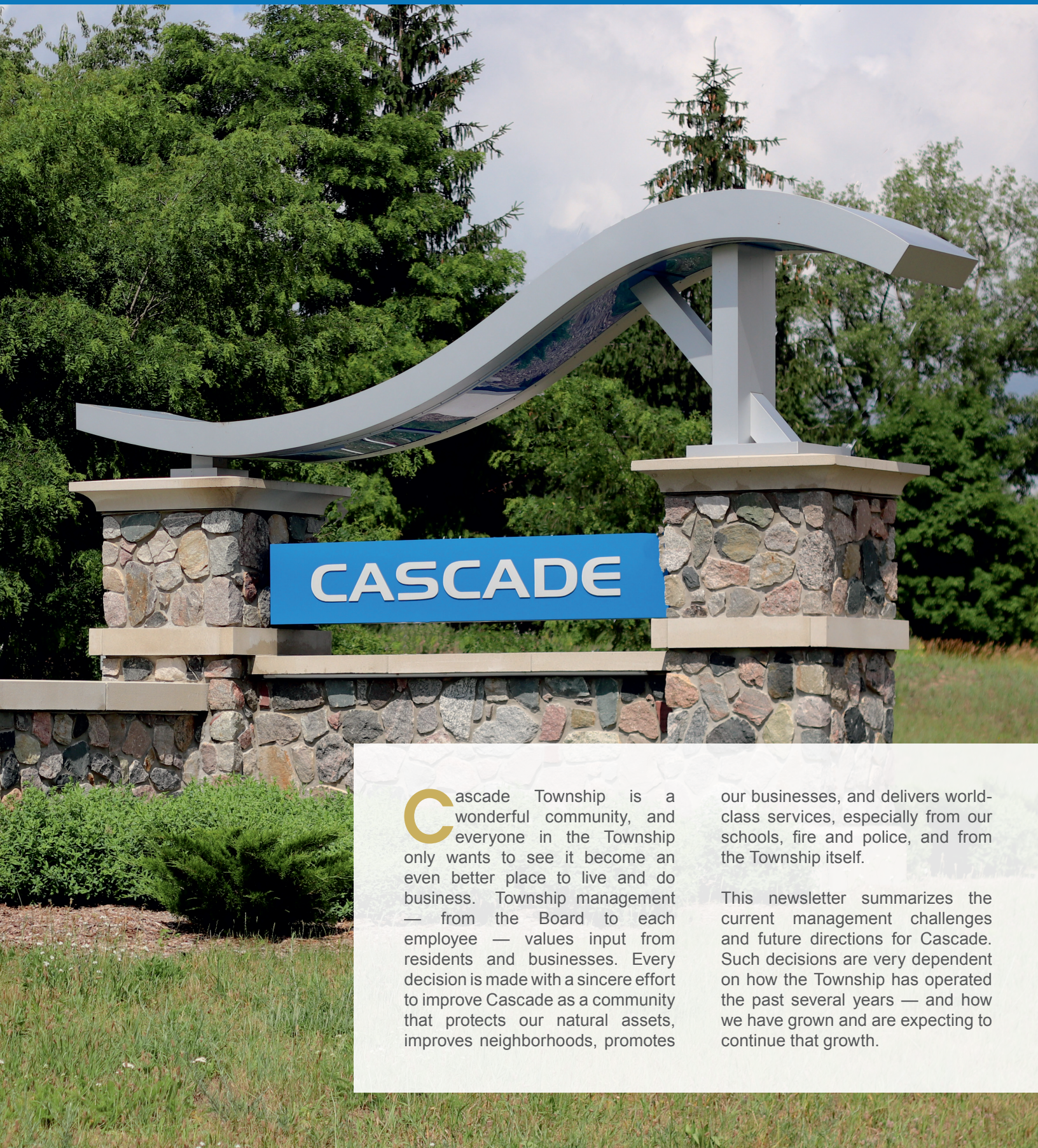


# Managing a Growing and Vibrant Township

## Facts + Findings About Your Township

A Special Publication from the Cascade Township Board



**C**ascade Township is a wonderful community, and everyone in the Township only wants to see it become an even better place to live and do business. Township management — from the Board to each employee — values input from residents and businesses. Every decision is made with a sincere effort to improve Cascade as a community that protects our natural assets, improves neighborhoods, promotes

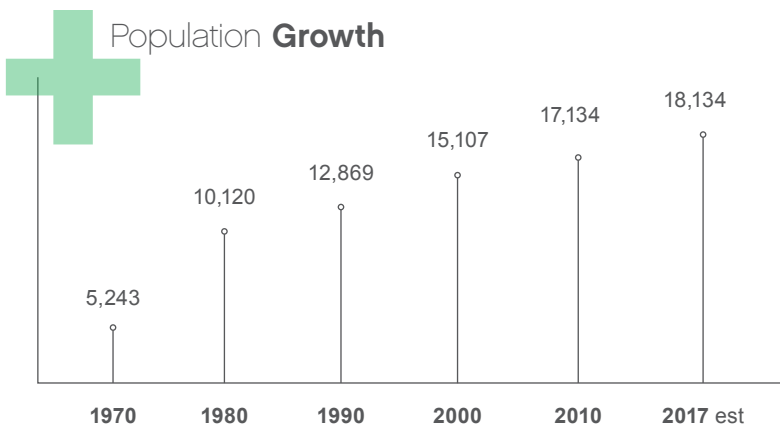
our businesses, and delivers world-class services, especially from our schools, fire and police, and from the Township itself.

This newsletter summarizes the current management challenges and future directions for Cascade. Such decisions are very dependent on how the Township has operated the past several years — and how we have grown and are expecting to continue that growth.

growing as a

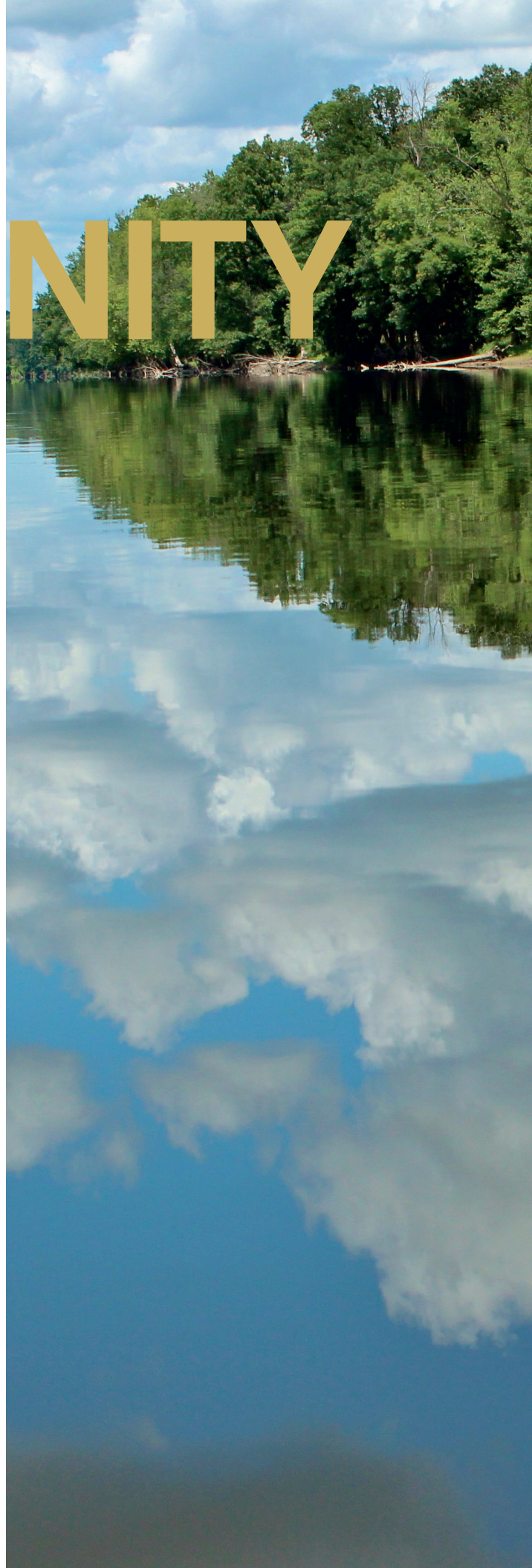
# COMMUNITY

Cascade Township has enjoyed steady growth over the last five decades. Residents and businesses tell us they appreciate the convenient location and the wide array of services and amenities. They are attracted by our family-friendly atmosphere, quality schools and outdoor opportunities. Since 2000, our population has grown by more than 25 percent — a number we expect will be even higher when we receive the next census results.



To better accommodate that growth, four years ago we began to look at the services we provide and the facilities we utilize. In 2015, the Township's engineering firm, FTC&H, did an extensive evaluation of Township Hall and administrative offices to determine long-term needs and if the existing Township Hall structure could be built up or out.

Residents provided feedback and made some excellent points, expressing concerns with the process of evaluating facilities since Fire Station 1 was not taken into account. Therefore, the Township Board ended the project and committed to create a new process to do a comprehensive evaluation of ALL Township facilities. The Township spent time developing a new process that would gather public input using multiple tools and methods, giving residents a chance to participate in the entire process.





Informed by resident input, we began this process for a second time in August 2018, committed to keeping residents informed every step of the way. The Township has been deliberate in its approach to professional communications by investing in:

- Information on our website
- Public meetings
- Social media
- Direct mailings
- Online surveys
- Quarterly newsletters
- News media

We went through a competitive bid process and hired Progressive AE, one of the leading architectural and engineering firms in West Michigan. In a recent survey conducted by Progressive, which received our highest response rate to date, approximately 600 residents and businesses shared that Cascade is a great place to live. Things they rated very highly were: amenities, convenience and connectivity, safety, a community/village feel, the river/trails/paths, the connection to nature, the library, schools, and the family-friendly atmosphere.

When asked about the “desired future for Cascade” in the same survey, people ranked these as priorities:

1. Community Center and green space for events
2. New/improved emergency services and coverage
3. Planned development/controlled growth
4. Small-town feel/sense of place
5. The preservation and enhancement of recreation/natural assets

When asked where priority should be placed “on investment in existing buildings,” people responded:

- Fire Station 1
- Township Hall
- Cascade Township park facilities

Also, key comments made were that the Township should: Separate Fire Station 1 from Township Hall; Prioritize Fire Station 3; and Expand the Library/Wisner Center to create a Community Center.

A Community Center can mean many things to different people. In the traditional sense, it is a building. In the study, though, it was more of a concept that could serve a multitude of uses. The report identified a “strong desire for a Township Center to physically anchor the Township and draw the community together.” Such a Community Center could be a combination of “outdoor green space with indoor gathering space.”

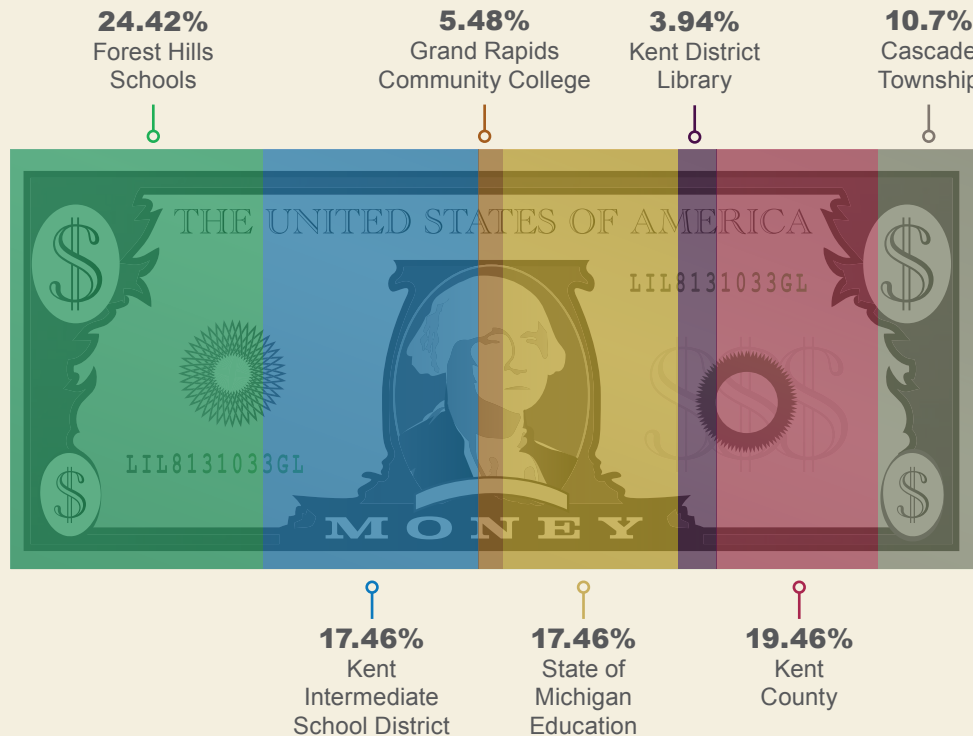
The Township entered this information-gathering process with no specific plans. The useful input provided by residents and businesses over the past six months via public meetings, an online survey, comment cards, and other methods is being closely evaluated and will certainly help drive future decisions. And while some people may disagree with the above priorities or conclusions professionally gathered by Progressive AE for the Township, these are factual findings, not opinions of the Township.

# Understanding LOCAL

## Cascade Township

collects taxes for essential services. Of the tax bills you pay, only 10.7 percent stay with the Township for our operations. For every \$1 dollar you pay in taxes, Cascade Township retains slightly more than 10 cents. We collect and disperse the other approximately 90 cents to the entities illustrated.

Property taxes account for approximately 40 percent of General Fund revenues. Other sources include state-shared revenues, fees for services, lease and franchise fees, and interest on investments.



## Managing Resources

Residents have voted for dedicated millages to support things such as pathway systems, improved fire and police protection, the library, and open space/parks. If we compare Cascade millage rates to nearby communities like Kentwood, Wyoming, Ada, East Grand Rapids, and others, Cascade's tax rate is comparable or lower than most communities that provide a comparable level of service.

Moreover, Cascade Township is recognized as fiscally very sound and well-managed. The Township has received a AAA bond rating, one of few local governments in Michigan with this rating. Though unfunded pension liabilities are a huge burden for many municipalities, Cascade reduced or eliminated

most long-term pension liability in 2018 as many employees moved to 401(k) style plans instead of pensions.

The millage rate in Cascade is comparable to many nearby communities. The services we offer are known as exceptional, whether we're talking about fire protection and emergency first response, the path system, parks, Building Inspections, or other services.

As a Township, we strive to **manage resources effectively**, to minimize debt by borrowing only when necessary, to plan/save for future needs, and to **enhance Cascade** as being the best community to live in.

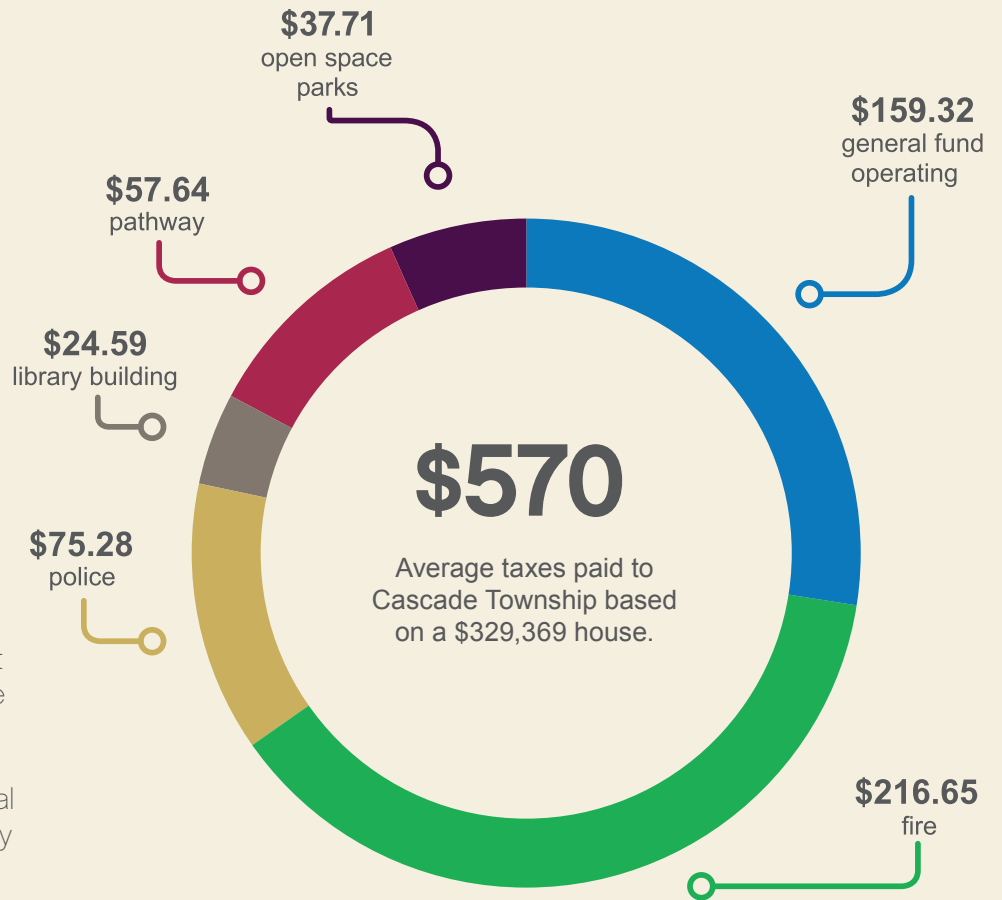
Based on a house valued at **\$329,369**, this table shows how much of a homeowner's local taxes would go to operating the following communities:

<b>Byron Township</b> 0.7100	\$116.93
<b>Gaines Township</b> 0.8546	\$140.74
<b>Walker**</b> 1.336	\$220.02
<b>Grand Rapids Township</b> 1.5995	\$263.41
<b>Alpine Township</b> 1.8808	\$309.74
<b>Ada Township</b> 2.7716	\$456.44
<b>Caledonia Township</b> 2.9344	\$483.25
<b>Cascade Township</b> 3.4623	\$570.19
<b>Plainfield Township</b> 4.1953	\$690.90
<b>Grand Rapids **</b> 8.971	\$1,477.38
<b>Kentwood</b> 9.6066	\$1,582.06
<b>Grandville</b> 11.05	\$1,819.76
<b>Wyoming</b> 12.1192	\$1,995.84
<b>Rockford</b> 12.9	\$2,124.43
<b>East Grand Rapids</b> 15.2157	\$2,505.79
<b>Lowell</b> 15.9423	\$2,625.45
<b>Cedar Springs</b> 16.4414	\$2,707.64

Numbers after community represent mills levied  
Source of data: AccessKent.com

\*\* Community also imposes a 1% income tax

# TAXES



This circle chart shows a breakdown of how Cascade uses the 10.7 percent of your local tax dollars that we receive (the dollar shown on the prior page). Each category is a dedicated fund approved by voters, except the General Fund. The General Fund is used to pay for dozens of services, such as many of those listed on page 6.



## Strengthening Communications

The vast majority of residents rely on the Township and the Township Board to make Township decisions because that is how it is supposed to work – that is the structure of government. Residents vote for fellow residents to represent them and their interests on our Township Board. In turn, our Board relies on input from Township leadership, residents, and business owners before taking actions on decisions that affect all of us.

Input from residents is critical to this process. Cascade has invested time and resources over the last decade to ensure we have as much input as possible. The challenge, of course, is that many residents don't have the time to understand all the details of every case, ordinance, or decision. To make Cascade as transparent as possible,

the Township has taken many steps to better communicate all aspects of the Township with residents.

The Township gets criticized at times by some residents for not getting the "right information" to them. There is a lot of competition for our attention these days, and the media are increasingly sharing less and less of our news. We understand it's frustrating not to have the exact information when you want it. However, know that the Township has taken more measures than at any time in its history to communicate with residents and be as open as possible.

If there is a communication channel we have missed, please let us know and we will evaluate it to see if we can include it in our mix.

evaluating

# Facilities + Services

To help prioritize the long-term needs of the Township, Cascade contracted with Progressive AE, a professional Engineering and Architectural firm based in Grand Rapids, to examine and evaluate Township facilities and to also engage the public in looking at facilities and services. This was done in late 2018 and early 2019. Progressive AE recommended that Cascade should prioritize investments in:

- 1. Fire Station 1:** 39 years old, not designed or built to code and lacking in safety measures
- 2. Township Hall:** 56 years old, unable to house all departments, challenges with connection to Fire Station 1
- 3. Emergency Services:** expanding and improving
- 4. Township Center:** serve as a community gathering space

Residents who took the public survey identified the following facilities as needing “the most help:”

- Fire Station 1
- Township Hall

Residents who took the survey also identified the following facilities as being “in the best shape:”

- Library
- Wisner Center
- Parks

At the public meeting in November 2018, which was attended by more than 100 residents, residents were given colored stickers to “vote” or give “points” to various facilities that needed the most attention.

Residents ranked the following as priorities for investment in existing buildings:

- **88** Fire Station 1
- **33** Township Hall
- **16.5** Cascade Township park facilities
- **8.5** Tassel Park restrooms
- **6** Tassel Park maintenance
- **4** Building and grounds
- **3.5** Library
- **2.5** Wisner Center

This is important information because the Township needs facts — not personal opinions or wants — to evaluate decisions and to make investments.

The Township has made no decisions based on any of this work and feedback. This information will be used in the future for prioritizing investments and evaluating options.

The Township will also continue to update all residents via public meetings, the Township web site, Facebook and Twitter, media outlets, newsletters, and other methods.

## Main Township Facilities

- Building Department (currently in a leased facility on Charlevoix Drive due to growth)
- Buildings and ground facility (located in Burton Park)
- Fire Station 1 (on Thornhills, connected to Township Hall)
- Fire Station 2 (on Buttrick)
- Library
- Township Hall (on Thornhills)
- Township park maintenance buildings
- Tassel Park maintenance and rest rooms
- Wisner Center

## Services Provided

- Assessing
- Economic development
- Elections
- Building inspections
- Buildings and grounds (and complete maintenance of the Township and parks)
- Capital planning and construction
- Cemeteries
- Drains
- Fire protection (including first responders and police)
- Historical Society
- Ordinances and enforcement
- Roads (in conjunction with Kent County, who owns the roads)
- Parks and recreation
- Passports
- Pathways
- Planning
- Street lights and holiday decorations
- Transportation
- Yard waste removal

The Township owns some additional undeveloped property, primarily near the library. This is in the “village area” that is often referred to as the heart of the Township, which is why the Fourth of July celebration is always featured here.



# the future of Cascade

Cascade is a growing and popular Township with a bright future. At some point, we will need to make important decisions about facilities and services mentioned on prior pages.

## Why?

Expanded and improved services will be needed as the Township continues to grow. Additionally, existing facilities such as Fire Station 1 are at the end of their useful life. In 2018 and 2019, we've sought professional recommendations, done a lot of fact-

finding, and took public input in order to shape decisions about facilities and services.

The Township will need to meet its infrastructure needs at some point. We have been fiscally conservative over the past decade, knowing that the day will come when investments are needed. We would like to do this without raising any new taxes or taking on extensive debt.

Decisions are seldom easy, and there will be many options and opinions. However, decisions have to be made for the overall benefit of all residents

and businesses in the Township. Decisions will need to be prioritized, and they will need to be paid for, preferably with no tax increases.

Decisions will need to be made based on facts with a focus on the long-term interests and needs of all residents.

Our goals as a Township remain the same: to manage resources effectively, to stay out of debt, to only borrow when it makes sense, to plan/save for future needs, and to enhance Cascade so it can become the best community to live in.



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## Cascade Charter Township

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Grand Rapids, MI 49546  
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cascadetwp.com

**Important information  
from the Cascade  
Township Board!**

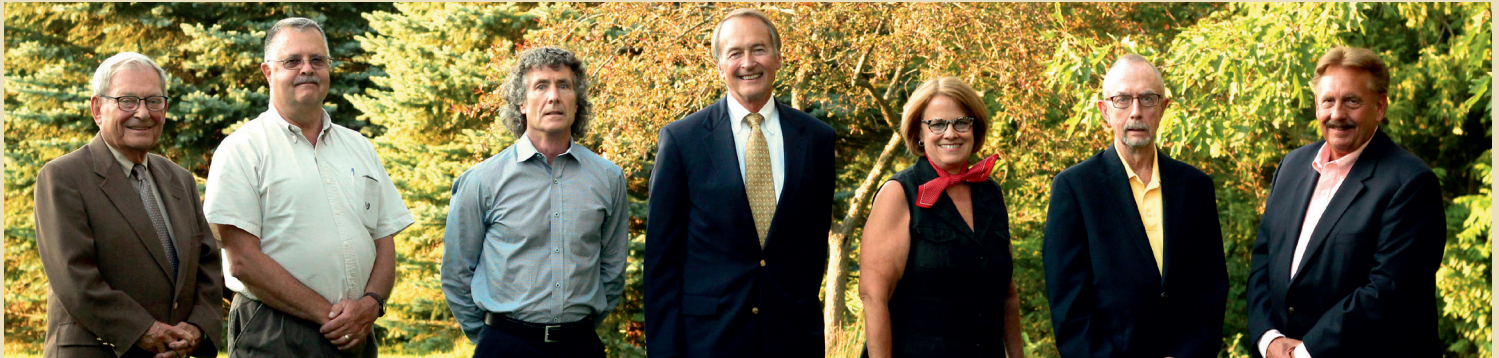
## an **ESSENTIAL OVERVIEW** from your township board

As the elected officials of Cascade Township, it is our responsibility to represent the interests and views of the residents who have elected us. We promise to listen to all issues and concerns with open minds.

We have developed this document to help you to better understand some **important questions** we often get asked regarding **taxes, infrastructure and other financial topics**.

As a Board, we are committed to keeping our township fiscally sound, as evidenced by our AAA Bond Rating.

We hope you find this newsletter filled with helpful information — and hope you will find it another way of continuing to improve communications with all residents. We pledge to make decisions based on the best interest of Cascade Township now — and in the future.



<b>Jack Lewis</b> Trustee	<b>John Shipley</b> Trustee	<b>Tom McDonald</b> Trustee	<b>Rob Behean</b> Supervisor	<b>Sue Slater</b> Clerk	<b>Ken Peirce</b> Treasurer	<b>Jim Koessel</b> Trustee
jlewis@cascadetwp.com	jshipley@cascadetwp.com	tmcdonald@cascadetwp.com	rbehean@cascadetwp.com	sslater@cascadetwp.com	kpeirce@cascadetwp.com	jkoessel@cascadetwp.com