Terry Hofmeyer, Laketown Township Supervisor

If you haven’t already done so, mark your calendar for 7:00 p.m. on March 9th and plan to attend Laketown Township’s Annual Meeting! It’s a great opportunity to be brought up-to-date on the activities of each of our many boards and commissions as well as the township’s proposed budget for 2016/2017. Annual meetings are not a requirement under Michigan law, but they still remain a great way for each of you to learn more about our township and voice your views and/or concerns as we move forward into another budget year.

The Felt Mansion recently held its annual winter open house and, as usual, this free event was well attended. The hot dogs were tasty and the tours of the mansion and adjacent grounds (by horse drawn hay wagon) gave everyone in attendance the opportunity to see the improvements made at and around the mansion over the past year. Summer time (Thursday evenings) music events are planned for 2016 – and – they are free and family friendly for you to enjoy.

While you’re at the Felt/Shore Acres properties, take the time to view our newest addition! The township has “gone green” and installed a solar energy field on approximately one acre of land and it is operational and producing solar electricity. We are now part of the green energy system and, if this pilot program (for us) goes as expected, we could consider proceeding with similar solar systems at one or two other locations on township owned properties as well. At the present site, we are capable of producing approximately 100 kWh of electric power.

Many of you participated in a fiber-optic survey about three months ago and the township was encouraged to look into providing a high speed internet system. We have taken the first step in this process by having an engineering firm look into the feasibility and costs to provide this within Laketown Township. I anticipate that we will be receiving the necessary information as early as February and, once received and evaluated, will be providing the information to township residents. The costs for such a system would likely require a voter approved bond issue.

We have a special election scheduled for March, 2016. Remember to vote!

It’s winter folks – please drive carefully!

laketown gig update

On December 9, 2015 the township board approved a contract with Yates Engineering Services Michigan to study fiber optic system options for Laketown Township. Yates is an engineering firm from southern Indiana that has extensive experience in building fiber to the home (FTTH) projects. This first report is due at the end of January 2016. It will provide us with options for the various types of fiber optic systems to consider as well as cost estimates for constructing the system.

If the first report shows the promise and we hope it does, the township board will need to act quickly. Constructing a fiber optic system will require voter approval on a bond referendum. The deadline for bond proposal language for the May election is 4pm on February 9. This means the board will need to move up the regular February meeting to February 8 to approve the bond proposal language. If we cannot make this deadline the next available election would be the August primary election. That will already be a very lengthy ballot.

The details of the bond proposal are unknown at this time. We will know more after we receive the report from Yates and decide on a direction.
TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2016, PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY

On March 8, 2016, voters will nominate presidential candidates and vote to elect the 80th District Representative in State Legislature (sample ballot enclosed). To participate, voters will select a party preference ballot. Those choosing not to participate in the primary can receive a non-partisan ballot for the 80th District Representative candidate.

Voters will be required to select one of the following three Ballot selections as follows:

- Republican Party Presidential Primary Ballot
- Democratic Party Presidential Primary Ballot
- Ballot without Presidential Primary. (This ballot choice is for voters not voting in the presidential primary who wish to vote for the 80th District Representative candidate, only).

Election Notes:

- February 8, 2016: The Last Day to Register to Vote for the March 8, 2016, election.
- March 8, 2016: Polls open at 7 a.m. and close at 8 p.m.
- Absentee ballots can be obtained at the Township Hall during regular business hours.
- Additional Election information can be obtained at www.michigan.gov/elections.

Thinking Of Running for Office?

Filing deadlines and petition signature requirement charts can be found on the State of Michigan web site www.michigan.gov/elections, under the Information for Candidates tab. Local, County, and State Partisan and nonpartisan candidates wishing to run in the August primary must comply with requirements and file by the appropriate deadlines. If you are interested in running for a position on the Township Board or the Parks Commission, Affidavits, Nominating Petitions and Statement of Organization forms can be picked up at the Township Hall. These must be properly filled out, signed and returned to the Township Clerk’s office by 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 19th. Affidavits and Nominating Petitions are filed with the Township Clerk, and Statement of Organization forms are filed with the Allegan County Clerk. If you have questions, please feel free to call the Clerk’s office at (616) 335-3050.

Felt Estate Sees Record Tour Attendance Patty Meyer, Director of The Felt Estate

A huge thank you to the residents of Laketown Township and beyond for making 2015 a record-setting year in so many ways! Our attendance at the recent holiday tours fully doubled from previous years – and much of that was due to Laketown residents attending and inviting friends and family to see our historic gem.

On December 5, 2015, The Felt Mansion hosted Winterfest – a free, family fun day sponsored by Laketown Township and the Friends of the Felt Estate. Over 500 people attended! We also powered up our new 100kw solar array on that day.

The following week, on December 12, the Felt Estate became “Downton Abbey” and hosted a wonderful afternoon tea. It was a sell-out crowd, with footmen in tuxedos as valets. How fun to see so many in period dress for the occasion! If you would like to be on the mailing list to receive up-to-date information about these events, please email patty@laketowntwp.org and you will receive our monthly updates.

Continued on page 4...
The State Treasury has issued the inflation rate to be used to calculate your 2016 Taxable Value. Your taxable value (excluding any new construction) may increase by 0.3%. Just to compare; both last year and 2014 the inflation rate was 1.6%. So, not surprisingly, very tame inflation. Remember that taxes are based on Taxable Value, not the State Equalized Value (SEV). The taxable value cannot rise above the SEV.

In 1995 Proposal A went into effect creating two values for each parcel. The SEV (State Equalized Value) represents 50% of the market value and goes up or down based on sales in the area. The Taxable Value = the SEV that first year but was only allowed to increase by the rate of inflation each subsequent year. Over the decades home values increased faster than the rate of inflation and the spread between the SEV and Taxable values increased representing significant savings in property taxes paid. Then in 2008 we had the great recession and property values decreased, in many cases to the point that ended up lowering the taxable values.

This chart is a good snapshot of where we were in 2005 and the overall changes to the township values at the bottom of the market in 2012. Lots of data here for you number crunchers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2005</th>
<th>AGRICULTURAL</th>
<th>COMMERCIAL</th>
<th>INDUSTRIAL</th>
<th>RESIDENTIAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Parcels where TV=SEV</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Parcels where TV=SEV</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>12.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$ of Parcels where TV=SEV</td>
<td>317,700</td>
<td>247,100</td>
<td>873,400</td>
<td>32,063,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Parcels where TV Decreased</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>10.26</td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td>6.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Pcls where TV Decreased</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxable Value of all Pcls</td>
<td>12,694,285</td>
<td>8,268,473</td>
<td>2,039,856</td>
<td>260,272,376</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012</th>
<th>AGRICULTURAL</th>
<th>COMMERCIAL</th>
<th>INDUSTRIAL</th>
<th>RESIDENTIAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Parcels where TV=SEV</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Parcels where TV=SEV</td>
<td>31.82</td>
<td>23.08</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>60.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$ of Parcels where TV=SEV</td>
<td>4,102,700</td>
<td>824,200</td>
<td>891,300</td>
<td>167,375,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Parcels where TV Decreased</td>
<td>24.65</td>
<td>12.07</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>21.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dollar value of SEV-TV</td>
<td>1,967,340</td>
<td>1,008,993</td>
<td>2,435</td>
<td>81,126,877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Pcls where SEV Decreased</td>
<td>93.18</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>74.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$ of Pcls where SEV Decreased</td>
<td>2,247,600</td>
<td>300,400</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>131,215,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Pcls where SEV Decreased</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>10.26</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>44.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxable Value of all Pcls</td>
<td>6,014,660</td>
<td>7,348,107</td>
<td>899,265</td>
<td>299,061,923</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s look at the Residential column. We can see that in 2005 only 12.94% of parcels had the TV (Taxable Value) = SEV. By 2012, 60.46% of parcels had dropped in value to the point where the SEV and Taxable values were the same. Since taxable values can only increase by the inflation rate (CPI) in subsequent years, this represents a permanent reduction in taxable value for the township and a permanent savings for individual property owners.

The market for 2016 continues to improve. Sales data shows values are rising which is great news for all of us. Some areas of the township (condos in particular) are showing dramatic recovery in sale prices. Roughly 25% increases in some cases over last year. To be fair, these folks also saw dramatic decreases during the height of the recession. Keep in mind that the reduced taxable values that resulted from those decreases are permanent and will only rise by the CPI (0.3%) for 2016 even when the SEV increases by 25%.

In late February you will be receiving your 2016, “Valuation Change Notice”. Check the numbers and if you have any questions, please call and we can go over them.

**Annual Meeting March 9, 2016 at 7p.m.**
From the Fire Department

I would like to start this newsletter highlighting the calls for service Graafschap Fire Department (GFD) received for the past year. For 2015 GFD responded to 453 calls for service, this was a 4.14% increase over 2014, and the 2014 call volume was 11.5% higher than 2013. This increasing call volume has been a trend over the last six years with 2015 again being a record year. In 2015 we had 94 calls in Fillmore Township, 316 calls in Laketown Township and 43 calls where we assisted neighboring departments.

As most of you are aware, GFD has been installing smoke alarms since 2013. We receive the alarms through the MISAFE program and WOOD TV. These smoke alarms have 10 year lithium batteries, are free and will be installed by GFD. I would like to thank Wayne Van Ommen and Cal Haverdink, who since the beginning of this program have installed over 1,200 smoke alarms. If you need more smoke alarms in your house or your alarms are over ten years old, call the fire station at 616-396-4060 and leave your name and number, and we will call and setup a time to check your smoke alarms and install if needed.

GFD staff have been busy with training. Two of GFD's new hires, Hayden Vachon and Blake Stewart, just started the fire academy in January. They will spend the next six months in training. Eric Winsemius, one of our new fire officers, just started Fire Officer I and II classes that will be finished in May. Deputy Chief Dan Martinez and myself recently completed EMT training and passed the National Registry exam.

In the last newsletter I spoke about a new tool GFD purchased recently called the LUCAS chest compression system. This device when applied to the chest of a person whose heart has stopped, will deliver uninterrupted compressions. I am happy to report that from what we know, there is one person who we have used this device on that is alive and able to enjoy life as you and I.

The following is a list of phone numbers for the fire officers of GFD. These numbers can be used to call for burn permits, etc. outside the normal office hours of the township hall and fire station.

Chief Doug DenBleyker 616 218-3227
Deputy Chief Dan Martinez 616 886-7928
Captain Todd Achterhof 616 836-1006
Captain Tom Dykstra 616 403-6820
Lieutenant Tom Achterhof 616 836-1004
Lieutenant Eric Winsemius 616 422-3780

Now that winter has arrived please remember a few safety items as related to heating. If you burn wood for heat please make sure your chimney is clean, and you have the correct clearances from the stove to combustibles and for the stove pipe as it passes through a wall or ceiling. Kerosene heaters produce Carbon Monoxide, so do gas stoves, candles, oil lamps etc. Some kerosene heaters produce more than others, and the amount of emissions produced by any one heater may vary depending on the heaters condition. So, service your heater, keep it clean and make sure it is peak operating condition at all times. Do not close yourself up in a single room with a Kerosene heater, keep adjacent rooms and doors open. Again make sure you have the correct clearances to all combustibles. Lastly, to ensure you are alerted to the presence of Carbon Monoxide, each floor of your home should have a Carbon Monoxide alarm installed.

Felt Estate Continued...

Our next project is the restoration of the ancillary buildings of the estate – the barn, the carriage house, and the pump house. The area known as “Shore Acres Farm.” The speed of this project will depend, of course, on funding. We have received a grant through the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. That, along with members' donations and attendance at tours and events, will help us toward our restoration goals.

The Felt Mansion is on the National Register of Historic Places and the Michigan Register of Historic Sites. The preservation project has won awards at the local, state, and national level – including LEED-EB Gold Certification for its green initiatives. To become a member of the Friends of the Felt Estate, please go to the website www.feltmansion.org and click on the “shop” item on the menu.

For information about renting the Felt Estate for your private event contact Staci at 616-335-3050 or email staci@laketowntwp.org.
Treasurer’s Trove
Laketown Township Treasurer, Gary Dewey

I love living in Laketown and love being involved as a public servant! Thank you for your support during my cancer fight and I am now cancer free! Please stay involved in township issues and contact me when you need assistance.

We have a couple of difficult issues in the township that we continue to deal with and hope to resolve in a positive way this year. Please continue to be involved in stating your opinion and know that the people you elected and those appointed have the same love and passion for the township that you have.

Tax bills were sent out early December for the winter taxes and many residents have already paid. Winter taxes are due on Feb. 16, 2016, interest will be added to payments received after this date. Remember, postmarks are not honored in determining prompt payment.

The last date to pay 2015 taxes in the township office is February 29, 2016. All delinquent taxes as of March 1st will be turned over to the Allegan County Treasurer for collection. Additional interest and penalty will be added at this time. For payoff amounts after March 1st, please contact the County Treasurer at (269) 673-0260.

Payments can be made by cash and check in the township office. Credit card and electronic check payments can be made by phone/internet only. Additional fees are applied by the serving agent to all electronic payments. For additional information on electronic payments please visit our website www.laketowntwp.org and follow the “Online Payments” link.

Hamilton School District continues to follow the policy of only collecting on the winter tax bill so Hamilton residents have a higher winter tax bill.

Hardship exemption requests need to be filed for each tax cycle/season and tax deferment requests fit the same legal requirement by tax law. Forms are available at the township office or on the website.

My Sunday drive through the township continues and wildlife abounds and I would love to know what you observe and where. Contact me at my township e-mail or at deweygary@gmail.com

---

See You In The Parks
Michelle Sall

After two long, snowy, and sub-zero winters, it was nice to start off 2016 with nicer weather for a walk in the woods. Laketown offers so many wonderful recreational activities each season. Other popular winter activities in the parks include snowshoeing, cross country skiing, ice fishing and hiking. For horse enthusiasts, remember to check out the recently installed hitching post at Farview Park, near the start of the horse trails.

We are excited to announce our 2016 partnership with the Outdoor Discovery Center (ODC). A few upcoming events include:

- “Owl Prowl” at Sanctuary Woods on Fri., Jan. 29, and Fri., Feb. 19, 6-8 pm
- Adult nature hike at Huyser on Fri. March 18, 10 am - noon

New moon hike at Farview on Sat. April 7, 8-9:30 pm
“Knee-deep” in a Wetland at Farview on Fri., April 22, 7:30 – 9 pm
These events are free. Full descriptions are included on the ODC flier in this newsletter.

Looking for a great place to hold an event this year? Consider reserving space at a park. A reservation application is required for groups of 20 or more who want to organize and host events. This alleviates conflicts as well as ensures a safe and clean environment for all visitors. Currently no fees are charged and an application must be completed and approved in advance. Past activities have included graduation parties and time on the softball field.

Our goal in managing the parks system has been to receive grant assistance for all major projects, which typically requires matching funds. We welcome donations large or small toward major projects, recreation supplies, or something personal, such as a memoriam bench.

The five-year recreation plan expires in 2016 and is in the process of being updated for 2017. For this reason, you will be receiving a short survey this year, which provides us the opportunity to receive input from you on future planning, recreational opportunities, and acquisitions. We look forward to receiving your comments for improvements.