



MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Please route to all interested parties in your township.

GOV. SNYDER TURNS DOWN PRESIDENT OBAMA TO MEET WITH MTA MEMBERSHIP

Gov. Rick Snyder kicked off the MTA Networking Banquet last Thursday night, discussing his vision for the state and answering a string of questions posed by township officials. Few people in the room realized that the governor had to turn down an invitation to greet the president of the United States at Metro Airport during his overnight stop in our state, which conflicted with the MTA event. The governor pointed out that his father was a former township official and that his very first car was purchased at a township auction; an old car used by the fire department, a point that included some humorous banter between the governor and MTA Executive Director Larry Merrill. However, the governor also talked about the challenge of evaluating state operations to become more effective. In fact, the governor challenged the MTA and its membership to develop its own list of issues regarding state operations to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape. MTA wishes to thank the governor for taking part in our banquet.

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE TAKES FIRST ACTION ON COMMERCIAL FORESTS

A subcommittee of the House Natural Resources, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee took action on three pieces of legislation that will impact lands used for forestry activity. The bills included HB 4302, offered by Rep. Ed McBroom (R-Waucedah Twp.), HB 4969, sponsored by Rep. Frank Forster (R-Pellston), and HB 4970, introduced by Rep. Matt Huuki (R-Stanton Twp.). When combined, the bills work to move smaller parcels of property out of the commercial forest act and into the qualified forest category for property tax purposes. In both cases, the forest is intended to be harvested on a regular basis; however, the commercial forest act requires the property owner to open the land to public hunting and fishing. Because of this public use, the state pays part of the tax on the property. Over the years, smaller parcels have been added to the program, with property owners being less enthusiastic about harvesting and more resistant to public access. By moving some of these smaller properties into the qualified forest category, the property owner would be exempt from the 18-mill school tax but would not need to open their land to the public for hunting. The legislation would also allow certain buildings on the forest land that are not designed for permanent housing. The full committee is expected to begin consideration of the legislation next week.

IMMUNITY FROM SIDEWALK LIABILITY MOVES FORWARD

For years, state law has provided protection to local governments from liability lawsuits associated with sidewalk maintenance. This was commonly referred to as the "two-inch rule." In a court case, it was noted that the law referred to sidewalks along side state and county roadways. This was particularly problematic for cities that lost the lawsuit. HB 4589 was introduced by Rep. Pat Somerville (R-Port Huron Chtr. Twp.) to correct the gap in the law. The legislation extends immunity for a sidewalk next to any state or local controlled road. The legislation was recently reported by the Senate Judiciary Committee and now awaits action by the full Senate.

REP. MARK OUIMET NAMED MTA LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR

At the Thursday night Networking Banquet during the MTA Educational Conference, state Rep. Mark Ouimet (R-Scio Twp.) was presented with the MTA Legislator of the Year Award. Rep. Ouimet is the chair of the House Local, Intergovernmental and Regional Affairs Committee. As noted at the banquet, this is the first time MTA has honored a legislator in their first year in office. Rep. Ouimet moderated some of the most controversial meetings over the course of the year, including his very first assignment, emergency managers. Despite the extremely controversial nature of the subject matter, Rep. Ouimet was able to maintain a frank and open environment during the course of testimony and debate. However, that was just one of the 29 pieces of legislation that moved through his committee last year that eventually became law. In the coming year, MTA will be working with Rep. Ouimet and the rest of his committee to rewrite the township operational laws to clear out outdated and problematic language.

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