

Weekly News Report

Oakland Township Sentinel, LLC

News and Information - Charter Township of Oakland, Michigan

Editors: Robert A. Yager – yagera@comcast.net, Barbara A. Yager – bayager@comcast.net

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/>

“Informed citizens are the foundation of effective self-government”

Township Meetings Next Week

(The public is invited to attend and to comment. Also you can view most meetings live on Ch 17, or see a video on the Township website after the meeting)

Tuesday, Feb 25, Board of Trustees (BOT), Township Hall, 7-10 P.M.

Future Township Meetings – Beyond Next Week

Tuesday, March 4, Planning Commission (PC), Township Hall, 7-9 P.M.

Tuesday, March 11, Board of Trustees (BOT), Township Hall, 7-10 P.M. (Budget Hearing)

Wednesday, March 12, Dog Park Task Force Open House, 5-7 P.M., Township Hall,

Wednesday, March 12, Parks and Recreation Commission, 7-9 P.M., Township Hall

Tuesday, March 18, Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), 7-9 P.M., Township Hall

Wednesday, March 19, Historic District Commission (HDC), 7-9 P.M., Township Hall

Tuesday, March 25, Board of Trustees (BOT), Township Hall, 7-10 P.M. (Approve Budget)



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Corrections:

Oakland Township has only eight (8) full-time firefighters, six to provide one person at each of the two stations 24/7/365, plus Fire Chief Paul Strelchuk and EMS Coordinator Greg Ball. In the February 14, 2014 Weekly News Report we mistakenly stated that we had nine (9). Thanks to paid-on-call firefighter, Andy Linn, for calling this error to our attention. See also his letter to the editor concerning the fire department in this issue.

Information added to our website this past week – Link:

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/>

**Parks and Recreation page – budget information
County and State page**

Board of Trustees (BOT)

Link to Township website page:

http://www.oaklandtownship.org/boards_and_commissions/board_of_trustees/index.php

Link to Oakland Township Sentinel webpage:

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/board-of-trustees/>

Next Meetings:

- **Tuesday, Feb 25, Board of Trustees (BOT), Township Hall, 7-10 P.M.**
- **Tuesday, March 11, Board of Trustees (BOT), Township Hall, 7-10 P.M. (Budget public hearing)**
- **Tuesday, March 25, Board of Trustees (BOT), Township Hall, 7-10 P.M. (Approve Budget)**

**Board of Trustees (BOT) / Parks and Recreation Joint Budget
Workshop –2/19/2014**

See Parks and Recreation – page 5 for a report

Budgets – It's Your Tax Money

At the 2/19/2014 joint budget workshop of BOT and PRC -

Township Manager Ann Capela announced that –

- hospitalization insurance for Township employees is expected to increase 10% for next year
- Tax revenues are expected to increase 5% (higher tax valuations + new homes in Township)

Supervisor Terry Gonser stated that this is an opportunity to possibly decrease tax millage rates instead of just automatically spending the increased revenue.

At OPC, Feb. 24th, Representative Tom McMillan will host a “Property Tax Town Hall Meeting” at 7 P.M. According to a phone message the topic will be “How to appeal your property taxes”.

Annual Budget Public Hearing

Tuesday, March 11, Board of Trustees (BOT), Township Hall, 7-10 P.M. (Budget Hearing)

This is your chance to comment on spending plans for next year, before they are finalized.

Fire Department (Oakland Township Fire Department, OTFD)

Link to township website page:

http://www.oaklandtownship.org/township_departments/fire_department/index.php

Link to Oakland Township Sentinel webpage:

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/fire-department/>

What Do You Know About Your Fire Department?

The 1.00 mil fire levy expires at the end of this year. Look for a renewal and/or increase on the August ballot. This important issue, in addition to a letter to the editor submitted by a volunteer firefighter, prompted us to want to know more about the department. On Thursday, Chief Paul Strelchuk and his crew gave Barbara and me a tour of Station #2 (Rochester Road) and discussed issues facing the Department. What follows is an overview; we plan to write several more articles delving into the subject in more detail.

Each of our two substations is continuously manned by a single full-time firefighter working a 24-hour shift. Each of these employees has been trained as both a fire-fighter and a paramedic, possessing Advanced Lifesaving Skills (ALS), which provides for maximum flexibility and expertise depending on the nature of the emergency. ALS training is particularly significant as 90% of the 716 runs by the OTFD in 2013 were in answer to calls for medical assistance.

Oakland Township has six of these skilled firefighter / paramedics, three for each station. Each full-time firefighter/paramedic works a 24 hour shift, living at the station alone on one-third of the days in a year for a total of 2920 hours. (A typical 40 hour work-week for the rest of us is 2080 hours).

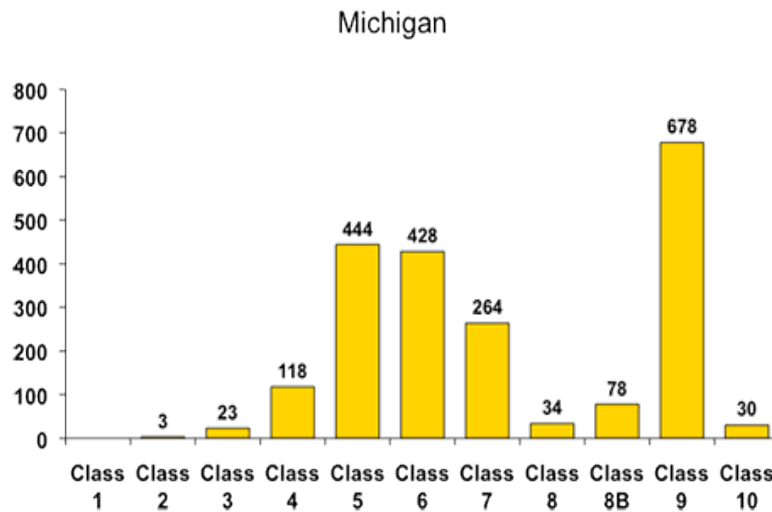
Monday through Friday the Chief and EMS Coordinator are available to serve as firefighters / paramedics and do so.

2014 Work Schedule for Full-Time Firefighter / Paramedics

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SHIFT A SHIFT B SHIFT C

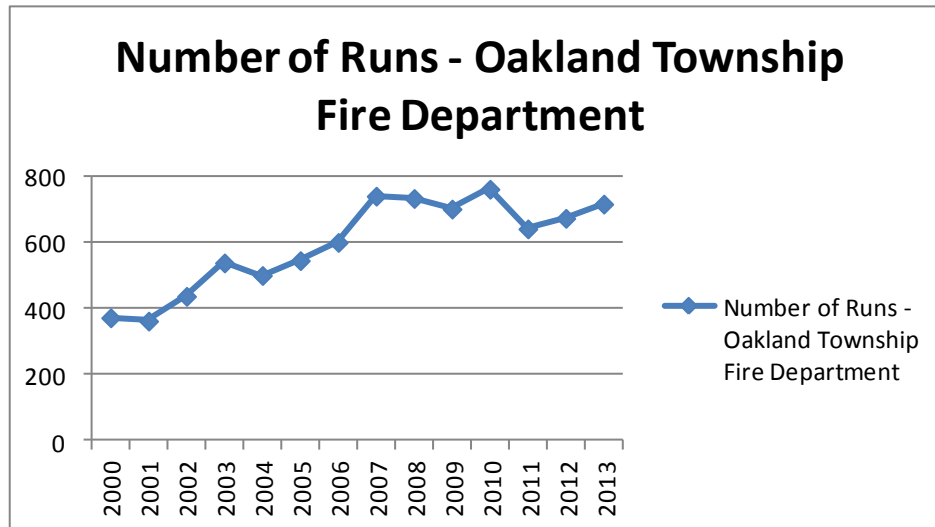
Getting to you fast, to help you, is the priority. According to Firefighter/Paramedic, Dave Ludington, “each minute a heart attack victim is untreated decreases survival chances by 10%.” And Chief Paul Strelchuk says, “Fires double in size every 2-3 minutes.” That’s one reason to have two stations, to be closer to the incident. Before Station #2 was built, the northern Township was rated 9 on a 1-10 insurance industry scale (1 is good, 10 is bad). Now it is rated 5. This means lower homeowner’s insurance rates for residents and quicker response for medical emergencies.



Fire Insurance ISO Ratings for Michigan Fire Departments

When a call comes in from 911 (received at the Oakland County Sheriff's Dept. in Pontiac), the full-time person at the station must be aided by volunteers. It is becoming increasingly difficult to have the required number of volunteers in the program to respond to the calls and provide a sufficient level of manpower to aid the victims and ensure firefighter personal safety.

Our growing population results in increased calls. The Fire Department is wrestling with the issue of how to provide adequate manpower to staff an emergency, and as population increases, more overlapping, simultaneous emergencies. Hiring more full-time employees is one option. Getting more volunteers is another.



Here's how the volunteer system works. The volunteers are called Paid-On-Call (POC). This does not mean, as some people assume, that these people are paid to wait around with their pagers. They receive \$11 per hour when actually responding. But to have one's supper, sleep, or child's school program interrupted by a pager alert to action for \$11 per hour is hardly pay; it is a volunteer job. There is no pay for just carrying the pager around. We have 21 such POC's, but work schedules mean that many cannot respond. When the Fire Department announces the desire to "hire" more, we may get two applications versus 30 in Orion Township. One theory to explain this lack of interest is that our largely professional residents are simply not interested. It also may be that in Orion Township this is a route to a full-time job that Oakland Township residents do not desire to hold. Firefighter/ Paramedic Derek Young and EMS Coordinator Greg Ball point out that the intensive training and required training-time commitment away from family may be a further deterrent to volunteering.

Next week – What Is Advanced Life Support?

Historic District Commission (HDC)

Link to Township website page:

http://www.oaklandtownship.org/boards_and_commissions/historic_district_commission/index.php

Link to Oakland Township Sentinel webpage:

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/oakland-township-historical-society-and-oakland-township-historic-district-commission/>

Next meeting:

Wednesday, March 19, Historic District Commission (HDC), 7-9 P.M., Township Hall

Older Persons' Commission

Website homepage: <http://www.opcseniorcenter.org/>

Link to Sentinel webpage: <http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/older-persons-commission/>

Link to OPC February Newsletter: <http://www.opcseniorcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/OPC-FEB-2014-NewsWeb.pdf>

At OPC, Feb. 24th, Representative Tom McMillan will host a "Property Tax Town Hall Meeting" at 7 P.M. According to a phone message the topic will be "How to appeal your property taxes".

Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC)

Link to Township webpage:

http://www.oaklandtownship.org/boards_and_commissions/parks_and_recreation/index.php

Link to Oakland Township Sentinel webpage:

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/parks-and-recreation-commission/>

Next Meetings:

Wednesday, March 12th, Dog Park Task Force Open House, 5-7 P.M., Township Hall,

Wednesday, March 12, Parks and Recreation Commission, 7-9 P.M., Township Hall

Parks and Recreation 2014-15 Proposed Budget is Generally Acceptable to the Board of Trustees at 2-19-2014 Joint Workshop

Currently the Parks Act of 1905 is interpreted in Oakland Township as giving the Board of Trustees authority/responsibility to approve or reject part or all of the Parks and Recreation Budgets including both the Parks Millage (Fund 208) and the Land Preservation millage (Fund 408). Therefore this meeting took place.

(Editor's note: We don't see where the law requires this approval. This 109 year old act, in our opinion, intended for the Board to approve a Parks budget only in order to be able to set the total General Fund tax millage. Our Parks are funded by separate millages and do not ask the Board for more funds from the General Fund. By providing our Parks Commission with two separate millages, we voters have clearly told the Board, politely, to "butt-out" of the Parks budgeting process.)

The Township Parks and Recreation Act 157 of 1905 states:

41.426c Budget; limitation; assessment, levy, and collection of tax. Sec. 6c.

"The township park commission shall submit to the township board a detailed budget covering the cost of maintenance of the township parks and places of recreation of the township for the ensuing year. The budget shall not exceed 1 and 1/2 mill on the assessed valuation of the township. The township board shall examine the budget and shall approve the entire budget, or a part of the budget that the board considers reasonable and necessary, which sum shall be incorporated into the tax on the township..."

Trustee Bailey started the substantive discussion by asking the purpose of this meeting. There was a general discussion that drifted to line item budgeting and land preservation fund control. Trustee Bailey strongly encouraged the Board to leave management of the Land Preservation Fund with Parks and Recreation, as they have done it for years and have the skills. He was also against line item control, citing his budget management work experience as a GM manager.

Parks Commissioner Rogers felt that inappropriate uses of the Land Preservation Fund would surface at this meeting and polled attendees on their budget experience.

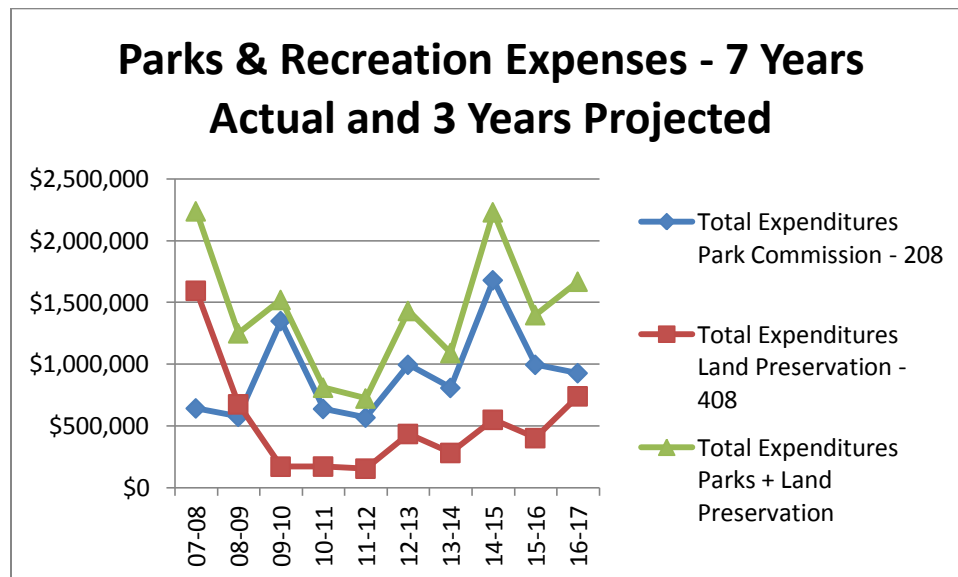
There was an unresolved disagreement between Supervisor Gonser and Treasurer Langlois over whether or how the City of Rochester uses line-item budget control.

There did not seem to be a lot of support for line-item budget control on the Board. There was support for more line item detail, without requiring approval for each and every line-item budget overage. Ms. Milos-Dale agreed to add more line-item detail to the budget. This will be made

easier by the new BS&A software introduced by this new Board last year and just now coming into full use.

Numerous questions were asked and then answered by Parks Director Milos-Dale and other Parks personnel or Commissioners. For example, a large budget item for Stony Creek Reserve Nature Park in the Land Preservation Budget was named “recreation”. It was questioned if “recreation” was properly part of the Land Preservation Budget. Ms. Milos-Dale stated that this was for access to this property via trails and a parking lot. Such access to Land Preservation properties has been considered part of the purpose of the Land Preservation Fund.

The Parks Budgets - Big Picture and Details



The above chart was prepared from data presented in chart form. It summarizes total expenditures controlled by Parks and Recreation Commission. This is actual data for 2007-2013, a very close estimate for fiscal year 2013-2014 ending soon on March 31, and projections for 2014-2017. Data with detailed explanations for 2014-2015 budget items prepared by Parks Director Milos-Dale can be seen in the meeting packet at this link: [Misc. Documents – Parks and Recreation Commission – 2014 – BOT PRC Joint Workshop PRC Packet February 19, 2014](#)

The large year-to-year variation is caused mostly by variation in large capital improvement projects. Parks Director Mindy Milos-Dale presented an excel spreadsheet showing the Capital Improvement Plan for the next three years. It can be seen at this link: [parks-capital-projects-2014-2017.pdf](#)

Some major big ticket \$\$ capital improvement items of interest for 2014-2015 fiscal year (April 1, 2014 – March 31, 2015), listed in order of decreasing cost are:

- Bond repayment (Marshview Park purchase, construction)...\$486,250
- Marsh View Park added parking, Phase 1.....\$248,000
- Paint Creek Trail Bridge at mile 33.7 replace\$230,000
- Dog Park\$225,000
- Land purchase\$135,000
- Marshview Connector parking lot (Parks 1/3 of cost).....\$41,500
- Bear Creek Park well..... \$20,000
- Portable Ice Skating Rink \$20,000

Questions about manpower levels and where they are charged are shown in this spreadsheet from Parks Director Milos-Dale: [Parks Manpower Summary 2-19-14.pdf](#)

Details of contractors / consultants budgeted for next year are shown by line item in this two page document: [Parks-professional-service-contractors-2-19-14.pdf](#)

County Parks & Recreation Surveys to Make Oakland Township Resident Preference Surveys Unnecessary? – Short Answer – No

Dan Stencil, Oakland County Parks and Recreation Executive Officer, presented a summary of their plans to the Oakland County Association of Township Supervisors February 10, 2014. Our Township Supervisor, Terry Gonser attended and summarized the presentation at the February 11, 2014 Board of Trustees meeting. Supervisor Gonser said, in part –

“They do a survey, and a they have a very comprehensive survey and they suggested that perhaps that local Township departments probably wouldn’t need to do a survey of needs, because their survey of need - because there’s is so comprehensive.”

We asked Dan Stencil for the text of his talk and slides. We got the slides. It turns out his PowerPoint presentation was prepared with input from Jon Noyes, Supervisor of Planning for

Oakland County Parks. Mr. Stencil asked Mr. Noyes to respond to our questions. He said in an email reply:

“I will locate and send to you the PowerPoint that was presented at the OCATS meeting, however, the recreational needs survey that you referenced was not included in the slides. Rather, Dan Stencil and I discussed opportunities for efficiency through collaboration and I specifically referenced our common interest in conducting surveys to determine recreational need. (In my opinion, it doesn’t seem to be the best use of tax dollars to have multiple levels of government conducting overlapping recreational needs assessments with little or no coordination.)

I have proposed that we should collaborate so that recreation needs can be determined for each municipality in Oakland County. This would not only be to the benefit of local governments and their corresponding recreational departments or recreational authorities, but I believe it would also benefit the County Parks and possibly also the State and the Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority (HCMA) as well. I am particularly interested in the possibility that local surveys will not only help determine the recreation needs of County residents but the distribution of those needs as well.

I apologize if this discussion has lead anyone to believe that Oakland County Parks and Recreation has already surveyed the residents of all 61 Cities, Villages, and Townships and that individual municipalities no longer bore that responsibility. I thought that I indicated that this is an opportunity for collaboration and that the County Parks staff is interested in working on with each of the CVTs and would be exploring further.*

Please contact me if you would like to discuss this in more detail. – Jon Noyes

**OCPRC has conducted a randomized survey of 600 residents with equal representation from 4 geographical quadrants in Oakland County. The surveys were conducted in 2006, 2008 and 2010. I am now suggesting that we pursue a different approach to better address how need is distributed.”*

We called Mr. Noyes to confirm that he did the presentation about planning collaboration between the County and the 61 municipalities and to see what he meant by collaboration. We had a nice discussion. It seemed to me that the County wants to piggy-back off our local surveys but needed to add a few questions or modify our questions in order to do that. I suggested he talk to Mindy Milos-Dale as a new survey will probably be done this year in our township.

Planning Commission (PC)

Link to Township webpage:

http://www.oaklandtownship.org/boards_and_commissions/planning_commission/index.php

Link to Oakland Township Sentinel web page:

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/planning-commission/>

Next meeting:

March 4th, 7P.M., Township Hall

(Probably they will work on the revision of the Goodison Plan.)

Police / Sheriff's Department

Link to Township webpage:

http://www.oaklandtownship.org/township_departments/sheriffs_department/index.php

Link to Oakland Township Sentinel webpage:

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/police-sheriffs-department/>

Trails and Safety Paths Advisory Committee (TSPAC)

Link to Township webpage:

http://www.oaklandtownship.org/township_departments/safety_path_and_trail_network/index.php

Link to Oakland Township Sentinel webpage:

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.wordpress.com/safety-paths-and-trails-committee-information/>

Next meeting:

Wednesday, March 5, 3 P.M., Paint Creek Cider Mill (tentatively set, not yet on calendar)

Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

Link to webpage on Township website:

http://www.oaklandtownship.org/boards_and_commissions/zoning_board_of_appeals/index.php

Next meeting:

Tuesday, March 18, Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), 7-9 P.M., Township Hall

Editorials

None

Resident Questions Answered

(Do you have a question that we may be able to research? Let us know. Here are our first two, below.)

Q- At the 2-19 budget meeting, Supervisor Gonser said our legal fees that are not for Parks are \$90,000 per year. My neighbor said it is much more. What is correct? What did we pay in the past? Is this year high for some reason? Do you know what the Board is predicting for next year? – OT resident. Where can I find this information?

A - The base cost of our Township, Board of Trustee legal contract is \$108,000 per year. A copy of this contract is on our website at this link:

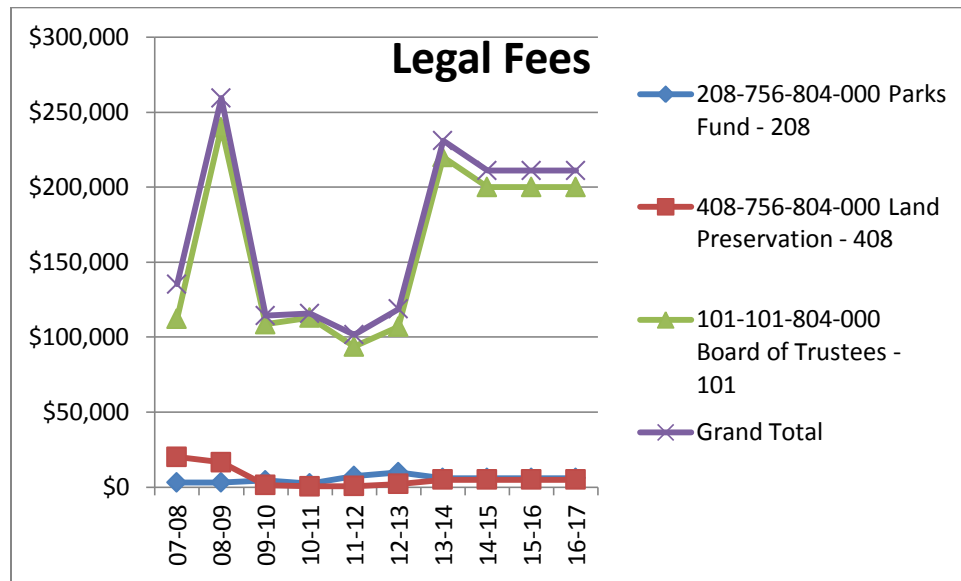
<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/foia-ots-2014-4-reply-law-firm-contracts.pdf>. See item 4a on page 3 of the Giarmarco, Mullins, Horton contract. But there is

more. Above the \$108,000 “flat rate” we are charged extra for any litigation or labor work. This will make our total 2013-2104 bill about \$220,000. See this on page 1 of the 12/31/13 “Quarterly Finance Report” at the bottom under “Legal Professional Services”

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/quarterly-finance-report-201401.pdf>

Parks has their own separate lawyer who charges \$125 per hour. His contract is also at the above link. This graph below shows past data and future budget projections. This data came from the Township website at this link:

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/foia-ots-2014-4-reply-law-firm-contracts.pdf>



Note that the size of the Board of Trustee legal fees is very much larger than Parks.

Q- At the same meeting Mindy Milos-Dale said we got Stony Creek Nature Park for only \$500,000 of our tax money. Wasn't she exaggerating? This is over 60 acres, who would sell it for \$500,000?

A – Actually we paid only \$445,000. The rest, \$904,500 was a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant that Ms. Milos-Dale obtained. These grant funds, as Commissioner Roger Schmidt pointed out recently, come from oil and gas leases by the state on our public lands. The source of our information is a report prepared by Jim Creech for the Board last summer at this link on our website (it can be found nowhere else):

<http://oaklandtownshipsentinel.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/ot071.pdf>. See page 9 of 13 for the details.

Letters to the Editors

(We welcome these, especially those that add missing facts or correct factual errors, or ask questions of interest to the general community. Facts presented should be verifiable by readers. Please restrict comments to local government affairs.)

Fire Department Equipment is Aging; Volunteer (Paid on call) Manpower is Slim

I would like to say I appreciate the work you are doing and enjoy your newsletters... Keep up the good work! I did have a correction to the 2/14 issue under agenda item #16 - Approval of Paid on Call Firefighter. You state:

"Our full time fire department has 9 employees:

- Fire Chief
- 4 – EMS, Emergency Medical Technicians
- 4 – Firefighters / EMS"

Our fire department actually currently has 8 full time employees

1 - Fire Chief

6 - 24 hour "duty" firefighter/paramedics (1 per station per day)

1 - Emergency Medical Services Coordinator

...We used to have a full time fire inspector that has gone away since the 2010 layoffs.

On another note...

I am a paid on call firefighter/paramedic for Oakland Township and am a lifelong OT resident. I take great pride in our department, our community, and being able to serve my friends, family, and neighbors. The upcoming millage renewal is very important to us, as obviously without a renewal the department ceases to exist. We also will be seeking a millage increase (unknown amount pending board approval). This increase also will prove to be VERY important to the citizens of Oakland Township.

As our community grows, equipment ages, (and firefighters age!) OTFD will be facing some serious challenges in the coming years. Our new Chief is finding that there was no plan in place for truck and equipment replacement (no capital improvement fund)... The "old way" was just take money from the general fund when needed. This used to work out decent with the old

administration; however our current Supervisor no longer wishes to subsidize ANY fire department functions with the general fund. The millage increase would allow much needed funds to be set aside specifically for apparatus and equipment. Fire trucks are nearly \$500,000 each, and our fleet is aging and constantly needing repair, total assets of the FD approach \$8 million, and taking from the general fund is not going to support complete replacement.

The second major function that an increase would serve would be to add extra full time manning at our stations. Our department is primarily paid on call which works, but presents a few problems. Being in an affluent area, with population made up of many administrators, executives and other upper echelon positions, we are simply not seeing any interest in residents becoming paid on call firefighters. Our POC numbers have dwindled to 21 - from well over 30 at its peak. The paid on calls on the roster all work normal 40+ hour jobs and simply cannot be around every time the pagers go off. During the day time, when most people are at work, we *may* get a response of 2-3 POC firefighters. Receiving a response of 2-3 people, in addition with the 2 duty personnel makes it very difficult to provide a timely and safe fire attack. The National Fire Protection Association states you must have 5 people to make an interior fire attack (2 in, 2 out, and 1 Incident Commander) - Oakland Township sometimes struggles to meet this number. Adding even just 1 person per shift would make a huge impact on the service we could provide to the township.

A millage increase is not something people desire to hear, especially myself, owning a couple properties in OT; however OT currently levies one of the lowest fire millages around. The Supervisor is strongly opposed to any increases, however we at the Oakland Township Fire Department feel like the residents deserve more, and they deserve a fire department that is completely ready to respond, even if it does mean a slight millage increase. As a fire department we attempt to take every opportunity to educate the residents, and will be sending out an informational packet to residents prior to the millage renewal.

I appreciate your time and your efforts with the Sentinel, I hope that this starts some gears turning and we can work together to provide the public with the information they need to know about their public safety services. Please let me know if you have any questions/comments/concerns.

Regards,

Andrew Linn

*******The End of 2/21/2014 Weekly News Report*******
