

Who is Oshtemo?

Our Future: Part 2 of a Two-Part Series

In our last newsletter, we looked back at Oshtemo's roots and how we grew into the community we are today. This time, we're looking ahead. Oshtemo is growing and changing, but at its core it's still a place where people know their neighbors, enjoy the parks and trails, and care about what happens next. This second part of our series explains the vision guiding Oshtemo's future, highlights key projects already underway, and shows how you can help shape what comes next.



Our Vision for Oshtemo's Future

Oshtemo's long-term planning efforts, including the Oshtemo 2045 Comprehensive Plan, Master Streets Plan, and other guiding documents, share a common vision. We are working toward a connected community where it is easier and safer to get around, a welcoming place to live with housing options for young adults, families, and seniors, shared natural areas that reflect Oshtemo's character, and a strong local economy that supports small businesses and jobs close to home.

These goals guide everyday decisions about roads, parks, development, and public

services. The projects you see around town are direct reflections of this vision.



Key Projects Underway or on the Horizon

Across Oshtemo, you can already see this vision taking shape.

In our parks and trails, the Fruit Belt Rail Trail is expanding our trail network and creating new opportunities to walk, run, and bike. At Township Park, new inclusive playground equipment will make it easier for children of all abilities to play together. These projects help everyone get outside, stay active, and enjoy Oshtemo's natural beauty.

On the infrastructure side, new sidewalks along Ninth Street and KL Avenue are improving safety and making it easier for nearby residents to get around. Phase 2 of the sanitary sewer expansion will bring reliable sewer service to about 270 homes in the Westport neighborhood, setting up the next generation with a modern system that will serve our community for decades. Investing in these systems now helps Oshtemo grow responsibly and avoid major problems later.

In community development and housing, the Oshtemo 2045 Comprehensive Plan

encourages growth in appropriate locations while protecting important natural and countryside areas. Updated zoning supports a mix of housing types so residents can stay in Oshtemo through different life stages. Thoughtful planning today helps us remain both welcoming and distinctive in the years ahead.



You Can Help Shape What Comes Next

Oshtemo's future is a shared effort. Residents help guide every major plan and project.

You can get involved by attending public meetings, serving on a board or commission, or staying informed by reading the newsletter, stopping by Township Hall for Open Office Hours or a Community Conversations session, following us on social media, and sharing information with friends and neighbors.

Oshtemo's next chapter is not something that just happens to us, it is something we create together. By staying informed and sharing your ideas, you can help ensure that Oshtemo remains a community where people know their neighbors, enjoy the parks and trails, and feel proud of what we are building for the future.

★ America at 250: Honoring the Founding Principles ★

On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence and launched a radical idea: legitimate power comes from the consent of the governed, not from a distant ruler. That founding principle has become a public promise, one we still work to keep.

The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights are known as the Charters of Freedom. Scan the QR code to learn more about these documents and the ideas behind them at the National Archives.



Throughout July, Oshtemo will reflect on Independence Day and the powerful moment that took place 250 years ago, and we will honor the enduring spirit of America by living out our principles of service, community, and stewardship.

★ Help Us Collect 250 Pounds of Food ★

Oshtemo Township hopes to collect 250 pounds of nonperishable food for local pantries in July. Please join this community effort.

Donate unopened, unexpired items such as cereal, canned soups and stews, protein drinks, granola or cereal bars, canned meat, and microwaveable foods. Drop them off in the Township Hall lobby

throughout July. Every can and box helps us move closer to 250 pounds and supports neighbors in need.

★ Other Ways to Serve Your Community ★

Honor and support veterans, preserve local history, strengthen our community, or protect parks and public lands this summer.

- » Donate or volunteer with **West Michigan Veterans Coalition**.
- » Contact your local **Veterans of Foreign Wars** or **American Legion** post to ask about current needs.
- » Volunteer to support crisis intervention and veteran services at **Gryphon Place**.
- » Help fight hunger with **Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes**.
- » Preserve and share our local history with **Kalamazoo Valley Museum**.
- » Protect parks and public lands with **Kalamazoo County Parks**.
- » Help to maintain and improve Township parks with **Oshtemo Friends of the Parks**.

Even a few hours of your time can make a meaningful difference close to home.

At Your Service From Supervisor Cheri Bell



Planning for Today, Protecting Tomorrow

Across Michigan, Public Act 233 (PA 233) created a new framework for how energy infrastructure projects gain approval. Project applications for utility-scale solar, wind, and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) can now be submitted at the state or local level. This means a project developer may choose to pursue approval through the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) or under a local government ordinance.

While PA 233 sets statewide parameters, it also underscores the importance of strong local planning, meaningful community involvement, and careful decision-making when creating or updating ordinances. In

Oshtemo, we are approaching potential energy projects with a clear focus on the public interest and are aware of two private agreements to lease or sell property to a battery energy storage developer.

In recent months, we have seen significant resident engagement on this topic. Public comment at Planning Commission and Township Board meetings has been impassioned and thoughtful, reflecting how much people care about the future of our community. That participation matters and plays a key role in shaping decisions.

In response, we have created additional opportunities for residents to connect with us. Supervisor Open Office Hours, held from noon to 1 p.m. on the first and third Tuesdays of each month, offer an accessible way to have a one-on-one conversation with the Township Supervisor. We have also launched a dedicated PA 233 information page on the township website to enhance awareness. In addition, Community Conversations,

held on the first Thursday of each month from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., were started in response to resident feedback and give community members and Township Board representatives an opportunity for open discussion.

As we work through the implications of PA 233 and consider potential future projects, our focus remains the same. We will follow established processes, encourage community engagement, listen carefully, and take the time needed to make informed decisions. This is what public service, one of Oshtemo's core values, looks like in action.

For us, public service means making sure people have the opportunity to be heard, using clear and transparent processes, and working toward outcomes that support the long-term health and character of Oshtemo. By staying engaged and working together, we can ensure Oshtemo's future is one we can all be proud of.

Infrastructure News



map, FAQs, and a new "Construction Glossary" on the Phase 2 project page on the township website.



Sanitary Sewer Phase 2

Phase 2 of Oshtemo's USDA Neighborhood Sanitary Sewer Expansion Project is underway! Bonds closed in May, with more than 150 residents attending our two informational meetings to learn about the project and ask questions.

In the first two weeks of construction, crews installed over 1,700 feet of new sanitary mainline, 23 laterals, and 8 manholes.

Scan the QR Code to follow along with weekly updates, an interactive



Michigan's Septic Situation

Michigan is the only state without a statewide sanitary code for septic systems, even though failing and aging systems are a known source of pollution in drinking water wells and surface waters. An estimated 1.3 million septic systems operate across the state, and roughly 20% to 25% are likely failing. Local experience reflects this problem, with residents utilizing a septic system reporting tanks pumped only once in decades, not knowing where systems are located, and even thinking they were already hooked up to public sewer.

A new proposal, Senate Bill 771, has advanced from committee and will next be considered by the full Senate. This would

create a statewide database of septic systems, require periodic inspections based on age and proximity to surface water, prioritize older and undocumented systems for early evaluation, and establish a new fund to support local health departments, digitize records, and help low-income homeowners with inspection and repair costs.

These realities reinforce the importance of Oshtemo's ongoing sanitary sewer expansion in appropriate neighborhoods, and improved septic stewardship throughout the Township.

Work Zone Safety

Construction season can be inconvenient, but the work happening now will make our roads safer and more reliable. Our top priority is that drivers, pedestrians, and construction workers all get home safely. Please slow down in work zones, allow extra travel time, and remind children that construction areas are not places to play.

Most work zone crashes are caused by distracted or speeding drivers, and most of the people hurt are the drivers and passengers themselves. Scan the QR Code to learn more from the Federal Highway Administration.



Featured Events in Oshtemo

Music in the Park

Summer Concert Series

Join us at the Flesher Field Gazebo this summer for free, family-friendly concerts. Picnics are welcome, and popcorn and water will be available for purchase from Oshtemo Rotary.

Concerts take place Sundays from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. and are presented by Oshtemo Friends of the Parks. *Note the new, later start time this year.*

Dates and Performers:

- » July 19: BlueBack (Kona Ice truck)
- » August 23: Zion Lion

In case of rain, visit the Oshtemo Friends of the Parks Facebook page for the latest updates.



Guided Nature Walks

Join us for our free Guided Nature Walk series, where volunteer Naturalist Educator Lorri will lead ¾-mile strolls on gentle trails, pointing out plants and wildlife, and offering hands-on activities. Participants receive a small take-home item.

- » July 25 at 10 a.m. **Drake Farmstead: Footpath Through the Prairie** - learn about adaptations and identify prairie plants.
- » August 29 at 10 a.m. **Flesher Field: Using Your Senses Walk** - use sight, sound, smell, and touch to explore nature.
- » September 27 at 2 p.m. **Drake Farmstead: Historic Drake Walk** - tour the property and learn about early settlers' life on the farm (takes place during the Fall Family Event).

Fall Family Event

Celebrate Fall at Drake Farmstead Park

Join us Sunday, September 27, from 2 to 4 p.m. at Drake Farmstead Park (927 N. Drake Road) for a festive afternoon celebrating fall and Oshtemo's farming heritage.

Held in partnership with the Oshtemo Historical Society, this event will feature live music, family-friendly activities, and guided tours of the Historic Drake House.

Come enjoy the season and connect with your community in a beautiful historic setting.



From Treasurer Clare Buszka



A Simple Guide to Tax Seasons and Due Dates

Each year, some residents arrive at Township Hall to pay property taxes and are surprised to learn their bill is overdue or can no longer be paid here. Oshtemo has two tax seasons, and the calendar can be confusing, so here is a quick overview to help you plan ahead.

Summer taxes are billed around July 1 and can be paid at the Township from July 1 through September 14. Beginning on September 15, any unpaid summer taxes begin to accrue 1% interest per month. If summer taxes are still unpaid on February 17, a one-time 3% penalty is also added.

Winter taxes are billed around December 1 and can be paid at the Township from December

1 through March 1. Beginning February 17, any unpaid winter taxes begin to accrue 1% interest, and a one-time 3% penalty is added.

After March 1, state law changes who can collect what. The Township can no longer accept real property tax payments, which cover homes, land, and buildings. We may only collect certain personal property taxes, such as business personal property and mobile homes.

From March 2 until about April 1, there is a short "dead period." During this time, the Township is closing out its tax collection for the year, and the County Treasurer is not yet ready to receive the new delinquent real property taxes. For those few weeks, no office can accept real property tax payments.

If you are ever unsure about due dates, penalties, or where to pay, please contact the Township Treasurer's Office. We are happy to look up your account, answer questions, and help you avoid surprises.

A Message from Fire Chief Greg McComb



Summer Safety Starts at Home

Summer brings longer days, outdoor projects, cookouts, campfires, fireworks, and more time with family and neighbors. It is also one of the busiest times of year for preventable injuries, fires, and weather-related emergencies. The Oshtemo Township Fire Department encourages every resident to take a few simple steps this summer to help keep your home, your family, and your neighborhood safe.

Grilling Safety

Outdoor grilling is a summer favorite, but grills can cause fires and burns. Keep grills 10 feet from buildings, out of enclosed spaces, away from kids, and never leave them unattended.

Fireworks Safety

Fireworks can cause serious injuries and fires. Attend professional displays, or if using legal consumer fireworks, keep them away from kids, buildings, dry grass, and always have water nearby.

Heat Safety

Extreme heat is dangerous for children and seniors. Drink water, stay in shade or AC, avoid exertion, and never leave people or pets in vehicles.

Severe Weather Preparedness

Summer storms develop quickly in Michigan. Have multiple ways to receive alerts, know your safe shelter at home, and keep an emergency kit with flashlights and essentials.

Water and Pool Safety

Water fun is a big part of summer, but drowning is quick and silent. Always actively supervise children, use life jackets for boating and weak swimmers, secure pools, and never rely on flotation toys.

Help Us Find You

Make sure your home's address is large, reflective, and clearly visible from the road, day and night, and not blocked by landscaping, vehicles, or decorations.

The Oshtemo Township Fire Department is proud to serve our residents, businesses, and visitors. Our mission goes beyond emergency response. We are committed to fire prevention, community risk reduction, emergency medical care, public education, and helping residents prepare before emergencies happen. A few minutes of prevention can make a major difference when seconds count.

On behalf of the men and women of the Oshtemo Township Fire Department, thank you for doing your part to keep our community safe this summer.

The Future of Oshtemo



Putting the Oshtemo 2045 Comprehensive Plan into Action

With the adoption of the Oshtemo 2045 Comprehensive Plan, we are now shifting from planning to doing. Implementation will unfold over several years, and the first major step is a full review of our Zoning Ordinance to see how well it lines up with the new plan. This work is underway with the help of Progressive Companies.



The Zoning Ordinance update officially kicked off on May 14 at a Planning Commission workshop, featuring a presentation from the Michigan Association of Planning on the Zoning Reform Toolkit. This toolkit, used by communities across Michigan and the country, outlines 15 strategies to identify outdated, subjective, or unnecessary zoning rules that may be holding communities back or increasing housing costs and limiting housing choices.

Oshtemo is growing, even as some other Michigan communities are losing population. Updating our zoning is an important way to help ensure a range of housing options for both current and future residents.

This project will continue through 2026, with Planning Commission meetings used to present and discuss recommended changes. Public comment is welcome at every Planning Commission meeting. Please watch the Township website and social media for ways to participate in the Zoning Ordinance update.

Growth Happens. Let's Decide How!

Community Conversations

Community Conversations are a monthly chance to talk directly with Township Board members about local issues, ask questions, and share your ideas.

Join us at Township Hall on the first Thursday of each month from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. for an informal, drop-in conversation with up to three board members. Everyone is welcome, and no registration is required.

Parks Department



Fruit Belt Rail Trail Ribbon Cutting

Save the date to celebrate completion of the Fruit Belt Rail Trail (FBRT)! The Sixth Street and Flesher Field trailhead parking lots are now paved and open. Crews have finished landscaping along the trail shoulders, including final grading and a wildflower seed mix to stabilize soils and support habitat. New black walnut benches, safety fencing, and wayfinding signs are in place to enhance your trail experience.



Join us at the Flesher Field trailhead on Sunday, July 19, at 6 p.m. for the ribbon cutting, then head to the Flesher Field gazebo for Music in the Park!

Public Act 233 and Battery Energy Storage

As Township staff and elected officials respond to Public Act 233 and its impact on local planning and zoning, we know many residents have questions and concerns. To provide clear, accurate information in one place, we have created a dedicated PA 233 webpage.

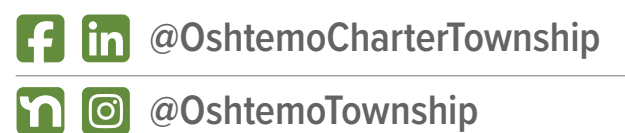


There you will find a plain-language overview of the law, background on battery energy storage, what the Township is doing to prepare for any formal application, and an explanation of the three paths a developer can take. The page also outlines Oshtemo's ordinance development process, who is involved in the work, and includes infographics and links to additional resources.

Scan the QR code to visit the page, and please reach out with any questions or concerns.



Follow Us On Social Media!



New Hires

March 30, 2026: Ben Wakley, Accountant

Ben holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from Michigan State University and brings six years of governmental accounting experience to the township, primarily in school settings. Originally from Sunfield, Michigan, he is glad to support Oshtemo's financial operations. In his free time, Ben enjoys golfing, spending time with his family, and cooking.

April 27, 2026: Lizeth Gutierrez-Arvidez, Legal Assistant

A Kalamazoo native and recent graduate from Western Michigan University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice studies, Lizeth is excited to join Oshtemo's legal department and contribute to the township's work. Outside of work, Lizeth enjoys spending time with family and friends, being outdoors, and going to the gym.

May 11, 2026: Jennifer Nitzel, Building Department Admin. Assistant

Jen has called Michigan home for more than 20 years and has worked in nonprofit, medical, academic, and animal health settings. A graduate of Western Michigan University, she brings strong administrative experience, a collaborative mindset, and a commitment to community service to the role. Outside of work, Jen enjoys boating with her family and hosting friends for dinner.

May 11, 2026: Michael McGrail, Firefighter

Born and raised on the east side of Michigan, Michael moved to Kalamazoo to attend Western Michigan University, where he met his wife. They have lived in Otsego since 2012. Michael began his fire service career in 2017, joined Oshtemo Fire in 2022, and is excited to transition to a full-time role because of the people and strong career opportunities.

Lawn Maintenance Reminder

As the growing season begins, Oshtemo Township reminds property owners and occupants to keep lawn areas mowed to a height of less than 10 inches, in accordance with Ordinance 595.

If lawn areas are not maintained, the township's Ordinance Enforcement Officer may arrange for mowing, and the cost will be billed to the property owner as outlined in Section 211.010.

Bulk Trash and Yard Waste



The Bulk Trash and Yard Waste Voucher programs are back for 2026, and may be requested in-person at our office or by scanning the QR code.



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Township Board

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Trustee Neil Sikora
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Trustee Michael Chapman
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OSHTEMO NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2026 EDITION



Important Dates

Holiday Office Closures

Offices will be closed July 3 and September 7. Offices will also be closed until 9 a.m. on the first Thursday of each month for staff meetings.

Shred Day

September 19 from 10 a.m. to noon. Visit oshtemo.org/Events for details.

Board Meetings

Visit the Boards & Committees page on our website for current schedule information: oshtemo.org/Boards-Committees

State Primary Election

The state primary election will be held August 4 and include proposals for the Kalamazoo County Childcare and Kalamazoo County Transportation Authority millages. Visit miv.vic.sos.state.mi.us to find your polling place and view your sample ballot.