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WHAT IS GHT?

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Although over 15,000 people live in Grand Haven Charter Township (GHT), most residents know little about townships in general or GHT in particular.

Townships are an important and integral form of local government. (*Cities and villages make up the other forms of local units.*) In fact, almost half of all Michigan's 10 million residents live in one of Michigan's 1,242 townships. (*In comparison, there are 533 cities or villages.*)

There are two types of townships, general law or charter. Most are general law townships (1,111). However, GHT is one of the 131 charter townships that have additional authority and responsibility under state law.

Unlike home rule cities or villages that draft their charters locally, the charter for GHT is contained within state law and is fairly detailed and comprehensive. This written instrument that defines GHT's authority and responsibilities is uniform for all charter townships and cannot be altered.

Townships normally cover an area of 36 square miles in the form of a six mile by six mile square. However, because of Lake Michigan to the west and the city of Grand Haven to the north, GHT has a total area of 28.6 square miles. The boundaries of GHT can roughly be described as Lake Michigan to the west, Fillmore Street to the south, 144th Avenue to the east and the city of Grand Haven to the north.

Most townships are small with populations as low as 10 residents. However, some of the largest communities in the state are townships with populations exceeding 95,000. (*In fact, the largest local unit in Ottawa County is Georgetown Township, which has a population exceeding 45,000.*)

Less than 60 of Michigan's townships have a population above 15,000, and about half of these townships have a professional manager like GHT. All other townships are governed by either a five or seven member elected township board.

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PRECINCTS 3 & 5 MOVED

Precincts 3 and 5 have moved from the Ottawa County Road Commission facilities.

These precincts are now located at the Lakeshore Baptist Church located near the intersection of Church Hills Drive and Lakeshore Drive. Church Hills Drive is located approximately 1/2 mile south of Rosy Mound Drive.

Voters in these precincts should have received a new voter register card in September of 2003. If you have questions, please call 842-5988



GHT is governed by a seven member elected Board, that includes a Supervisor, a Treasurer, a Clerk, and four Trustees. Each are elected to four-year terms that correspond with the presidential elections. All of the positions are part-time.

The Supervisor is frequently the first public official contacted about any township business or complaint and is often perceived as the township’s spokesperson. This position is similar to a mayor in a home rule city and directs all policy decisions of the Board and mediates discussion and friction in a rational and logical manner that serves the broad interests of the township residents.

The Treasurer is required under state law to receive, take charge and invest all funds belonging to the township. Moreover, all property taxes from county government, to K-12 education, to the district library are collected by GHT before being disbursed to the appropriate unit. To assist the treasurer, GHT has a finance director to oversee the day-to-day collection and investment duties.

The statutory duties of the clerk are numerous, technical and legally essential for the proper operation of the township. In brief, the clerk must maintain all financial records and official documents. The clerk is responsible for the operation of all elections whether it is for the national presidential election or a millage request for the North Ottawa Council on Aging. Similar to the treasurer, full-time staff assist the clerk in meeting the day-to-day statutory obligations of this job.

The four elected Trustees make up the remainder of the township board and have an equal vote in all legislative and budget decisions in the township. Like the name

implies, a Trustee is an individual elected to a position of public trust with fiduciary responsibilities to oversee the affairs of the township. Trustees are similar to the council members in a home rule city.

In terms of municipal infrastructure, GHT contains over 103 miles of roads including 83 miles of paved roads and 20 miles of gravel roads.

The main difference between a city and a township is that a township does not have

direct control over its streets and roads. Rather, the township depends on the county road commission to maintain the streets. Because the gas and weight taxes forwarded from the state of Michigan to the Ottawa County Road Commission (OCRC) are insufficient to cover the maintenance costs, GHT directly contributes monies to the OCRC to resurface subdivision streets, control dust on gravel roads, and fund certain paving projects throughout the township. This can range from \$100,000 to \$400,000 each year.

There are also about 22 miles of private streets in GHT. However, these roadways are maintained by the adjacent property owners.

GHT provides over 20 miles of paved bike paths that follow many of the major streets in the township. These are meant to be utilized for both recreation and pedestrian purposes.

GHT owns over 85 miles of water main, two 500,000 gallon storage tanks, and five major connection points to the North Ottawa Water System water plant and the Grand Rapids water plant. During 2003, GHT distributed over 531 million gallons of drinking water.

To collect waste water the township maintains over 17 miles of sanitary sewer mains with 10 pump stations that help transport the sewage to the treatment plant located in the city of Grand Haven. The sanitary sewer system is relatively new. Most of the sewer mains were installed within the past decade. Homes not located next to a sanitary sewer line must rely upon septic tanks and drain fields.

Another essential service provided by the Township is emergency response. The Fire/Rescue department responds to about 750 calls for service each year. The department consists of 7 full-time and 22 part-time employees that staff the Fire/Rescue station 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

Law enforcement services are provided by the Ottawa County Sheriff’s Department. However, since the county only has limited funds and the base level of service has not increased over the past decade, GHT contracts with the Sheriff for three additional Community Oriented Police Service (COPS) officers. One of these sheriff deputies is directed toward ensuring the safety of students at the high school.

Recreation is also a major capital component of the township. GHT maintains 5 parks and 1 boat launch totaling 411 acres. Ottawa County also maintains two additional parks and one preserve within GHT that contain an additional 597 acres of public land.

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Community Development is one of the most visible services that GHT provides. This includes planning for future growth, implementing zoning regulations to ensure community standards are maintained, inspections of the \$40+ million in new construction that occurs annually, ordinance enforcement with a particular emphasis on the junk and rubbish ordinance, and maintenance of the township’s Geographic Information System (GIS), which inventories all property records, infrastructure, and related information.

Property taxes are a major revenue stream for most municipal units including K-12 education. However, for the system to work properly, all of the real estate within the township must be properly valued through a detailed procedure defined by state law. This assessing role is sustained by GHT staff.

As certain as the taxes, even in death GHT provides an essential service through the operation of two cemeteries. The Historic Cemetery is located south of Lincoln Street on 168th Avenue and the Lakeshore Cemetery is found at the intersection of Lakeshore Drive and Lincoln Street.

For 2004, GHT adopted a budget of about \$7.4 million. Approximately \$1.8 million of the revenues is from property taxes, another \$1.0 million is in the form of state revenue sharing, and about \$0.6 million came from

cash reserves for a storm water and paving project.

The remaining \$4.0 million in revenues comes in the form of various fees for service including fees for water and sewer service, building permits, park rentals, cemetery lot sales and other services.

To provide the aforementioned services as well as other related activities, GHT employs 51 permanent staff. Additional labor is provided seasonally with summer help or through contracts with various engineering, attorneys, or planning consultants.

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Local government is fairly “dull”, especially if it is well-managed and avoids silly controversy. Hopefully, this 1,300 word article provides a foundation of information that will allow you to better understand the framework of your local government and how Grand Haven Charter Township serves you.

Comparison Table With Area Communities

	Population (+ / -)	Area (square miles)	2003 Taxable Value	2003 Tax Rate (total millage)	Employees	Professional Manager
Grand Haven Charter Township	15,049	28.6 sq. mi.	\$503.1 million	3.8	51	Yes
Grand Haven City	11,168	5.8 sq. mi.	\$420.8 million	11.9	168	Yes
Spring Lake Village	2,514	1.1 sq. mi.	\$82.6 million	13.2	24	Yes
Ferrysburg City	3,040	3.0 sq. mi.	\$118.8 million	11.0	29	Yes
Spring Lake Township (excludes village)	10,626	18.6 sq. mi.	\$431.1 million	1.0	46	No
Robinson Township	5,588	36 sq. mi.	\$150.7 million	2.6	40	No

HOW GHT COOPERATES WITH OUR NEIGHBORS

Decreasing revenues, political boundaries that don't correspond with service areas, and more demands for service from local residents, require GHT and other local units to cooperate in order to be both effective and efficient. Some examples of cooperation include:

- The North Ottawa Water System (NOWS) refers to the water plant that produces water for the city of Grand Haven, Ferrysburg, the village of Spring Lake, Spring Lake Township, and portions of GHT and Robinson Township. *(GHT sends about \$460,000 to NOWS each year. Much of the plant's 2006 expansion will be funded by GHT.)*
- The Grand Haven/Spring Lake Sewer Authority is the sewage treatment plant that is operated on behalf of all of the NOWS members. *(GHT pays the Sewer Authority about \$120,000 annually.)*
- The North Ottawa Recreation Program (NORP) is a cooperative arrangement with the Grand Haven area schools and local governments. NORP provides year-round recreational programming. *(GHT residents are the largest user of NORP and*

the township contributes about \$45,000 annually to support this program.)

- The Loutit District Library Authority was created by agreement between the school district, the cities of Grand Haven and Ferrysburg, Robinson Township and GHT. Each community appoints members to the governing board that operates this important local service. *(GHT residents are the largest single user of library services.)*
- Mutual Fire/Rescue Response Agreements allow nearby local fire departments to automatically respond to emergencies outside of their local boundaries. For example, GHT will automatically respond to any fire emergency in the city's industrial park since our fire apparatus can respond more rapidly.
- The Ottawa County Hazardous Material and Response Team was established in 2003 to provide a coordinated response to accidental or intentional chemical spills. It is funded 50% from the county with the remaining monies coming from the 24 local municipal units in Ottawa county.

Numerous other examples of cooperation ranging from dust control on gravel roads to gypsy moth spraying are completed yearly.

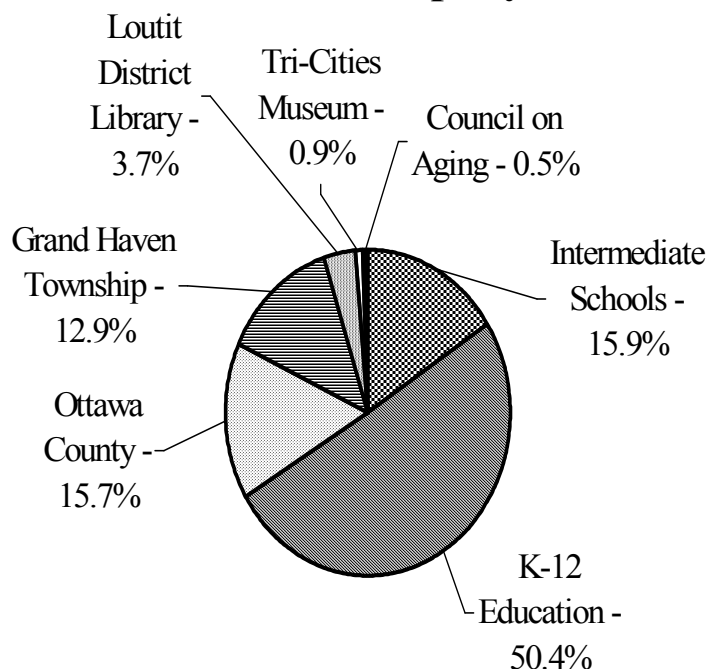
WHERE DO MY TAXES GO?

During 2003, Grand Haven Charter Township collected over \$13,370,000 in property taxes. However, only a small percentage of that total stays with the township, less than 13 cents from every dollar collected.

Both your summer and winter property tax checks are made payable to the Grand Haven Charter Township Treasurer. Under state law, all property taxes levied in the township are collected by the township and disbursed to the various taxing units, such as the Grand Haven Area School District or Ottawa County.

A breakdown of how the money is distributed by percentage is seen on the adjacent pie chart.

Division of Property Taxes



DIRECT PAYMENTS

Grand Haven Charter Township (GHT) is offering a new service for residents, the direct payment of your water bills and property taxes.

Your tax bill and/or your water bill can be withdrawn automatically from your checking or savings account. This eliminates any worry about late payments or the hassle of mailing or dropping off these payments.

If any resident wants to pay either their tax or their water/sewer bill with a direct debit of their checking or savings account, they have to complete the following three steps:

1. Complete and sign an agreement with GHT authorizing the direct debit of your checking or savings account for property taxes and/or your water bills. *(There is a separate form for the water/sewer bills and the property tax statements.)*
2. Provide the Township with a voided check or a



deposit ticket from the designated checking or savings account.

3. Sit back, relax and watch as your Township bills are paid automatically.

Township residents that participate will continue to receive their water bill and/or property tax statement showing the amount due and the due date.

However, the payment will be automatically withdrawn on the proper due date without any additional work. *(The property tax agreement will allow for the winter tax bill to be paid prior to December 31st if a resident desires. Many residents pay their winter tax bill before the due date for income tax purposes.)*

FAST FACTS – DURING 2003

- The Township's population reached 15,049.
- The State Equalized Value rose to \$684 million.
- The number of Fire/Rescue emergency runs reached 748.
- The gallons of water distributed increased to 531 million. *(37 million gallons were from the Grand Rapids Water Plant.)* 2.61 miles of new water main and 0.5 miles of new sewer mains were added.
- The total value of new building permits was \$43.3 million.
- 209 new single family residential units were added.
- 1.5 miles of roadway were paved; and, 1.3 miles of gravel roadway were re-graveled.

Currently, over 45% of all households in the United States use direct payment for at least one recurring bill. Over 84% of consumers who use automatic payments are satisfied.

The Township also considers the direct deposit of bills to be beneficial since it reduces the amount of staff time necessary to complete these financial transactions, reduces the likelihood of human error, and eliminates the difficulties that occur when a resident forgets to pay their bill by the date due.

Besides saving consumers money, direct payments help government to run more efficiently. Research has shown that GHT will save an average of 11 cents per payment (versus checks) in reduced processing costs.

If you would like a copy of the necessary agreements you may:

- Stop at the township offices and pick-up the forms.
- Call the township at 842-5988 during normal business hours and request that the agreement forms be mailed to you.
- Email gschreiber@ght.org and request the agreement forms be sent to you electronically.

If you have questions, call Gary Schreiber at 842-5988.

SPRING CLEAN-UP

Saturday, May 8th – 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.

A \$15 fee will be charged for appliances. Tires are limited to two per household. No hazardous waste, chemicals, liquids, or sealed paint cans will be accepted.

YARD WASTE COLLECTION

Leaf dumpsters will be located at the township parking lot from April 19th through May 2nd.

No dumping of wood, limbs or brush is allowed.

PROTECTING OUR GREATEST RESOURCE

Over the last three years, Grand Haven Charter Township (GHT) has been participating in a program to protect Michigan's greatest resource, our water. GHT wants to keep providing the best water quality for our residents, tourists, and wildlife.

Because Grand Haven Charter Township was classified during the 2000 census as an urbanized area, new storm water regulations have been adopted and implemented. This program is part of a wider regional, state, and national effort to prevent pollution from entering our

waterways through existing and new storm water drains.

Last year, GHT adopted a strict new storm water ordinance that helps to ensure that the storm water and run-off from new development doesn't damage local streams, rivers or bayous.

Right now, interns are examining about 50 storm water outfalls searching for illicit discharges and analyzing the storm water to ensure it meets federal standards for clean water. GHT employees are also being trained to do their jobs in environmentally friendly ways.

A public education program will be beginning this year. This program will provide opportunities for all of us to help preserve our water resources for wildlife and water sports.

Many activities are being planned, so keep an eye out for more news about preserving Michigan's greatest resource, water.

