

STATE OF THE TOWNSHIP, 2010

By

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Saginaw Charter Township

Saginaw Township – Proud of Who We Are – Proud of Who We are Becoming –
Building a Better Township

We are strong, despite difficult times!

Good afternoon. One of my many duties as your Supervisor is to provide you with an annual “State of the Township” report, and this afternoon it is my honor and privilege to do so. To all elected officials, community leaders, business owners and associates; to all who came today out of a sense of identity with Saginaw Township, I thank you for being here. I especially want to acknowledge my fellow Township Board members and our outstanding staff for being here as well, and, as always, give a special thank you to my wife Judi and my family. Being Supervisor entails long hours and much responsibility, and I am so very fortunate to have the support of the people I love most.

At its best all government is local, and Saginaw Township has been your local government since April 4, 1831, nearly 179 years, making us the oldest community in Saginaw County. Back then, it was hard work, an optimistic outlook toward the future, and perseverance that made settling a new community possible. Today, 179 years later, in these trying times, those same principles still apply.

Saginaw Township government operates much the way a successful family functions. We live within our means, make plans for the future, and adjust as we move forward. We have made tough decisions, and we have worked hard to be good stewards of our resources, the resources you have given us.

The State of our Township is strong, but we are not immune to the challenges of the financial and economic crisis gripping our nation. This is especially true in Michigan where we are experiencing a horrible economic downturn. Day after day the news shows and the newspapers report the discouraging news of the day. These tough times are not only experienced by businesses and individuals, but by government as well, and Saginaw Township is no exception. Our budget horizon is challenging, with projected declines in property tax revenues, state revenue sharing, and fees.

As your elected officials, we have the responsibility, in good times and in bad, to insure that every dollar we spend is spent wisely and responsibly. Today, I commit to you that we will continue to do just that. As Supervisor, I am working with my fellow Board members, our managers, and department heads to make adjustments in staffing, work assignments, and purchases with the goal of reducing our operating costs while maintaining the highest level of service possible to our residents. Making these changes is no simple task, since doing more with less is not easy. You know this because as business owners, managers, and residents you have experienced it first hand. Your Saginaw Township government understands that we must work together to creatively meet these challenges. We must, and we will, continue to make informed, tough decisions while continuing to adapt to these difficult times.

How does shrinking revenue affect our commitment to quality service and improvement? For Saginaw Township, it means doing more with tight budgets while establishing clear and identifiable budget priorities. It means looking within our Township government to deliver services more efficiently and to be faithful stewards of your tax money, and I promise you that your Township Board and its staff never forget that it is your money. Last, but certainly not least, it means reforming government to bring it in line with 21st century realities and technology. I must also emphasize that this speech is by no means the start of our efforts to achieve these goals for our Township; rather, it is an opportunity for me to review what we have been doing for years.

During the past five years, we have laid a great foundation. As the economy began to fail we knew that we could not just hope for things to get better. We focused on our core values and developed a strategic plan to move our community forward. Our first priority was to insure that we remain the safe community we have always been. To that end, we have put a great deal of time and energy into supporting our police and fire departments.

Our crusade against crime continues daily under the leadership of Chief Don Pussehl. His team of 47 full-time officers has the experience, the expertise, and the commitment to provide for a safe community. Perhaps one or two of you have heard me say that public safety is our number one priority. I said it the first day I became Supervisor, and it will be the last thing I say when I leave office. When choosing a place to live and raise a family, is there a higher consideration than, "Will I feel safe?" Your Township Board is committed to providing our law enforcement professionals the tools they need to get the job done.

One of the primary functions of the Police Department is crime prevention. Each year the department's District Resource Officers host several crime prevention seminars for residents and businesses. Designed to remedy specific crime issues surfacing in our community, these seminars help address the criminal element before it takes a foothold. These officers also head up our shoplifting task force which focuses on preventing retail fraud. During this year's Shoplifting Blitz, 45 shoplifters were arrested. This certainly sends a clear message to criminals – do not commit crime in Saginaw Township.

This year, I would like to specifically recognize the Township's Crime Prevention Unit. This unit is recognized throughout the state as a leader when it comes to demonstrating effective crime prevention. These dedicated officers received an *Outstanding Unit Citation* from the Crime Prevention Association of Michigan for their work during 2009 in providing training to other departments across the state. Officer Chris Fredenburg, Officer Brian Kanicki, and Officer Henry Reyna – Congratulations!

Our Saginaw Township Fire Department is a strong, combination department led by Chief Jim Peterson. It is staffed by six full-time personnel that take care of the day to day business operations, conduct fire prevention and inspection activities, and provide educational programs in our schools and the business community. Our on-call fire fighters, 90 of them, staff three fire stations in the Township and respond to help you in times of emergency. We have a strong, well trained firefighting force that provides high-level fire protection, and as a result we can feel safe and secure in our homes and businesses. While proudly serving our community, our paid on-call firefighters save the Township millions of dollars each year.

Our Department of Public Services, under the direction of Sonny Grunwell, is often the unsung hero of our Township operations. For the most part, you probably do not have the opportunity to

interact with these employees. They are the ones who ensure your fire hydrants function properly; they are the ones who make sure water main breaks are fixed quickly and effectively. They maintain our sewer system, keep our parks spotless, and basically are the backbone of our entire operation. On behalf of the Township Board, I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them for their hard work and continued commitment to the Township and to each of you.

I truly believe that our employees are the most valuable asset we have in these tough economic times. They understand our limited resources and actively look for ways to cooperate, reduce costs, and above all continue to focus on what government should be doing, providing great and responsive service.

While we have built a solid foundation for our community the past five years, we have also felt the impact of the economic downturn of the past two years. As our revenue sources have declined, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain services while striving to balance our budgets. To keep Saginaw Township moving forward, we recognized that we needed to change and adapt. William Arthur Ward said, "The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails." Given all that we faced, the Township realized it was time to adjust its sails.

With that in mind, we adopted a new economic development policy that allows us to provide incentives to attract new businesses and help existing businesses to expand. In fact, during 2009, Saginaw Charter Township was home to the single largest job creation in the county, 650 jobs, thanks to the industrious and committed spirit of Morley Companies.

There is no question that the Great Lakes Bay Region's economy will eventually recover. The question is, when will it happen and what will the new economy look like? As I said last year, we can no longer rely on our automotive manufacturing base or retail and service sectors to carry us through the next few decades. We must continue diversifying our economy by leveraging the assets that are available in our region. One of the most important assets that we have in our region is a highly skilled work force with the experience and technical expertise that can be used to expand emerging fields such as alternative energy. I am encouraged every day when I speak to talented people in our community that share their ideas with me on how to get the Michigan economy moving in the right direction.

In fact, we are seeing some of this diversification taking place right now. Just a few weeks ago, our Board of Trustees approved a new facilities tax exemption for Midwestern Reprocessing Center, LLC. Midwestern reprocesses medical equipment like blood pressure cuffs and other similar materials that were normally just thrown away. They collect these materials, disassemble them, clean and sterilize them, and repackage them for sale to hospitals. This medical-based industry will bring approximately 20 new full-time jobs to Saginaw Township paying \$35,000 plus benefits. They plan to be fully operational by April of this year.

Speaking of creating jobs, let's talk about Saginaw Future. Much of our success in helping to attract new jobs is do to the efforts of JoAnn Crary and her staff. Their expertise and familiarity with the solar and medical industries is one of our biggest advantages. Rest assured that Saginaw Township is establishing appropriate policies and working with Saginaw Future to attract new development and bring new jobs to our community.

It is important for all of us to remember that the 650 jobs created in Saginaw Township last year benefit the county and the entire region. The same holds true for the proposed Suniva facility in Thomas Township and the proposed Global Watt plant in the City of Saginaw. Without a doubt, a regional approach to job creation is what works.

The regional approach can extend beyond job creation, and last year we saw first hand what our region can do when it rallied around Dick Garber and Garber Buick. Now, I can tell you for a fact, that not everyone who wrote letters of support to keep the dealership operating had purchased a Buick from Dick or had ever driven a Buick. However, there are times when the right thing to do is just the right thing to do.

So today, I truly believe that one of the right things to do is make sure there is a place for the Saginaw Spirit to continue to call home. I think it is important that there is a place I can take my grandchildren, to attend the Shrine Circus or Wizard of Oz, and a place where Ron can take his lovely wife to see a Broadway musical. It is this underlying belief that WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER that makes it easy for me to support the renewal of the Dow Event Center millage.

What makes this millage different from the last one is the fact that it will be reduced from .45 mill - cut in half - to .225 mill for the next 10 years. The average State Equalized Value for a home in Saginaw Township is \$70,500. This means that the average homeowner in our community will pay approximately \$16 per year to support the Event Center. I sincerely hope that after you carefully consider the issue, that you will join me in supporting this wonderful and valuable resource.

So what does the next five years hold for us? It is impossible to tell what the economy will do in the next six months, let alone the next five years. What we do know is this - if all we do is hunker down and wait for this storm to pass, we will not be ready when things turn around. So, instead of waiting, we have positioned ourselves in a manner that will foster a favorable business climate with established policies and guidelines that will create jobs and keep Saginaw Township a great place to live. Obviously, a robust economy would allow us to do more, but we are going to move forward systematically and resourcefully. Instead of looking to consultants and others, we will perform work in house whenever possible with the goal of reducing costs.

We have set a number of goals for 2010:

1. We will continue to focus on what we think Saginaw Township, the county, and the Great Lakes Bay Region needs most right now - jobs.
2. We will partner with our businesses along State Street to create a Corridor Improvement District. This district will allow the Township and business community to help make State Street the destination for shopping, entertainment, and dining that we know it can be.
3. We will continue to examine our budgets and scrutinize every dollar we spend to be certain that we continue to operate in the most fiscally responsible manner while insuring that we maintain the services that mean the most to our residents and business community.

4. We will reach out to other governmental entities to find ways to share resources, reduce costs, and allow us to use your tax dollars more cost effectively. We have had ongoing discussions with various communities and are looking for ways to use our greatest resource, our employees, to our advantage. By this time next year we will have found ways to use cooperation to save your tax dollars.
5. We will become more energy efficient and reduce our utility costs.
6. We will continue to work with the Saginaw County Road Commission to find ways to improve the quality of our roads while at the same time reducing costs.
7. We will continue to work with the Friends of the Saginaw Valley Rail Trail, Saginaw County Parks, and the adjoining communities to develop and improve our pathway system.

So many things have changed since the Township was established almost 179 years ago. Someone, I'm sure, will post their attendance here to Facebook or maybe "tweet" about it; but there are some key elements, some absolutes, that have not changed. Your township government is just that - it is your township government, and we want what you want - a well-run, efficient government that works hard, looks forward with optimism, and perseveres. I pledge to you that we will continue to do just that.