

Cascade Connections



2026 | EDITION 1

Cascade Charter Township Newsletter



from the **Supervisor**

Dear Cascadians,

As we welcome 2026, I want to highlight current and ongoing Township initiatives – furthering our goal of **preserving Cascade’s unique character and enhancing residents’ quality of life.**

Thank you to the many residents, volunteers and staff who are making these collaborative efforts a reality.

Enhancing Public Safety by Targeting High Crime Areas

Since its adoption over a year ago, the Hotel Licensing Ordinance has proven to be an effective tool to crack down on the disproportionate amount of crime and illicit activities in and around local hotels near 28th St. and the 96 overpass.

The number of violent crimes at the hotels has been cut in half (sex and weapon crimes, drug overdoses, felonious assaults, etc.). Calls for first responder services to the hotels, which drained a disproportionate amount of public resources, have decreased.

The hotels also had to make interior and exterior site improvements to comply with the Ordinance, including: improving access drives and parking lots; cleaning up litter, debris and landscaping; and installing surveillance cameras.

Updating Zoning Ordinance

As many of you are aware, another vital initiative underway – critical to preserving Cascade's unique character – is updating the Township’s Zoning Ordinance.

The new Zoning Ordinance ensures that short-term development decisions in Cascade are consistent with the community’s long-term vision and growth goals. Residents have been clear regarding development goals: preserve Cascade’s unique character and enhance residents’ quality of life and property values.

By resisting development that diminishes Cascade’s health and character, we encourage—and leave room



for- better development.

As detailed in the last newsletter, the Township has been comprehensively reviewing and updating the zoning ordinance over the past year.

Thank you to residents for your participation and feedback throughout this extended public process.

New Farmland & Open Space Preservation Program

The new Zoning Ordinance includes a voluntary program to protect rural and agricultural lands - a historical and defining feature of the Cascade community - from future development. Through the voluntary sale of their property’s development rights, property owners can retain all rights to their land, save for the development rights sold as a result of participating in the program. This

from the **Supervisor** *(cont'd)*

preserves farms and open spaces for future generations while also compensating property owners for said rights.

Improving the “Village” Area

Creating a more walkable village area has been a top priority for residents since the 2021-2022 strategic planning process. To achieve this complex goal, the Township initiated three interrelated projects:

- adopting clear village design standards for future redevelopment (part of the new Zoning Ordinance)
- incorporating the Tuffy site into Tassell Park and updating streetscapes
- establishing a site & façade improvement grant program for local businesses (pending zoning ordinance approval)

Funding Village Improvements

These projects are being funded by the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). A DDA is an economic tool available to local municipalities to help revitalize local business districts. DDAs were created in the 1970s after the rise of expressways, suburban shopping malls, and big box stores changed how people worked and shopped, leading to the decline of traditional downtowns.

DDAs are funded through Tax Increment Financing. First a certain geographic area is designated for revitalization (a “TIF district”). As property values in the area go up, property taxes increase. Property taxes in that area are broken into two streams. The base stream, tied to the property value at the time the TIF district was created, continues to go where it always has: schools, roads, fire, police etc. The increase in property taxes—the “tax increment”—is recaptured by the DDA (for a set time period) to reinvest in the area. Local school millages and the State Education Tax are not subject to DDA capture; they continue to receive tax revenues on growth.

Tuffy / Tassell Park Plans

An updated design that incorporates the Tuffy site into Tassell Park is now available for public review and feedback. The new design incorporates the Township’s purchase of the Verburg property across Cascade Road, which allows for the construction of a boardwalk underneath the bridge along the river so residents have a safer way to cross Cascade Road. See page 5 for details!

Burton St. Pedestrian Bridge Over I-96

As I have shared before, Cascade was awarded \$3.5 million in state funds for the construction of a



pedestrian bridge over the I-96 expressway on Burton Street. This bridge will safely connect Cascade to Grand Rapids’ regional network of bicycle and pedestrian paths. Construction is scheduled for 2026, after an extended permitting delay at the state level that prevented construction last year.

It is an honor to serve as your Supervisor. Your thoughts, comments, and suggestions are always welcome and important. I hope to hear from you soon.

Grace Lesperance

Cascade Charter Township Supervisor
glesperance@cascadetwp.com



from the **Clerk** Sue Slater

Did you know?

The Cascade Township Clerk is an elected position and is responsible for maintaining voter registration files, recording, publishing and maintaining the minutes of the Township Board, overseeing the Township’s three cemeteries, administering elections and voter registration, and handling passport appointments. See below for more on how we can help you!

Cemeteries

Cascade Township owns and maintains three cemeteries:

- **Cascade Cemetery**, 7200 30th St.
- **Snow Cemetery**, 3131 Snow Ave.
- **Whitneyville Cemetery**, 5601 Whitneyville Ave.

Current residents of Cascade Township may qualify for burial sites in a Cascade Township cemetery. Former residents may qualify by meeting certain parameters. Visit cascadetwp.com/cemeteries for more information.

Election Information

The next elections will take place August 4, 2026 (primary) and November 3, 2026 (general).

You may register to vote online anytime up to 15 days before an election.

Missed the deadline? You can register at any time up to 8 pm on Election Day in person at the Township Office.

You are not required to re-register for each election but, if you have moved, **call the Clerk’s office at 616-949-1508.**

PASSPORT APPOINTMENTS

Staff are available to answer passport questions via phone at 616-949-1508. No passports will be processed without an appointment.

Reservations must be made online using the calendar found at cascadetwp.com/passports.

Any Passport Acceptance Agency is able to accept your passport application, no matter where you reside.

You are eligible to vote if you are:

- A citizen of the United States
- At least 18 years old on or before the next election
- A resident of Michigan
- Registered at least 30 days prior to the next election

Have more questions? **Visit cascadetwp.com or contact the Clerk’s office at 616-949-1508.**



from the **Treasurer** Windy Korstange

Reminder: Winter Taxes Due

Winter taxes are due by February 17, 2026 to avoid penalties. If you did not receive your bill, check online at cascadetwp.com or call the Treasurer’s office at 616-949-6944.

For mailed payments, please allow seven days for delivery - postmarks are not accepted. Please include a phone number on your check. An informational letter with payment options and an E-Z pay application will be included in your bill.

On March 1, 2026, all unpaid real property taxes will be forwarded to the Kent County Treasurer’s Office for collection.

Reimagining TASSELL PARK

A revised concept for Tassell Park was recently unveiled following public feedback. The new concept focuses on maintaining and improving the existing park, while also integrating new elements including walking trails and natural gathering areas along the riverbank, offering scenic views, tranquil picnic spots and multi-use public spaces. Stay tuned for more updates on this exciting project!



Rendering of a fish sculpture and seating area overlooking the river.



Rendering of the boardwalk overlooking the dam.

For more information about plans for Tassell Park, visit cascadetwp.com/projects.

Tassell Park Open Houses

An Open House was held in December at the Wisner Center where the public was invited to learn more about plans for Tassell Park.

The event was hosted by the Troyer Group, the Landscape Architecture & Planning firm that is leading the redesign portion of the project. The community was invited to see initial renderings of the transformation of the park, ask questions and provide input.

See photos from the event below.

You're Invited!

Missed the Tassell Park Open House in January? Not to worry - another opportunity to learn more and ask questions has been scheduled!

Tassell Park Open House
Wednesday, March 11, 5-7pm
Kent District Library
Cascade - Wisner Center



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! TASSELL PARK QUESTIONNAIRE

The Tassell Park transformation is a work in progress, and we are looking for your input to ensure the improvements made reflect your priorities and desires. Scan the QR code to answer questions and leave comments about current renderings, as well as any other information you'd like to share about the project.



Community Risk Reduction Program - Local School Tours



The Cascade Fire Department recently joined the Ada Fire Department as well as Forest Hills Public Schools Director of School Safety and Security, Ryan Kimball, to tour Central Woodlands, Central Middle, and Central High School.

Tours like these help familiarize firefighters with buildings and determine staff roles in an emergency. Tours have also been conducted at both elementary schools in the township as well as all four assisted living facilities.

“When we train with our mutual aid partners, we become wiser and better equipped to provide efficient and effective emergency responses to our residents and visitors to Cascade Township.”

Lt. Andrew Albright, Cascade Fire Department



Parks & Facilities Preppin' for Spring!

Easter Egg Hunt

March 28 at 10 am @ Cascade Rec Park

Spring Clean Up Day

May 2 @ Cascade Rec Park

Walking Club

May 6, 13, 20, 27 & June 3 & 10 at 9 am @ Cascade Rec Park

Independence Day Parade & Community Event - July 4

The **Summer Concert series** will begin monthly this June in Friendship Park. Details coming soon.



Pickleball Clinics will also start up beginning this spring at Cascade Rec Park. Look for more information coming soon!



FIRE SAFETY DURING WINTER STORMS

- Test smoke alarms at least once a month and install carbon monoxide alarms in your home.
- Plan two ways out of the home in case of an emergency. Clear driveway and front walk of ice and snow to provide easy access to your home.
- Make sure your house number can be seen from the street so firefighters can find you if you need help.
- Have flashlights on hand in case the power goes out. Never use candles.
- Watch for winter weather updates on TV, radio, and online.
- Check on neighbors and others who may need help.
- Generators should be used outdoors. Keep them away from windows and doors.
- Stay away from downed wires and report any to authorities.
- Use extra layers of clothes and blankets to stay warm if your heat stops working.
- Turn portable heaters off when you leave the room or go to bed.



CASCADE VOLUNTEERS

Thank you!

A special thank you to the nearly 180 volunteers who worked more than 1,200 hours gardening, treating and removing invasive species in the natural areas, the village and library grounds throughout 2025.

Cascade has eight parks and three cemeteries with 400 acres to maintain. These volunteers worked to enhance these spaces and improve habitats and forest health.

Thank you for keeping Cascade parks beautiful!



Join the Cascade Friendship Garden Club

Interested in helping to make Friendship Park more beautiful? Introducing Cascade's Friendship Park Garden Club!

Beginning early April 2026, this club will care for the native gardens around Friendship Park.

If interested in joining, **contact Jeanine Heibel at jheibel@cascadetwp.com or (616) 826-0288.** Exact dates and times will be announced closer to April.



Cascade Library Upcoming Events

Let It Snow Reading Challenge

The "Let It Snow Reading Challenge" is underway! **From now through February 28**, readers of all ages are invited to read any six books to earn a free mug and be entered to win a gift card to a local bookstore.

Battle of the Books!

Coming soon - Battle of the Books! Registration will open soon for students in 3rd through 5th grade to compete in teams of four. Teams will show their knowledge of four preselected books at the Cascade Branch on March 4 at 6:00 PM.

Community Impact Scholarship

Kent District Library is accepting applications for its Community Impact Scholarship open to high school seniors, college students, and adults returning to school or entering the trades, with up to three \$5,000 scholarships available. **Learn more at kdl.org/scholarship.**

One-on-One Tech Help

The Cascade Branch offers one-on-one tech help for laptops, eReaders & smartphone. Schedule an appointment or simply stop by to speak with a librarian.

Preschool Expo

Families with preschool-aged children are invited to the Preschool and Early Learning Expo **on January 31 at 10 am** to explore the preschool options available in the Cascade area.

Scholarship Opportunities!

The Friends of the Cascade Library are offering two \$1,500 scholarships to Forest Hills Public School students.

Applications are open until February 15. Visit cascadefriends.org for details.

“SUNDAY IN CASCADE”

By Julie Belknap

Julie Belknap Baldwin was born in 1888 in Grand Rapids and wrote of her experiences in her early years in a book titled, "There Is Life Left in the Old Girl Yet." One such experience was a Sunday visit to the Cascade Magnetic Mineral Springs Hotel, which was located on the east bank of the Thornapple River, just north of Cascade Road. At the time, mineral springs were the go-to for health-conscious folks, and this hotel was special. Peacocks strutted the grounds while side stepping croquet balls. One could also soak in one of the many copper tubs located on the ground floor filled to the brim with "magnetic mineral water." Below is an excerpt from her book:



Old sketch of Cascade Magnetic Springs Hotel circa 1891

Down on the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Wealthy Street, right where the Schnitzel bank stands now, stood a livery stable—a big white frame building. In it were stored carriages to rent, and the horses which stood ready to convey patrons to various places they wanted to visit.

Out at Cascade on the far side of the beautiful Thornapple River stood a big, white frame building which was a summer hotel. They served a special Sunday chicken dinner which was very popular with the Grand Rapids people. My father used to go to the Jefferson Avenue Livery Stable and rent a horse and buggy for the day. We would all pile in and off we would go for the day. It was long before the days of the automobile, so it was quite a jaunt-- nine miles on the dusty, bumpy, unpaved road. But who minds a few bumps when chicken and real homemade ice cream are coming up, and besides that there was scrumptious chocolate layer cake. Three layers high!

Of course, at that early stage, 1900, there was no fine bridge such as we have now over the Thornapple. Instead, there was a wooden bridge which made a fine noise when we went clattering over it. A short turn left and we were there. Whew! Were we hungry! So, into the dining room we trooped and sighed and sighed until we were served. The fried chicken came in on a platter so everyone could have all they wanted. Mashed potatoes piled high, with gravy to top them. Green peas, sweet as honey; salad of tomatoes, cucumbers, and sliced red onions from their big garden; homemade rolls, jam to put on them, and then we came to the strawberry homemade ice cream and cake. Jack, my brother, turned to mother and said, "I hope I don't bust." Dad said, "They sure didn't make any money on us today."

But those days came suddenly to a sad end one night when the Livery stable burned to the ground. In the morning, we kids hustled down there on our bicycles. What a sad sight—the building a total loss, and worst of all, thirteen dead beautiful horses in a row in the street. No more rides out to Cascade. Frances said, "I'm sure glad I had that second piece of cake last Sunday."

Cascade Historical Society



Assessing Corner

Staff is available to assist residents and answer questions:
Monday-Thursday: 7 am – 4 pm & **Friday:** 8 am – 12 pm.
Visit the Township Office or call 616-949-6176.

PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION: DISABLED VETERANS

Public Act 161 provides a property tax exemption for disabled veterans, their unremarried surviving spouses, or another legal designee. Eligible individuals must file a completed **Affidavit for Disabled Veterans Exemption**

- along with supporting documentation - annually with the local municipality where their property is located. Whenever possible, submissions should be made during the first two months of the year (January or February). For more information about the program, visit:

michigan.gov/treasury/local/stc under Disabled Veterans Exemption Information.

ONLINE TOOLS & RESOURCES

Assessing information is available 24/7 at

cascadetwp.com including:

- Property/Parcel information
- Assessing forms, sales and land studies by neighborhood
- Annual residential review

More resources are also available 24/7 at

accesskent.com, including:

- Property mapping services
- Parcel Viewer (iMap)
- Register of Deeds Self Service Web

ASSESSMENT CHANGE NOTICES

Assessment change notices will be mailed on or before February 17, 2026. If you are a new homeowner and do not receive your notice by March 1, 2026, please contact our Assessor's Office.

Notices will also include:

- Recent ownership changes
- Principal residence exemption (PRE) status

If you purchased property in 2025, please review the PRE status carefully. Contact the Assessor's Office if the status is incorrect.

ASSESSMENT APPEALS SET FOR MARCH 9 & 10

The March Board of Review will hear assessment appeals on March 9 & 10, 2026.

Appointments may be made beginning March 1, 2026.

Sales data and comparative information will be available beginning February 17, 2026, on the Township's website, at the Township Office and in the Cascade Library.

An appeal to the Board of Review, either in person or by letter, is a prerequisite for an appeal to the Michigan Tax Tribunal.

Your Building Department: A Community Asset

Cascade Township's Building Department is dedicated to helping residents navigate essential building regulations, making sure your construction projects are safe, efficient, and compliant.

Safety is the cornerstone of our building codes. They are established so that your homes, schools, and public spaces are constructed to withstand various hazards, providing peace of mind for you and your family.

Fire safety is a key aspect our inspectors focus on during assessments. They review critical features such as fire blocking, smoke detection and fire separation walls. These precautions mitigate fire risks, ensuring your home remains safe and secure.

Building regulations also include provisions for energy conservation. When building or purchasing a new home, you can expect that minimum standards for insulation, air sealing and equipment efficiency are verified by inspectors through the permitting process.

Permits are essential, assuring that your project complies with local zoning rules and statewide construction codes. In addition to periodic field inspections, our inspection team completes a review prior to construction that often saves time and money by avoiding problems once construction begins.

When you're ready to start a construction or renovation project, the application process is straightforward. You or your builder will need to submit plans to the Building Department, either in person, via mail or online (www.cascadetwp.com). The process allows us to issue permits for smaller projects in just a few days. Whether your project is small or large, our knowledgeable team is here to help answer any questions you have about the permitting process.



2026 PROJECTS

See below for a list of several new projects slated to begin around the Township this year. For more information, visit cascadetwp.com.

Burton Street Pedestrian Structure

- Once permits and bids are finalized, construction should begin in the fall and be complete by summer 2027.

2026 Pathways Improvement Project

- Bids have been received, and a construction contract will be awarded pending Board of Trustees approval.

2026 Local Roads Program

- The Township participates in an annual cost-sharing program with the Kent County Road Commission. The scope is yet to be determined and will be presented to the Board of Trustees for consideration this winter.

Irene and Linda Avenue Water Main (off Burton St)

- The City of Grand Rapids is working with approximately 50 residences who will be eligible to connect to city water by the end of the year in response to PFAs contamination.

Cascade Recreation Park Water Main

- Construction of a water main extension into the park to make available the switchover from existing well water to City water.

ZONING ORDINANCE OPEN HOUSE - RECAP

Open Houses for the proposed Zoning Ordinance were held December 17 and January 8 where residents from Cascade were invited to ask questions and learn more about the proposed changes.

If you'd like to learn more about the proposed Zoning Ordinance, visit cascadetwp.com/zoning.



Contact Us

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Cascade Township Fire Department

Fire Chief / Non-Emergency
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Kent County Police Department

Sheriff / Non-Emergency Dispatch
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Community Policing Officer
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Township Office Hours

Monday through Thursday: 7 am – 4 pm
Friday: 8 am – 12 pm



Connect with us on Facebook and Instagram! We share news, events, and community highlights to help you stay involved and informed.