

Howard Charter Township Safety Update

Dear Residents,

The Howard Charter Township Board has recently faced some difficult decisions to ensure the safety and well-being of our community. Historically, our township has maintained one of the lowest millage rates in the region, with a modest 0.7714 millage until the latest adjustment increased it to 2.7714.

Comparison with Neighboring Townships:

- Niles Township: 5.9934
- Ontwa Township: 5.4605
- Milton Township: 1.79 (No police protection)
- Jefferson Township: 3.75 (No police protection)
- Pokagon Township: 2.9989 (No police protection)
- LaGrange Township: 2.8619 (No police protection)

Howard Charter Township continues to provide exceptional services to our residents while maintaining one of the lowest tax rates in the area. This balance is becoming increasingly challenging to sustain.

Ensuring Public Safety

The safety of our community is a top priority. However, all funding for safety services, including fire and police, has been drawn from the general fund. This fund has become insufficient to cover ongoing costs. For instance, in 2021–2022, we could not allocate funds for road work. While ARPA funds helped us maintain roads over the past two years, those resources have been exhausted, leaving us reliant on the general fund once more.

Police Services

Several years ago, local police departments in many communities, including ours, faced staffing challenges. The Cass County Sheriff's Office has historically provided a contract officer for Howard Charter Township. However, staffing shortages last year left us without a dedicated officer. We anticipate resuming this service when the Sheriff's Office can assign an officer. It's important to note that we are responsible for providing a patrol vehicle under this agreement.

Fire Department Challenges

Our fire department faces significant financial challenges due to aging equipment and operational costs. The department currently operates:

- Fire Truck 436 (33 years old)
- Fire Truck 422 (20 years old)
- Fire Truck 424 (26 years old)
- Two light-duty trucks for grass fires (16 and 17 years old)

A medical-assist pickup truck, also used for special rescue response like ice and water rescue and transporting utility equipment. (11 years old)

In addition to vehicle upkeep, substantial funds are required to maintain and replace essential gear and equipment. Our firefighters are highly trained and dedicated, with 17 personnel, including 8 EMTs and 1 MFR.

Fire Department Response Statistics

- Fires:
 - 2020: 113
 - 2021: 111
 - 2022: 151
 - 2023: 144
 - 2024: 121
- Medical Assists (with SMCAS):
 - 2020: 282
 - 2021: 315
 - 2022: 299
 - 2023: 354
 - 2024: 323

A special assessment for a new fire truck would only provide a temporary solution. A sustainable approach requires a modest safety millage to address ongoing and future needs.

A Sustainable Path Forward

The township's current millage plan is based on a 10-year budget for the fire department. While we continue to pursue grants for equipment and infrastructure, maintaining flexibility with a general allocation millage allows funds to be redirected as necessary, such as for road improvements.

Addressing Community Concerns

We are aware of misinformation circulating on social media regarding these changes. The township board and fire department remain committed to the safety and welfare of all residents. Fire department personnel work tirelessly and risk their lives for modest compensation. Your support and understanding during these challenging times are deeply appreciated.

This decision, though costly, is necessary to ensure the continued safety and security of Howard Charter Township.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
Howard Charter Township Board
January 15, 2025