



Crystal Lake Township Newsletter

Winter 2021-22

1651 Frankfort Hwy/ POB 2129 Frankfort, MI 49635
#231-352-9791 and www.crystallaketwp.org

GIVE US FEEDBACK

SOLICITING YOUR RESPONSES: We serve you, but we can serve you better with helpful feedback on a variety of services, including meetings, elections, general support, tax assessments and tax bills, blight, cemetery operations, roads, staffing, planning and zoning, communications with the public, fireworks and a myriad of other topics including local events that effect our residents (festivals, fundraisers and athletic events, such as Ironman.) Please put your feedback in writing and send it either by USPS or email. **If nothing else, please consider communicating on at least these two salient issues:**

- A) **Adequate Broadband Coverage:** To help locate where “empty pockets” are, Benzie County has teamed up with Merit Network to complete a study to see who has broadband and who still needs it in Benzie County. The study will begin November 15th 2021 and will be gathering information for a few months. For more information contact Mitch Deisch via mdeisch@benzieco.net or call 231-882-0035.
- B) **American Rescue Plan Revenue:** The township is receiving Federal funds from the Congress-passed American Rescue Plan Act, and intending to commit the monies to expanding border-to-border broadband in our township. However, if in the end this isn't feasible, we would like to hear from you on what this money, an expected \$100K, should be used for. What's a good second option?

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

ELECTIONS WORKERS: Help keep our elections fair, honest and accessible. Additional election inspectors are needed to work on Election Days. Training and a modest salary will be provided. Contact Sue Sullivan, Clerk, at 231-352-9791 or clerk.clt@gmail.com.

BOARD OF REVIEW MEMBER: Interested in getting involved with the property assessment procedure? There is a check-and-balance on how our property assessments are decided, called Board of Review. It is a board comprised of township citizens that receives complaints from property owners and reviews assessments. If you are interested in being an alternate on this board, making a long term commitment, attending training, and meeting 5 days a year, we will remunerate your time and effort! Contact Supervisor Ferris.

ZONING ISSUES

SHORT TERM RENTALS: You may well be aware that there is a recent explosion in short term rentals (STR's), such as VRBO, AIRBNB, HOME AWAY and others. This is becoming a big issue, not just in Michigan but all over the country, if not the world. Presently, there are no ordinances covering short term rentals in the Township. Several cities and townships in the area have enacted ordinances requiring licensing of rental properties. CLT may consider one, as well, but nothing has been proposed to date. There is proposed state legislation presently in Lansing that would prohibit smaller government entities, such as counties and townships, from regulating STR's. However, as things stand, please note the following:

- All zoning districts in the Township are residential zoning allowing only one single family

dwelling per lot.

- Parking on residential lots is limited to two (2) cars. Parking more cars may be subject to citations if parked improperly.
- Properties that are continuously rented to non-family members are considered to be a commercial business.
- A recent court ruling was decided in favor of a township who sued an owner who was renting his property continuously on the basis that the owner was operating a commercial property in a residentially zoned area.
- If a property is rented for more than two weeks in one year, the owner would lose their State of Michigan Personal Residence Exemption (PRE) from certain property taxes.

AN IMPORTANT ZONING ORDINANCE CHANGE:

What: There are changes to the Crystal Lake Watershed Overlay Ordinance (Article 24), which defines requirements and generally imposes special conditions on land use and development on top of other existing township zoning regulations, became effective on September 10, 2021.

Why: Two major dynamics prompted the Township Planning Commission to approve recommended updates to the 26-year-old ordinance:

- New research gives more insight on what factors most affect watershed health and how best to mitigate those effects. It also reinforces the importance of protecting our waterways from getting polluted in the first place since it is almost impossible to restore a lake or river once it has been degraded.
- Escalating development in the area which removes natural vegetative cover makes it critical for regulations to keep up and continue to be effective in protecting the health of our watershed and the quality of our waterways. Removal of vegetation, especially on steeply sloped land, has become one of the major factors affecting the health of the lake's watershed.

Examples: Two important changes included in the ordinance update:

- **Vegetative Buffers:** All existing vegetation located within thirty-five (35) feet of the ordinary high-water mark of Crystal Lake and any stream, wetland or ridgeline shall not be removed and shall be preserved as a vegetative buffer in accordance with Article 24, Section 24.7.A and B.
- **Tree Removal:** With the exception of diseased, dying or dead trees and up to five (5) healthy trees (up to 12 inches in diameter at 4.5' above ground) outside of defined buffer zones, property owners must submit to the Zoning Administrator a plan for tree removal in accordance with Article 24, Section 24.7.C. This includes forestry/tree harvesting/logging activities.

Key to remember:

- Site plan approval/permits are required prior to **ANY** grading, excavation, and vegetation/tree removal. Check with Zoning Administrator prior to plans, including certain landscaping projects.

Next move: Property owners, architects, building designers and contractors need to review the entire Article 24 for other important changes. The complete and updated Crystal Lake Township Watershed Overlay (zoning ordinance article 24) is available online at crystallaketwp.org.

ANOTHER ZONING ORDINANCE CHANGE:

What: Article 22 protects ANY area of the Township considered to be environmentally sensitive from ANY alteration of land, including removal of vegetation/trees. Factors include soil types, drainage, vegetation, wildlife habitats, floodplain, slope erosion, wetlands, water bodies, for example.

Impact: Check with the Zoning Administrator prior to beginning any project, including Forestry/tree harvest/logging.