

2017 Michigan Townships Association policy platform



Legislative Vision

The Legislative Vision expresses long-term aspirational goals of the Association.

The Michigan Townships Association envisions a 21st-century Michigan where:

- Townships have statutory authority and state financial support sufficient to provide high-quality services and infrastructure consistent with community needs and expectations, and to enable full compliance with ever-expanding state-imposed mandates without cutting local spending priorities.
- Elections enjoy a high level of voter participation.
- Townships and other governmental entities enjoy a level of trust and mutual respect essential for collaboration to solve Michigan's challenges.
- Natural resources are developed from townships in a manner consistent with township regulations that protect public safety and property values.
- There is clarity of roles and responsibilities among township officials essential for efficient and effective services to the public.
- Townships have the authority and resources to ensure good roads and bridges now and for future generations.

Assessment and Taxation

As the primary means to finance township government, the Michigan Townships Association supports the principles of property tax fairness, equity, and efficient assessment and collection by township officials to ensure accountability, public trust, and locally accessible information and assistance. Judicial decisions regarding valuation should be based on sound assessing principles. Affected local governments should be reimbursed by the state for property tax revenues lost due to statutory exemptions and state government should provide local governments with education and technical support to develop and defend their assessment rolls.

As lawmakers and regulators enact changes to current tax laws and local government requirements, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

1. Preventing "dark store theory" assessment appeal decisions by amending state law to require property values be based on highest and best use, and recognition that such highest and best use may result in a value based upon the continuation of an existing use of the property, and prohibit the consideration of private deed restrictions or covenants imposed to reduce the value of the property or exclude competitors of the grantor from the market
2. Codify the 2006 Michigan Supreme Court *Wexford Medical Group v. City of Cadillac* decision for the purpose of narrowing eligibility for nonprofit charitable institutions property tax exemptions

3. Allow charter townships, with voter approval, to increase their millage rate to offset taxable value losses due to constitutional rollbacks
4. Recodify Michigan township statutes to include clarification that assessors are accountable to the township board when the supervisor is not certified to perform assessing functions
5. Increase the specific tax on mobile homes located in licensed parks
6. Exempting minimal personal property tax obligations resulting from minor property improvements on mobile home lots, such as small decks, stairs and porches

Elections

The Michigan Townships Association supports democratic principles of fair, transparent and efficient elections administered by township officials that encourage high voter participation and procedures appropriate to varying community resources and population densities.

As lawmakers and regulators enact changes to current election laws, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

1. Preserve authority of townships to convey information on ballot proposals to their residents
2. State funding for replacement of election equipment
3. Allow candidates seeking township office to pay a filing fee in lieu of filing petition signatures

Environment and Land Use

The Michigan Townships Association supports in principle state laws supporting the role of township governments to efficiently and effectively plan for land uses and adopt zoning ordinances to protect the public health, safety and general welfare. State and federal regulations should not impede local government growth and development policies and objectives. Further, preemption of local land use authority should be limited to issues of great statewide impact and any resulting adverse local impacts should be mitigated by the state or federal government.

As lawmakers and regulatory agencies enact changes to laws addressing township land use and environment, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

1. Require local approval for any DNR purchase of land in townships where a significant amount of land is commercial forestland or is owned by the State of Michigan

2. Require DNR to notify townships and provide opportunity to discuss a proposed state land acquisition
3. Statewide septic system maintenance standards to reduce septic system failures that create serious public health threats and expose townships to being required to build expensive public sewer systems

Intergovernmental Relations

The Michigan Townships Association supports in principle intergovernmental collaboration to restore economic prosperity, efficiently and effectively deliver programs and services, and solve other challenges. State laws should allow creativity, flexibility and incentivize fair and equitable cost-sharing, benefits and governance in inter-local agreements. State laws authorizing economic development tools and other powers should be based on community characteristics relative to policy objectives, rather than city or township legal status. State taxation and spending policies should mitigate adverse revenue sharing impacts on townships.

As lawmakers and regulatory agencies consider altering the fiscal relationship of the state to local governments as well as powers and authorities of local governments, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

1. Full funding to townships for payments-in-lieu-of-taxes, commercial forest program and the swamp tax program
2. Expand the number of townships eligible for statutory revenue sharing and grants
3. Allow a municipality to create or continue the use of a tax increment financing (TIF) authority to capture tax revenue attributable to increases in property value within an area or district and allow the use of that money for identified TIF purposes
4. A local government consolidation process that continues to require voter approval of any consolidation

Township Operations

The Michigan Townships Association supports the principle of state and federal governments granting to Michigan townships broad discretion and autonomy to govern the funding and delivery of programs and services. MTA also supports state reimbursement to townships for increased costs resulting from new mandated services and state regulations. The Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

1. Modernizing state laws to clarify the governance role of township boards to establish broad policy direction for townships

2. Exempt from state-imposed retiree health care mandates, all townships demonstrating the ability to fund their OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefit) obligations, while adequately funding their public services, and allowing townships with high OPEB liabilities to develop appropriate strategies to achieve fiscal solvency
3. Appropriate, cost-effective training requirements for township planning commissioners, zoning board of appeal members and board of review members to reduce costly lawsuits and improve township decision-making by key appointed boards
4. State funding to townships providing public safety protection to state-owned, tax-exempt properties

Transportation and Infrastructure

The Michigan Townships Association concludes that Michigan's road system will continue to require more funding than is currently anticipated in law to ensure that county primary and local roads are safe and convenient for travel. As townships are major financial contributors to road maintenance and construction costs, the Michigan Townships Association supports the principle that township officials should be included in transportation policy discussions at all government levels. Michigan has also under-invested in other infrastructure necessary to remain economically competitive and protect the health, safety and general welfare of residents. The Michigan Townships Association supports the principle that the State of Michigan must play a major role in planning, funding and delivering infrastructure needed by every community to be economically viable and free of environmental threats and risks.

As lawmakers and regulators address pressures to better address Michigan's infrastructure, the Michigan Townships Association supports the following objectives:

1. Supports adequate and continuous funding for infrastructure replacement and improvement, as identified in the Governor's 21st Century Infrastructure Commission Report including transportation, water, sewer and communications
2. Allow townships with voter approval to create special assessment districts for communications infrastructure, including broadband and high-speed Internet
3. Require road agencies to comply with a township's Complete Streets Policy resolution