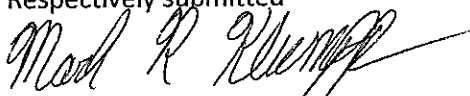
We funded a gypsy moth survey for the entire township as it was apparent there was a larger than normal infestation this year. Those results will be shared in the beginning of 2021. Unfortunately, the county/state and federal government have no funds to assist us with spraying as they did the last time around approximately 25 years ago. Funding could be an issue for this project if we must move into the spraying stage.

We hired a new tax assessing contractor, Precise Tax Assessments. Stop in and say hi to Seth or Megan, as they are doing a fantastic job already. Our building official Fritz Pins, resigned and took another job downstate, so the board has been working hard to fill this vacancy and hope to have the process completed in January. A special thanks goes to Deputy Treasurer, Vicky Esch, for all her help during this transition period. Alan Sackett resigned after years of faithful service and leadership on our planning commission. The township board appointed Steve Brandt to replace Allen on the planning commission. The Township had to work with all other townships in the county, along with the City of Big Rapids to create a job description then select and hire a designated assessor. This is a new position required by the State of Michigan, but one we hopefully will never need. It is designed to come in and clean up the tax rolls if an entity is not doing things properly and fails their required audits. Finally, in December, the board approved a one-time hazard pay stipend for our front-line workers recognizing their work during the COVID crisis.

A couple final things from the year 2020 include an upgraded server and storage for our township computer system. The purchase and installation of new flag poles at both fire stations and the township offices to replace older broken ones. We purchased and started the process of applying limestone to the CSX trail and parking area as this could potentially be a trailhead to our bike trails, however, the weather put a stop to it as the large trucks were getting stuck. We expect to continue this project in the Spring of 2021 when things dry up. Approved a permit for Tri-County Homeworks to start their high-speed fiber network which is expected to be completed in 2021.

This is an overview of many notable things that took place in Morton Township during 2020 but does not cover everything. We are excited to see what 2021 has in store for us as we continue to strive to provide the best services possible to all our residents. Thank you for your continued support and goodbye 2020!!!

Respectively submitted



Mark R. Klumpp, Supervisor (on behalf of the entire Morton Township Board)