



2020 Newsletter

Volume 8

February 14, 2020

SLT Township Board

- * Lee Mindemann
Chairman
- * Keith Aune
Vice Chairman
- * Tammy Ziegler
Supervisor
- * Jeff Michaelson
Clerk
- * Ronola Richards
Treasurer

Website:
starlaketownship.org

STAR LAKE TOWNSHIP ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

Written/compiled by Lee Mindemann

The Star Lake Township (SLT) Board of Supervisors is pleased to report a successful conclusion of 2019 township operations; and extends a sincere thank you to our residents and taxpayers for your continued support and cooperation. We are especially pleased to report no accidents or injuries; and are appreciative of the dedication and hard work of our staff.

This year’s edition of the SLT Newsletter has been delivered exclusively by email to those taxpayers/residents who have registered for electronic SLT Communications. Additionally, the newsletter has been posted on the SLT website (starlaketownship.org), and hard copies will be available at the Annual Town Meeting, or upon request via the Town Clerk.

The SLT Board urges property owners and voters to register for electronic delivery of SLT communications via the website. *Your email contact information will NEVER be shared or sold to others.*

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TOWNSHIP MEETINGS

Monthly SLT Board Meetings:

SLT Board Meetings are open to the public and are a good way for citizens to communicate their concerns, and to stay informed on local township issues. Monthly board meetings are held at 6:30 P.M. on the **SECOND TUESDAY** of each month, unless otherwise noted.

SLT Annual Town Meetings:

In accordance with state law, the Annual Town Meeting and Election are held on the second Tuesday in March each year. In the event of bad weather, the meeting may be postponed until the following Tuesday. Accordingly, this year’s meeting and election will be conducted **March 10, 2020 at the Town Hall, 31030 380th Street**. The election polls will be open from 5PM to 8PM, and the annual meeting will begin at 8:15 PM.

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TOWNSHIP MEETINGS ... continued

In the election township voters will cast their ballots for ONE three-year Supervisor position which is currently held by Tammy Ziegler.

Amongst other things, registered SLT voters in attendance at the meeting will be asked to **approve the annual SLT tax levy for 2021**. “Annual Town Meetings” unlike Monthly SLT Board meetings, provide registered voters the opportunity to vote on agenda items.

Agenda for Annual Meeting on March 10, 2020 (8:15 PM)

- Meeting Call to Order
- Election of Moderator
- Read Agenda for Meeting
- Minutes of 2019 Meeting
- Read Financial Reports
- Board of Audit (Election Results)
- Hospital District Report
- Board Chairman Comments
- Annual Levy Recommendation
- Motion for Board to contract services
- Set time/place for next meeting
- Other Business
- Motion to Adjourn

Please mark this important date on your calendar now, and plan to vote and attend.

MARCH 10, 2020 - SLT ELECTION & ANNUAL MEETING

VOTING 5 PM to 8 PM - MEETING AT 8:15 PM

Town Hall: 31030 380th Street

ELECTIONS 2020

Interestingly 2020 will be the first year since 1996 that we will have FOUR elections in our township:

- 3/3/2020 is the Presidential Nomination Primary election
- 3/10/2020 is the Star Lake Township Supervisor election
- 8/11/2020 is the MN State Primary election
- 11/3/2020 is the General Election

So please mark your calendars now, **DO YOUR CIVIC DUTY AND VOTE!**



2020 CENSUS

April 1st as we all know is “April’s Fool Day! But this year, more importantly for our country it’s also U.S. Census Day. The framers of the U.S. Constitution understood the importance of knowing where the country’s population resided, thus the federal mandate for a Census to be completed every 10 years. NO FOOLING!

The completion of an accurate census is important to all U.S. citizens, but especially to us here in MN’s 8th Congressional District. In 2010 we came

to within 8,739 residents from losing the 8th Congressional District. MN and especially here in Otter Tail County we don’t want to lose our congressional district; that translates to less representation in congress and fewer electoral votes in presidential elections. It also affects how federal/state funds get allocated, and that matters to all of us in Star Lake Township. SLT doesn’t get a lot of federal \$, but every little bit helps.

Find more info At: 2020censusruralmn.org.

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF TOWNSHIPS (MAT)

Within this newsletter and conversations with SLT Board members one might often hear a reference to “MAT” – an acronym for Minnesota Association of Townships. SLT is a dues paying member of MAT. The organization is a very valuable resource for us. It has three main purposes:

- 1) support township officials in their work by conducting training and acting as a resource in questions of town law;
- 2) protecting townships, their assets, and their officers and employees by offering a range of insurance products specifically designed for townships;
- 3) defending the prerogatives of township government and advocating for necessary resources in the state legislature.

In 2019 I again had multiple legal consultations with MAT Legal, while our Clerk and Treasurer also had several consultations with MAT Administrators. Additionally, SLT Board members attended seven group/individual training sessions covering a broad range of subjects. Other sessions include the EOTC Township Officers Assoc. and once again this year I attended Township Lobby Day at the State Capital which included several meetings with local legislators. While townships are

apolitical (*there are no RED or BLUE potholes or snow drifts!*), our state legislators can/do have significant impact on township residents by what laws they decide to enact or not enact. Township Lobby Day offers Township Officers an opportunity to express their concerns directly to state lawmakers. (Incidentally, the costs for Lobby Day are paid for by MAT.)

The MAT provided support is worth many times over the amount of our dues as it provides the due diligence training your township board needs in the execution of their duties. This training is especially essential to new township officers.

Election Judges undergo separate training provided by the State and County Auditor Offices. This training and preparation for this year’s elections began in January and will continue up & through the 2020 elections. We recognize and thank SLT Clerk Jeff Michaelson as well as all our Township Election Judges for their dedication and hard work.



**Minnesota
Association
of
Townships**

ROAD RIGHT OF WAY (ROW) ISSUES

This is a topic that has been discussed in every single edition of our past newsletters, and likely will be in all future editions. This is also a subject that most, if not all, *Township Officers will attest is the subject of their greatest concern/frustration in performing their duties. It is so, primarily because this is where we often have to say “no” to our friends/neighbors/property owners.* To be clear, Township Officers do not write these laws – but are legally sworn to insure they are complied with. Pretty much every single MAT Training Event we attend will have at least one session related to ROW – because that’s what most lawsuits are about.

ROW laws are very prescriptive with ample legal precedent and are rarely over-turned. They are tough laws because they need to be. The road right of way provides for effective maintenance operations, the accommodation of public utilities, and the safety of the general travelling public. The MN Statute that covers state, county, township, and municipal roadways is MN Statute 160.

MN Statute 160.2715 covers ROW Misdemeanors, while 160.22 covers Trees – copies of these are posted on the town website (on the Newsletters/Info page).

Here’s the Cliff Notes Version –

1. *Do not plant, place, or build “anything” but grass and a legal mailbox within the road right of way.*
2. *Do not push or dump snow onto a roadway or within its ROW.*
3. *Do not cultivate/farm the ROW or it’s ditch.*
4. *Trees do not become “trees” until they are 6” in diameter at a point 24” above ground – less than that, they are legally considered “brush” and can be legally removed by the road authority at its discretion.*

Given the above it is acknowledged that SLT like most rural MN Townships has a multitude of uncorrected ROW violations for a variety of reasons. A concentrated effort to correct them all would be incredibly expensive and time-consuming. However, the law is the law and the SLT Board is committed to developing and implementing a plan to eventually address all these issues.

The initial steps of the plan are:

- A. ROW violations that present a clear and present danger to the public will be addressed immediately and dependent upon circumstances may be corrected without prior notice.
 - B. ROW violations that have a negative impact on employee safety, roadway stability, or drainage will be the next priority. Property owners will be advised of the violation and requested to take corrective action.
 - C. New” ROW violations will be addressed next in order to avoid “growing” more problems. Property owners will be advised of the violation and requested to take corrective action.
 - D. SLT will continue with its tree trimming operations which essentially includes the trimming of branches over-hanging the ROW at an elevation of less than 14 feet. Removal of trees will only be done with owner permission.
 - E. An increased use of legal counsel to address specific SLT ROW issues to insure property owner and township rights are properly respected.
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NOXIOUS WEEDS - It's Everybody's Business

I am Tammy Ziegler your local noxious weeds inspector for Star Lake Township. I am including this letter in the annual newsletter to hopefully save time and money. Taking care of these weeds is very important for our land, bodies, and animals.

The big one that we dealt with this summer was the Bull Thistles, Canadian Thistles, and Plumless Thistle. We do need everyone's cooperation with these weeds that blow seeds everywhere when they mature especially when they go on neighboring properties that have taken the precautions to rid of these plants. If one person takes care of them and the next does not this is a cost that just went down the drain for them.

It would be greatly appreciated if everyone works together to bring these weeds under control. It is truly for everyone's benefit. Oh, by the way it is MN State Law, and townships are required to conduct annual inspections and report findings back to their local Soil & Water Conservation District. The recent advent of "Palmer Amaranth" (now within 100 miles of OTC) has heightened awareness and demonstrated the need for more robust inspections.

Here are some that were found this year in SLT:

Prohibited. The list below are to be eradicated which means all above and below plant parts are to be destroyed. (Herbicide, dug up & burned, or bagged and put in county dumpster)

Giant hogweed
Common Teasel

Dalmation toad flax
Yellow Star Thistle

Meadow Knapweed

Controlled. The list below is to have efforts made to control these plants. (Herbicide or mowed prior to going to seed)

Garlic Mustard
Plumless Thistle
Leafy Spurge

Narrow leaf bittercress
Canada Thistle
Purple Loose Strife

Leafy Spurge & Wild Parsnip
Purple Loose Strife
Common Tansey

Restricted. The below are detrimental to humans & animal health.

Glossy Buckthorn

Common Buckthorn

Specially Regulated. Measures must be taken to minimize potential harm caused by these plants.

Poison Ivy

References. MN Noxious Weeds

www.dot.state.mn.us/roadsides/vegetation/pdf/noxiousweeds.pdf



There is also an app called "picture this". If you are unsure and need help for identifying these I do have the app and would be glad to help you. I look forward to working with all to get these under control for the beauty and safety of our area.

Thank You. - Tammy Ziegler, Star Lake Township Noxious Weeds Inspector

2020 MAT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

As in years past MAT will again be offering scholarships to up to five high school juniors currently attending a MN public, private, or parochial high school, or a home study program that plan to further their education at a college, university, or vocational school.

MAT has sweetened the deal this year by increasing the scholarship to \$2,000 vs. the previous \$1,000. The competition requires an essay between 450 and 500 words in length and this year's subject is the Annual Town Meeting.

For more information contact your high school counselor or visit www.mntownships.org.

Will a SLT student be among the lucky FIVE?



DUST CONTROL FOR 2020

Individuals interested in requesting seasonal dust control are reminded that applications for such are due to the Town Clerk by April 1, 2020 and payment for the application must be received by the Town Clerk by May 1, 2020.

Application forms may be obtained from the township website "Road Services" tab, or by contacting the Township Clerk.

We have been informed by our vendor that they are converting to liquid Calcium Chloride due to "sourcing issues". SLT has historically used liquid Magnesium Chloride which was more economical. Consequently, we are anticipating the cost will increase somewhat versus last season. We will communicate the new rate once we receive that information from the vendor. Please direct any questions you may have on Dust Control to Lee Mindemann at sup2@starlaketownship.org



SHOULDERING MAINTENANCE

One of the nastier gravel road maintenance operations is “shouldering maintenance”, or sometimes called “reclaiming”. Simply put – over time vehicle traffic will displace the gravel from the roadway to the edge of the road. As the gravel builds up on the shoulder, vegetation begins to take root, more gravel works its way in, more vegetation takes root, etc.. Soon you have what is referred to as a “secondary shoulder”.

To restore the road’s ability to properly drain water (cuz we all know what happens when water sits on a gravel road), the secondary shoulder must be removed. This is best done in the spring before vegetation gets too high, it’s dry enough to not clump, but not too dry to make it hard, and there’s no rain coming. One may ascertain that timing & conditions are important.

A shouldering disc is used to bring the material back on the road and the motor grader follows to spread that material across the road so it can dry more if needed, and traffic can break-up the clumps, so the motor grader can return a few days later to spread it back across the road surface in the opposite direction for the same purpose, etc..

All of this of course before the next significant rain, if not – *the road turns to soup* – people get upset, call a Supervisor to share their opinion – which is greatly appreciated because we love profane laced feedback! Once the road dries a bit the grader will come back and straighten it up – this could take several passes over several days, because the grader operator loves to play in the mud. You should also know – calling again to share your opinion on the matter will not necessarily expedite a return visit by the grader operator.

BTW, his 2nd cousin is the guy who plows snow across your driveway in the winter just because.

Most folks that have lived on a gravel road understand – don’t like it, but understand. Unfortunately, this is likely why shouldering maintenance does not get done as often as it should, which just makes it worse. The bright side is those of you who had soup for a road last spring are safe for a few years – the rest of you, your turn is coming – a few miles each year til done, then we all get to start over again. Yes, this is a touchy subject.

WINTER OPERATIONS

A couple of brief reminders on snow operations:

1. When cleaning out your drive, **DO NOT** deposit snow upon the roadway or it’s ROW (Right of Way). This applies for all public roads and it is state law.
2. Please do not park anything on the roadway in advance of, or during a snow event. Many of our roads are narrow, and we cannot afford to have a plow truck get stuck trying to get around a parked vehicle.
3. Again, for a copy of the SLT Snow Removal Policy and Snow-plowing Routes consult the Road Services Tab on the website.
4. Property Owners – **if possible, please do not park seasonal use items such as watercraft, trailers, docks/lifts, or any type of vehicle within the ROW or close to it.** This is especially critical for those areas prone to severe drifting during the winter. This greatly complicates/inhibits our snow plowing ability.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS - 2019 OVERVIEW

I'm pleased to announce that Star Lake Township is in good financial condition. Our total cash assets at the conclusion of 2019 were slightly in excess of \$232,000 which I think may be a record high. Specific 2019 financial data will be shared as part of the Annual Meeting on March 10th, and as always will be posted on the Town Hall bulletin board for public viewing. I hope to see you all there – weather permitting.

I also am pleased to share that we had no accidents or injuries, nor did we incur any weather-related damages. Old man winter was NOT kind to us in the 2018-19 season resulting in snow removal expenses of about \$24,000. Repairs to the snowplow truck were a big part of this number coming in at about \$7,000. We lost the right rear duals in early January, and in a freak chain of events again later that month. Unrelated causes – only things in common, both were expensive repairs on an old truck (1994).



As most may recall we had an incredibly cold February event which caused significant problems with fuel gelling. We were not alone as neighboring townships and the county highway dept. experienced similar issues. We estimate service calls, multiple fuel filter changes, purging of fuel tanks, etc. cost about \$2,700. The event certainly highlights the need for increased heated garage space; with only one space - equipment

had to be rotated through to thaw out – taking precious time.



Unfortunately, the 2019-20 winter season is not looking much better at this point. The accelerator pedal on the truck fell off due to rust/wear. That and the headlights switch had to be replaced. Due to the age of truck the accelerator part had to be fabricated – another expensive repair.

This, plus the major repairs required to the truck in recent years makes it apparent we are overdue for an upgrade. The board has agreed and currently in discussions to get this done by fall of 2020. We are looking to upgrade the plow attachment as well with a 12' Falls power reversible plow which provides for much greater flexibility (it can plow either direction). As noted later, we have already ordered a similar style plow for the front of the motor grader for the same reasons.

Gravel and road maintenance services provided by Egge Construction (ECI) of Pelican Rapids remained stable at our budgeted amount of \$25,000. Additionally, we used ECI to make a road improvement this year in the curve just past Camp Joy on 380th St.. A perpetual soft spot finally gave way in late spring closing the road to a very narrow single lane.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS - continued

A type of Geo-fabric was installed and then overlaid & compacted with 16" of Class 5 gravel. The project was completed in one day in October at a cost of about \$4,000. This spring will tell if this procedure works as we hope. We have 21 other places identified in SLT with similar problems (see Road Report dtd 5/2/19). The financial reality is we generally can only afford to band-aid fix our roads. I'm hopeful with continued financial diligence we can become more pro-active and begin repairing these trouble spots "before" they become a "big" problem.

Tree trimming by Countryside Tree Service was much reduced this year due to a death in the family of our contractor. We are uncertain at this point of our plan going forward. We are hopeful Countryside Tree will be back full time in the spring. Additionally, we may be looking at additional options for vegetation control.

Our contracted professional beaver trapper netted 14 beavers in 2019 at a cost of \$350. SLT is very fortunate to have the services of Mike Nelson. I think this may be the first year in my tenure that we did not have a culvert failure/repair, and I'm quite sure getting control of the beavers is a major factor in this.

As stated earlier I am pleased with our improved financial health. Listed below are some items of note items that will impact the 2020 financial year and beyond:

1. The SLT Board has decided to purchase the current grader for \$176,000 and will be financing that purchase with annual payments of \$21,442.60, which is an increase of \$2,914/yr. vs lease, over 10 yrs.. The grader currently has about 2000 hours on it, which is extremely low and has a current average retail value of \$250,000.
2. The SLT Board has purchased from funds on hand a new Falls PRP1255 snowplow attachment for the front of the motor grader

for \$17,360 (delivery expected this spring), (PRP=power-reversible-plow; 12' wide & 55" high)

3. The SLT Board will be moving to upgrade the 1994 Ford F-8000 snowplow truck prior to the fall of 2020. It is estimated this to be a \$75,000 transaction. This issue is still under study & discussion.
4. Anticipated legal/professional services costs of \$3-6,000 as ROW issues persist.

What's missing from the above are what might be some capital improvement needs? Things like additional heated garage space with floor drainage, a utility sink with hot water, perhaps a working bathroom, new siding on the hall, new windows for back entry way, etc..

Your SLT Board remains committed to doing the best job we can with the resources at hand. Some of the above listed items we are actively working on, others are on the radar screen so to speak, while yet others are on the far horizon. We are always appreciative of your support and open to hearing your ideas. Best Wishes to you for 2020 and beyond.

Respectfully, Lee Mindemann



STAR LAKE TOWNSHIP BOARD/STAFF

The SLT Board is comprised of three elected Supervisors, an appointed Clerk, and an appointed Treasurer.

Chairman: Lee Mindemann (2018-2021)

218-298-2010 sup2@starlaketownship.org

Vice-Chairman: Keith Aune (2019-2022)

218-457-0520 sup1@starlaketownship.org

Supervisor: Tammy Ziegler (2017-2020)

701-367-7164 sup3@starlaketownship.org

Clerk: Jeff Michaelson (Appt'd 03/08/2016)

612-210-6144 clerk@starlaketownship.org

Treasurer: Ronola Richards (Appt'd 12/08/16)

218-205-7916 treas@starlaketownship.org



The current township staff is as follows:

Terry Johnson: General Maint. man, mowing, and primary operator of "Snow Grader"

Mike Sundblad: Summer Motor Grader Operator, and alternate for winter operations

Jeff Michaelson: Snowplow Driver and serves as Township Clerk

Jim Piper: Alternate Snowplow Driver

The Supervisors would like to thank each of our staff for their excellent work during 2019.

We were saddened to hear of the passing of former Township Supervisor Ron Peterson this past December. Ron served as Supervisor from 2012 – 2017. We are grateful for his service and pass our condolences to his family & loved ones.

Star Lake Township Website: starlaketownship.org
