



# GRAND HAVEN CHARTER TOWNSHIP

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## COST OF OPERATIONS

### Cities vs. Townships

Whenever comparisons are made between cities and townships, issues of tax rates and levels of service quickly arise. Townships pride themselves on their efficiency in government with tax rates that are only a small fraction of city rates.

Cities pride themselves on high levels of service and provide benefits to their residents that may not be offered in townships.

In Michigan, the number of people who reside in cities is roughly equal to the number of people who live in townships. Yet, the public monies that are spent to service these residents vary widely. According to the most recent data from the Census Bureau, cities in Michigan spent nearly \$12 billion on municipal operations in the 2001-02 fiscal year. During the same time period, township's spent \$1.7 billion, which is about one-eighth the amount of cities.

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Put another way, cities expend more than \$2,500 per resident per year, while townships spend less than \$400 per resident per year. (*GHT, which has a population larger than most cities and is growing rapidly, spent \$560 per resident in 2002.*)

This disparity in spending is further illustrated with the following examples:

- Michigan cities spent as much on public safety as townships did on overall operations.
- Cities spent twice as much as townships on fire protection.
- Cities spent \$500 million on parks and recreation programs, more than townships and counties combined.
- In combination, counties and townships spent more on roads than cities — \$1.1 billion compared to \$865 million. But, these monies were used to maintain 90,000 miles of roads, compared to 21,000 miles in cities.

Some argue that counties provide service to township residents that cities also give to their residents. However, even taking this issue into consideration, only \$2 billion of the county expenditures went to services that primarily benefit township residents (*e.g., roads, sheriff patrols, libraries, parks and recreation, etc.*).

Therefore, even with this additional \$2 billion from counties added, cities expend nearly \$12 billion while townships expend only \$3.7 billion.

Why is this important to understand? Because as GHT continues to grow, residents often request additional services — improved road maintenance, expanded parks and recreation programs, more police coverage, additional miles of new bike paths, bus service, etc.

The Township Board will continue to try to improve the services provided while maintaining a low tax rate.

But, for many of the services requested, the residents will have to make a fundamental choice. Do we want to pride ourselves on being a low cost government or a high service level government? Or, where do we want to fall between these two alternatives?

# NEWSLETTER

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

**“If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.”**

You probably recognize this famous line from Lewis Carroll's book “Alice's Adventure in Wonderland”. This simple truth is what the Township is trying to avoid through a strategic planning process.

Headed by Trustee Laurie Larsen, the Township recently began to work on an updated strategic plan. Although strategic planning is a never-ending process, every few years the Township “steps back” and takes time to review the landscape of change.

Every community is influenced by many factors: the economy, finances, technology, development pressures, environmental concerns, legal and regulatory matters, and many more. A strategic plan is meant to consider how each of these factors are changing and to take advantage of any opportunities and prepare to minimize the negative impacts.

Strategic planning in the public sector can be more complicated than in the private sector since government has broad responsibilities ranging from public safety, to recreation, to delivery of water, to economic development. And, a change in one area often portends changes in others.

If growth is artificially suppressed, it may impact educational funding for the local schools. If growth is allowed without controls, it may hurt the environment or increase traffic congestion. If police and fire services are minimized, it may lower housing values. If recreational issues are ignored, it may send high-value growth to other communities.

However, no government can do everything. There are limits in terms of finances, staff and time. Therefore, strategic plans also decide where the Township's priorities will be focused.

But, this process shouldn't be done by only a few. A good strategic plan represents the collective thinking of

a group of insightful participants about the future.

Since it is difficult to bring together a large group of individuals, one of the most important aspects of the Township's strategic planning process will be a questionnaire that will seek input on a number of areas. This questionnaire measures “value” statements about issues within the following areas:

- Community Development
- Economic Development
- Utilities (Water and Sewer)
- Transportation
- Public Safety
- Parks and Recreation
- Financial
- Environmental
- Governance

The Township is hoping that a minimum of 250 households will take the time to complete this survey. These surveys will serve as a foundation for determining the core values of the community.

The Township is not always aware of the collective values of the community. But, the plan will only be effective if it reflects the concerns, values and priorities of the citizens.



Ultimately, the collective values of the residents and elected Board members will effect the manner in which programs are defined and resources allocated.

There are two ways to complete the survey. The easiest is to simply go to the Township's web site and complete the survey ([www.ght.org/strategic\\_survey](http://www.ght.org/strategic_survey)).

However, if you do not have Internet access, you may also call the Township's receptionist at 842-5988 and request that a copy of the survey be mailed to your home with a return envelope.

**Help us plan for the Township's future!**

## MASTER PLANNING

The Michigan Township Planning Act states that *“at least every 5 years after adoption of the plan, the planning commission shall review the plan and determine whether to commence the procedure to amend the plan or adopt a new plan”*.

The last time the township updated its Master Plan was in 1996, and before that it was 1990. In 2007, the Township finds itself overdue for a re-evaluation of development policies in our community.

Although strategic planning often precedes other planning documents, the Township Board felt that both the Strategic Plan and the Master Plan were so important that they should be developed simultaneously and completed on parallel tracks.

The Master Plan is a document used primarily by the Planning Commission to guide them when making important land use and development decisions, such as the rezoning of property. The Master Plan recommends a strategy for the management of growth and represents a statement by citizens and community stakeholders of what is in the best interest of Grand Haven Township.

The Township Planning Act also mandates that *“the township planning commission shall make and approve a basic plan as a guide for the development of unincorporated areas of the township”*.

The plan must include, at a minimum, the following subjects:

- A land use plan and program consisting of land use classifications.
- The general location, character, and extent of streets, railroads, bicycle paths, bridges, waterways, water and sewer systems, etc.
- Recommendations as to the general character, extent, and layout for the development and redevelopment of lands in the community.
- Recommendations for implementing any of its proposals.

The Strategic Plan and the Master Plan are both important planning documents; but they vary in purpose and scope.

For example, the Strategic Plan will incorporate a wide range of issues, examining all of the changes and factors that are impacting the Township while trying to formulate specific plans of action. In contrast, the

Master Plan is focused on ensuring that the zoning classifications and infrastructure are appropriate for the growth that is occurring.

Another difference is that the Master Plan is required by law, while the Strategic Plan is not.

If you are interested in learning more about the Master Plan process, please contact Patrick Waterman at [pwatman@ght.org](mailto:pwatman@ght.org) or call 842-5988 ext. 426.

## RECREATION PLAN

Over the past fifteen years, Grand Haven Township has received over \$1,222,500 in grants from the State of Michigan in order to develop or improve many of the Township parks. However, pursuant to State law, in order to qualify for these grants, the Township needs to complete a detailed “Parks and Recreation Plan” every five years.

In January, the Township Board approved a plan that had been developed by the Township’s Parks and Recreation Committee over the previous twelve months.

*(Continued on page 4)*



### NEW TRAFFIC OFFICER

Deputy Mike Veldkamp has transferred from the High School Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) officer to the Township’s new traffic enforcement vehicle.

Deputy Sara Adams, a seven-year veteran of the department, was selected to replace Deputy Veldkamp and began as the high school’s COPS deputy on March 5th.