

# CASCADE

## CONNECTIONS



2025 | Edition 1 | January-February  
Cascade Charter Township Newsletter

# FROM THE SUPERVISOR *Grace Lesperance*



## 2025 PROJECTS, OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Dear Cascadians,

As we begin a new year, I want to thank you – the residents – for your participation and interest in our Cascade community. Your engagement and support over the past year laid the foundation for our 2025 initiatives:

### IMPROVING COMMUNITY SPACES

#### CASCADE ROAD/THORNAPPLE RIVER BRIDGE

Pedestrian improvements to the pathway portions of the Cascade Road bridge will resume when weather permits, with completion slated for this spring. This project has been funded entirely with state ARPA and Cascade Downtown Development Authority (DDA) funds.

#### TUFFY DESIGN CONCEPT READY

Initial design concepts for the Tuffy site and greater village area are complete. More details can be found on page 6.

These design concepts detail plans to improve public spaces. However, most of the property in the village area is privately owned. To incentivize private businesses to improve their facades in the village area, the Township DDA recently established a voluntary program that provides a financial match to local businesses for qualifying façade improvements to existing buildings. Improvements must meet designated design standards.

There is also the potential for a public/private partnership in certain areas, including the shopping center parking lot at 28th Street and Cascade Road, such as the concept pictured at right.

#### PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE OVER I-96

Construction of the pedestrian/bicycle bridge over I-96 is on track for completion in 2025. Based on the engineering/design work to date, the \$3.5 million appropriation of state funding will cover the entire project budget with no cost to Cascade residents.



A close up from the OHM presentation given at the October 17 Board of Trustees meeting. Please visit [cascadetwp.com/projects](https://cascadetwp.com/projects) to find the full presentation as well as a link to the Board meeting where it was presented.

**Airport Zoning Litigation:** As I mentioned in the previous newsletter, the Board adopted a new Master Plan in 2024. This Master Plan prioritizes smart growth that complements and enhances residents' safety, quality of life, and property values. It also exercises the Township's authority to regulate land uses in and around the airport that are unrelated to aeronautical operations.

The Airport Authority responded to Cascade's new Master Plan by filing a lawsuit against Cascade Township, alleging the Township has no authority to regulate development of any property owned or leased by the Airport Authority, including development that is completely unrelated to airport operations. Unfortunately, the Airport Authority unexpectedly prevailed in Kent County Circuit Court, taking the stance that any property owned or leased by the Authority is entirely exempt from any local zoning or land use regulations, even including stormwater management.

The Circuit Court Judge's unprecedented ruling eliminates any reasonable local regulation of non-aeronautical activities and creates a loophole for the establishment of a multitude of unregulated activities completely unrelated to airport operations. The Township is in the process of appealing the Circuit Court's ruling.

We remain eager to work with the Airport Authority to equitably balance it's ability to provide regional air travel with Cascade's responsibility to protect residents' property values, public health, and quality of life. We cannot, however, allow the Airport Authority unilateral, arbitrary, and unrestricted authority over land uses completely unrelated to its airport operations.

## **PRESERVING CASCADE'S CHARACTER**

### **NEW FARMLAND & NATURAL SPACE PRESERVATION PROGRAM**

In response to significant public interest, the Township is implementing a new voluntary program in 2025. This multi-faceted program allows property owners to retain all rights to their land, save for the development rights sold as a result of participating in the program. This preserves farms and open spaces for future generations while also compensating property owners for said rights. Township funds will be matched with existing county and federal funding to protect property from more intense development.

## **PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH & RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY VALUES**

### **PFAS REMEDIATION**

Extension of municipal water to the remainder of the 400+ properties impacted by PFAS contamination from Gerald R. Ford Intl Airport is slated to be completed in 2025. This project has been fully funded with federal and state grants.

Thank you to impacted residents for your patience and participation as we resolve this very challenging and disruptive issue.

**It is an honor to serve as your Supervisor and fight on your behalf. I look forward to hearing from you!**

Remember – in addition to regular business hours – I have “after hour” office hours the **first Thursday of each month from 6 - 7 pm** in the History Room of the Cascade Library.

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### **Grace Lesperance**

Cascade Charter Township Supervisor  
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616-949-1500

## FROM THE CLERK *Sue Slater*



### ELECTION THANK YOU'S

I want to publicly mention my fantastic staff who made our Election process smooth: Deputy Clerk Jennifer Jager, Election Specialist Jan Baumann, Election Assistants Anita Gorsuch, Jill Johnson, Amy Otto, and Emily Mollhagen. Mary Lou Lachniet and J.D. Shumway were involved in pre-processing; Robyn McKenna and Karen Snoeyink, the Township's receptionists, assisted voters at the desk with accepting ballots and answering questions. **My grateful appreciation goes out to these women for their expertise and tireless assistance!**

### ELECTION STATISTICS

**Absentee Voting** was higher than ever, with **6,574 (38%)** voting this method, and 96% of the ballots issued were returned. This was almost double the other two methods combined.

**Early Voting** far exceeded expectations. With just over 400 early voters in the August Primary, we had that many on the first day of Early Voting! We averaged 435 voters each day of Early Voting, for a total of **3,919 (23%)**.

**Election Day** totaled **3,650 voters (21%)**, which reduced wait times in Election Day lines. We were busy, but it was much more manageable. Overall, turnout was 82% – higher than ever!

## FROM THE TREASURER *Windy Korstange*



### WINTER TAXES

Winter 2024 taxes are now due and payable and must be paid by February 14, 2025, to avoid penalty or interest charges. If you did not receive a tax statement during December, please check the Township's website at [cascadetwp.com](http://cascadetwp.com) using the steps below to look up your tax bill, or call the Treasurer's Office at 616-949-6944.

Payments are receipted on the same business day they are received. If paying by mail, we recommend allowing seven days to ensure timely delivery. **Postmarks are not accepted.** Please include a phone number on your check in case we need to contact you. An informational letter is enclosed with the bill for alternative payment instructions and E-Z Pay application.

### PAYING TAXES

Your tax bill information is available 24/7 at [cascadetwp.com](http://cascadetwp.com):

- Click on **Property/Parcel Lookup** on the homepage.
- Select **Property/Parcel Lookup Tool** to open a new browser window.
- Begin by entering an address into the search bar.
- Click the drop-down arrow next to **By: Address** to select data search by name or parcel number instead.
- Double-click on **Selected Parcel**.
- Click on **Tax Information Tab**.

On **March 1, 2025**, all unpaid real property taxes will be forwarded to the Kent County Treasurer's Office for collection.

# CHANGING LANDSCAPES

## *Cascade Historical Society Corner*

Step back in time with these historical images! See how familiar places have changed, connecting our community's past to its present.



Circa 1930: Wes Cook, Rus Fox, and Hugh Slater (left to right) at Cook's Garage, once located at Thornapple River Drive and Cascade Road. Today, the site is Virgil Nishimura Westdale Memorial Park.



Circa 1917: A grocery store at Thornapple River Drive and Cascade Road, likely owned by C. G. Watterson and later by the Buttrick family. The location is now home to The Gathering Place restaurant.

### **ABOUT THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY:**

The Cascade Historical Society meets at 10 am on the first Thursday of each month, except July, at the Cascade Historical Museum, located in the original Cascade Township Hall at 2839 Thornapple River Drive SE. Meetings are open to the public.

If you have questions, comments, information or photos to share, email [cascadehistory@yahoo.com](mailto:cascadehistory@yahoo.com).



Explore the vision for Cascade's signage, lighting, awning, and outdoor display standards. Scan the QR code below for a detailed look at this sketch and more details about the program.

## **SITE IMPROVEMENTS GRANT PROGRAM**

### *Boosting Local Business Appeal*

Revitalizing a commercial district often begins with improvements to a single building or storefront. While this process can occur spontaneously through individual property or business owners, it can be accelerated with a facade improvement program.

As part of its village revitalization strategy, and in conjunction with the redevelopment of the Tuffy site and Tassell Park, the Cascade Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is launching a Site Improvements Grant Program to kickstart this process in the village area.

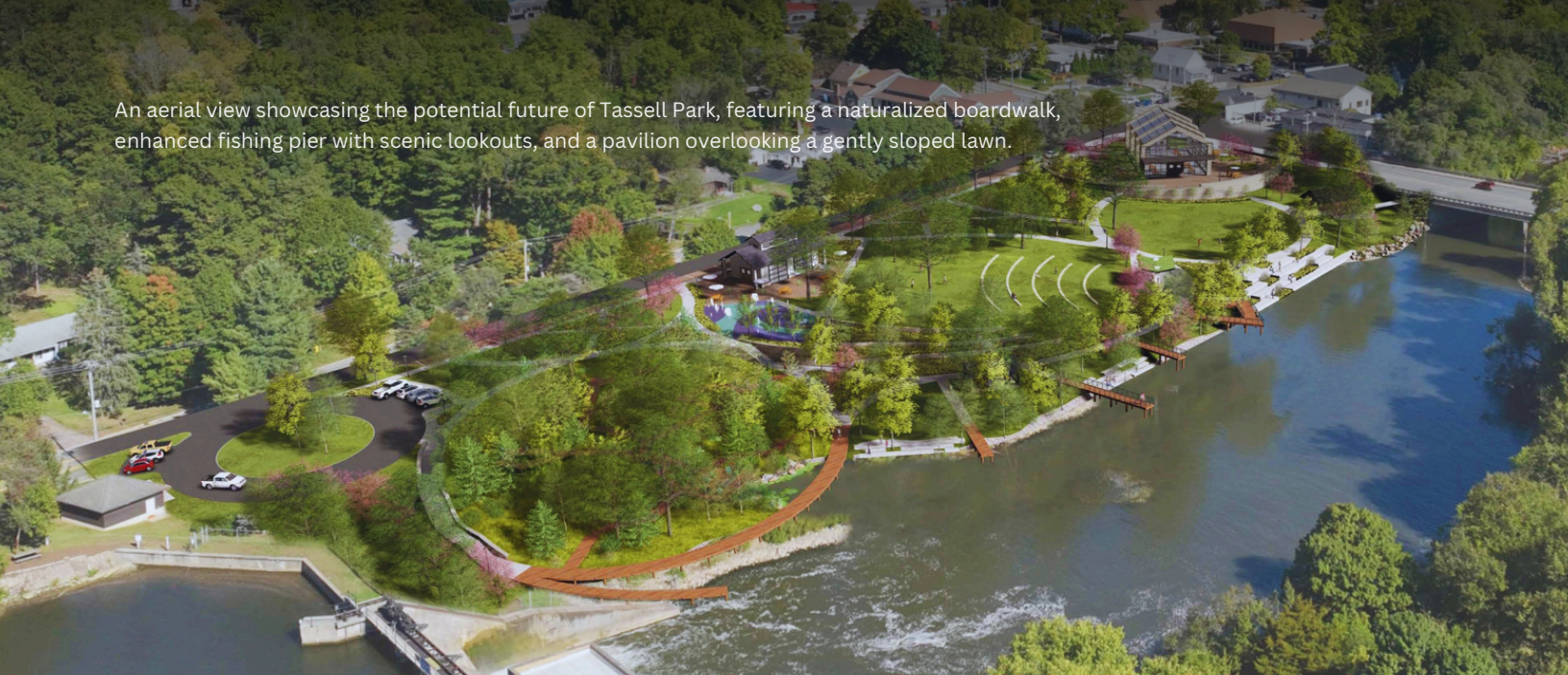
This new program incentivizes local property and business owners to enhance the exterior appearance of their buildings and storefronts by offering matching grants and design assistance for qualifying improvements.

Design assistance ensures that improvements align with established guidelines specifically created to enhance buildings in the village area, which includes Cascade Road between the river, 28th Street, and Thornhills, as well as old 28th Street. Beyond creating a more vibrant streetscape and enhancing Cascade's unique character, the program aims to strengthen locally owned businesses, keeping dollars in the local economy.



**Visit here** for details about eligibility, project priorities, and the application process.

An aerial view showcasing the potential future of Tassell Park, featuring a naturalized boardwalk, enhanced fishing pier with scenic lookouts, and a pavilion overlooking a gently sloped lawn.

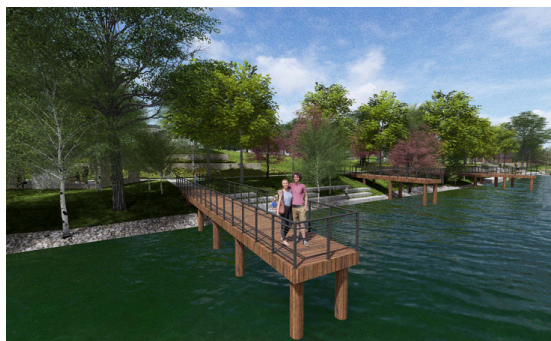


# Reimagining TASSELL

The Cascade community has an exciting project in the works—a transformation of our beloved Tassell Park. Just two months after the Township unveiled public plans for improvements along the Thornapple River, we’re now getting a closer look at the vision for revitalizing the heart of Cascade.

The plan was crafted by the team at OHM, an architecture and planning firm contracted by the Cascade Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and the Township. Drawing from the Township's strategic plan and extensive community feedback, OHM has developed a concept that celebrates the natural beauty of the area while fostering greater connection, recreation, and enrichment for residents of all ages.

A standout feature of the Tassell Park plan is the potential development of a new multi-purpose building at the Tuffy site. This flexible facility would serve as a



A conceptual rendering of a public gathering space along the Thornapple River, highlighting an expansive fire pit designed for community enjoyment.

# L PARK



Explore the full vision for Tassell Park! Visit [cascadetwp.com/projects](https://cascadetwp.com/projects) to watch OHM's video presentation and find an interactive digital walkthrough of the concept.



hub for a variety of community activities—from art classes and fitness programs to local meetings and events.

In addition to the multi-purpose building, the Tassell Park redesign includes new walking trails and natural gathering areas along the riverbank, offering scenic views, tranquil picnic spots, and multi-use public spaces.

As Cascade embarks on this transformative journey, we can look forward to Tassell Park and the surrounding areas serving as vibrant hubs of activity, fostering a greater sense of connection and pride among residents. By investing in these public spaces, Cascade is prioritizing the well-being and enjoyment of its residents.

Stay tuned for more updates on this exciting project—the future of Tassell Park is bright!

# ASSESSING CORNER

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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    ASSESSMENT CHANGE NOTICES

**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](http://michigan.gov/treasury/local/stc) under *Disabled Veterans Exemption Information*.

### Online Tools & Resources

Assessing information is available 24/7 at [cascadetwp.com](http://cascadetwp.com) including:

- Property/Parcel information
- Assessing forms
- Sales and land studies by neighborhood
- Annual residential review data

More resources are also available 24/7 at

[accesskent.com](http://accesskent.com), including:

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

Assessment change notices will be mailed on or before February 19, 2025. If you are a new homeowner and do not receive your notice by **March 1, 2025**, please contact our Assessor's Office.

Notices will also include:

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

If you purchased property in 2023, please review the PRE status carefully. Contact the Assessor's Office if the status is incorrect.

## ASSESSMENT APPEALS SET FOR MARCH 10 & 11

The March Board of Review will hear assessment appeals on **March 10 and 11, 2025**.

Appointments may be made beginning **March 1, 2025**.

Sales data and comparative information will be available beginning **February 19, 2025**, 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.

# BUILDING DEPARTMENT CORNER

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## DO YOU NEED A BUILDING PERMIT?

As we head into spring and you start planning your projects, remember that many require a building permit.

Permits are required for:

- Decks, pools, and accessory buildings
- Roofing, siding, and structural remodels
- Installing or altering mechanical, plumbing, or electrical systems

You don't need a permit for:

- Painting, carpeting, or tiling
- Cabinet, countertop, or trim installation
- Small repairs or detached structures under 200 square ft.

## HOW TO APPLY

Submit your application, plans, and other required documents online at [cascadetwp.com](http://cascadetwp.com), by mail, or in person. Zoning approval is needed before permits are issued.

## SCHEDULING INSPECTIONS

For open permits, inspections can be scheduled via:

- Online: Cascade's portal
- Call: 616-949-3765
- Text: 616-240-4693

For questions, contact the Building Department at 616-949-3765 or visit [cascadetwp.com](http://cascadetwp.com).

# CASCADE LIBRARY EVENTS

While the Kent District Library (KDL) - Cascade Branch library undergoes its refresh from **February 17 through June 1**, they'll continue offering key programs, a browsable collection with popular and seasonal books, and curbside services to meet your needs. Visit [cascadetwp.com/projects](http://cascadetwp.com/projects) for details regarding the refresh.

## LET IT SNOW READING CHALLENGE



Our annual *Let It Snow* reading challenge for adults and teens started Dec. 2 and runs through

Feb. 28. Dive into reading to earn a collectible mug as a reward for your efforts. It's the perfect way to stay cozy and engaged this season.

## EXPLORE WITH YOUR KDL CARD

Did you know your KDL library card offers more than just books? With the KDL Perk Pass, you can gain access to amazing local attractions like the Frederick Meijer Gardens, Grand Rapids Children's Museum, and more! Discover all the perks at [kdl.org/perkpass](http://kdl.org/perkpass).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Lunar New Year Celebration January 25, 12 pm

Celebrate the Lunar New Year with us as we welcome the Lotus Boyz for a traditional dance performance.

### African Drumming February 10, 6:30 pm

Come learn about and listen to traditional drums from African cultures with Motherland.

### Weekly Programs

Storytime: Mon. thru Fri. at 10 am  
Babytime: Storytime on Tuesdays for little ones  
Afternoon Activities for School-Age Kids: Every weekday at 4:30 pm



Asian bittersweet at Cascade's Burton Park before removal efforts.

## HELP PRESERVE CASCADE'S NATURAL SPACES THIS WINTER

Cascade Township is proud to announce that we were recently honored with an award recognizing our commitment to invasive species management, with a particular focus on combating the invasive Asian bittersweet vine.

This resilient vine poses a serious threat to our local ecosystems, choking out native plants and weakening trees that provide critical habitats for wildlife. This award acknowledges not only the Township's efforts but also the dedication of our volunteers who are essential to making these conservation efforts possible.

Winter provides an ideal time to remove and treat woody invasives, as these plants are easier to spot and manage during the dormant season. Each volunteer workday begins with a short orientation covering the target invasive species and our treatment methods. No prior experience is necessary—just dress warmly, as we may work in brushy areas. All tools, gloves, and refreshments are provided to make volunteering as easy and rewarding as possible.

We invite families, friends, and community groups to join us in preserving Cascade's natural spaces. By working together, we can protect our parks and support local biodiversity.

For more information or to sign up, contact [volunteer@cascadetwp.com](mailto:volunteer@cascadetwp.com).

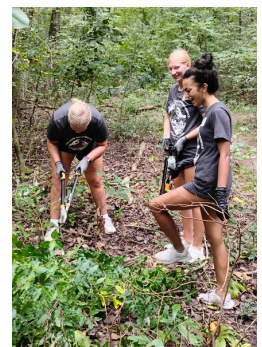
### Come make a difference in our parks!

Meet at Peace Park's Bolt Drive parking lot.

Saturday, February 1st, 1 pm - 3 pm

Saturday, March 1st, 1 pm - 3 pm

Every Tuesday, 10 am - 12 pm



## Fire Safety during Winter Storms

Winter storms can happen almost anywhere and cause various problems. Knowing what to do before, during, and after a storm will help keep you and your family safe from a winter fire.

- **Test all smoke alarms** at least once a month to ensure they are working.
- **Install carbon monoxide alarms** in your home and test them regularly.
- Plan **two ways out of your home** in case of an emergency.
- **Clear the driveway and front walk** of ice and snow to provide easy access to your home.
- Make sure your **house number is visible from the street**. If you need help, firefighters will be able to find you.
- Be prepared in case the power goes out. Have **flashlights, battery-powered lighting, and fresh batteries** on hand. Never use candles.
- **Stay aware of winter weather updates** by listening to the television, radio, or online bulletins.
- **Check on neighbors** and others who may need assistance.
- Generators should be used outdoors and kept away from windows and doors. **Do not run a generator inside your garage**, even if the door is open.
- **Stay away from downed wires** and report them to authorities.
- **Be ready if the heat stops working**. Use extra layers of clothing and blankets to stay warm. If you use an emergency heat source, keep anything flammable at least 3 feet away.
- **Turn portable heaters off** when you leave the room or go to bed.

### Important Reminder:

There are more home fires in winter than in any other season. **Half of all home heating fires** occur in December, January, and February.

As you stay cozy and warm this winter season, be fire smart!



#### Fact:

Nearly half of all space heater fires involve electric space heaters.

## 10 tips Get Ahead of the Winter Freeze

It's not too early to begin preparing for the heating season. Check these ten tips off your list and get ahead of the winter freeze:

- Our **furnace has been inspected and serviced** by a qualified professional within the last 12 months. *(A furnace should be serviced at least once a year.)*
- Our **chimneys and vents have been cleaned and inspected** by a qualified professional. I have checked for creosote buildup. *(Not cleaning your chimney is the leading cause of chimney fires due to built-up creosote. This service should be done at least once a year.)*
- Our wood for the fireplace or wood stove is **dry, seasoned wood**.
- Our **fireplace screen is metal or heat-tempered glass**, in good condition, and securely positioned in front of the fireplace.
- We have a **covered metal container** ready to dispose of cooled ashes. *(The ash container should be kept at least 10 feet away from the home and any nearby buildings.)*
- Our children know to **stay at least 3 feet away** from the fireplace, wood/pellet stove, oil stove, or other space heaters.
- Our portable space heaters have an **automatic shut-off** feature.
- Our portable space heaters will be **plugged directly into an outlet** *(not an extension cord)* and placed at least 3 feet away from anything flammable, like bedding, paper, walls, and even people. *(We've placed notes throughout our home to remind us to turn off portable heaters when leaving a room or going to bed.)*
- We have **tested our smoke alarms** to ensure they are working. *(Smoke alarms should be installed on every level of the home, inside each sleeping room, and outside each sleeping area. For the best protection, smoke alarms should be interconnected so that when one sounds, they all sound.)*
- We have **tested our carbon monoxide alarms** to ensure they are working. *(Carbon monoxide alarms should be located outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home.)*



adapted from:

**NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION**

The leading information and knowledge resource on fire, electrical and related hazards



**Cascade Township Fire Department**

*Dedicated to Serving You*

Fire Station 1 | 616-949-1320 Fire Station 2 | 616-259-7020



Front row, from left: Treasurer Windy Korstange; Township Supervisor Grace Lesperance; and Clerk Sue Slater. Back row, from left: Trustee John Shipley, Trustee Timmy Noordhoek, Trustee Chris Noordyke, and Trustee Scott Rissi.

## WELCOME OUR NEW TOWNSHIP BOARD

At the November 20 Cascade Township Board of Trustees meeting, we welcomed our newly seated board. The Board oversees policy decisions, budget allocations, and community planning to ensure Cascade thrives.

We encourage residents to attend Township Board meetings to stay informed and involved. Meetings are held on the **second and fourth Wednesday of each month at 7 pm** at the Wisner Center. Adjusted dates due to holidays or elections are listed on the Township website.

Public participation is always welcome during the “public comments” section or by bringing matters directly to the Board. Their contact information is available below:

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES



**Grace Lesperance**  
(Supervisor)  
616-949-1500  
glesperance@cascadetwp.com



**Sue Slater** (Clerk)  
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**Windy Korstange**  
(Treasurer)  
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**Timmy Noordhoek**  
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**John Shipley** (Trustee)  
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**Scott Rissi** (Trustee)  
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**Chris Noordyke** (Trustee)  
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## CONTACT US

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**Sheriff / Non-Emergency  
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**Omar Dieppa**  
Community Policing Officer  
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omar.dieppa@kentcountymi.gov



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## Cascade Charter Township

5920 Tahoe Drive SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49456  
616-949-1500  
cascadetwp.com

## 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.

