



WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

September 18, 2009

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Please route to all interested parties in your township.

LEGISLATIVE LEADERS AGREE TO HIT LOCAL GOVERNMENT HARDEST

House Speaker Andy Dillon (D-Redford Chtr. Twp.) and Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop (R-Rochester) agreed to an outline of spending on a department-by-department basis this week. One of the specific items agreed upon by both leaders were the overall cuts to revenue sharing for the coming year. The leaders agreed that they would persuade their individual chambers to cut statutory revenue sharing by 20%, beginning Oct. 1. This is a significantly deeper cut than is proposed for virtually any other program offered at the state level. This is one more giant step in the state's relentless efforts to convert money that has been designated for local operation for decades to be used to paste over the state's operational deficiencies. A 20% reduction will also be applied to PILT and Swamp Tax payments. Swamp Tax payments have remained unchanged since the Great Depression. These payments offset the cost of caring for the large expanses of land in our state; let's just hope that we have a wet summer next year so that Michigan doesn't look like California – only without the resources to fight the forest fires. Meanwhile, constitutional revenue sharing is expected to see a 5% reduction for next year based on the economy; the Legislature has no control over this constitutionally protected fund.

Township officials that receive statutory revenue sharing, PILT or Swamp Tax payments should contact their legislators immediately and ask that they reject this leadership agreement. Votes could take place as early as Tuesday. Specifically, ask why local government funding is being targeted for larger cuts than virtually any other state function. Why does the Legislature put so little regard in public safety while the citizens put it at the top of the list for the use of public tax dollars? Some legislators are talking about potentially raising revenue in the future to offset select budget cuts. However, most political observers suggest this is highly unlikely once the pressure of approving a budget has passed.

HOUSE PASSES FARM ANIMAL WELFARE LEGISLATION

The House passed legislation this week designed to deal with the issue of proper treatment of certain farm animals. HB 5127, offered by Rep. Mike Simpson (D-Liberty Twp.), originally created some major concerns from MTA. The bill as introduced contained provisions that no local ordinances could be applied to the care and treatment of a laundry list of animals. MTA pointed out that if a severe case of abused horses were discovered, the local government would be forced to simply report the issue to the state Commission of Agriculture and hope that someone might respond. Once the issues were explored in the committee, chaired by Rep. Simpson, the bills evolved into a much more direct approach on the issue at hand. As passed, the legislation simply applies to pregnant swine, veal calves and laying hens in terms of what confinement methods are appropriate. The legislation now moves to the Senate for consideration.

SENATE COMMITTEE PASSES WETLAND LEGISLATION

On Wednesday, the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee passed legislation to keep wetland jurisdiction under the DEQ rather than sending it to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. While the legislation is not perfect, MTA did support it in committee. SB 785, introduced by Sen. Patty Birkholz (R-Saugatuck Twp.), would fund the program for the next three years through state restricted funds in return for some streamlined approvals of wetland permits in certain types of situations. In addition, the legislation would require state and local governments with wetland ordinances to utilize hydric soil testing (as outlined in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wetland delineation manual) as a determinant in whether or not a parcel contains wetlands. The bill could see action on the Senate floor next week, as final approval needs to occur by Oct. 1 for the state to maintain its authority.

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