

The Ottawa Way

NEWSLETTER

BIANNUAL NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2022

Introducing Ottawa County's first newsletter!

In it you will find stories about people, programs and places affirming that you made a great choice to live in Ottawa County. As the seventh-most populous county in Michigan and consistently one of the fastest growing in the state, Ottawa County is truly 'Where You Belong.'

New to West Michigan? Perhaps you were attracted to the area's spectacular Lake Michigan coastline, where nature is cherished and protected. Maybe it was the friendly people of Ottawa County who are working hard to succeed in charming downtown small businesses, at manufacturing hubs with global impact, or on acres passed down from generations that brought you here. Perchance you saw that in Ottawa County, we embrace innovation and never wait for someone to solve our problems for us. We've coined this lifestyle 'The Ottawa Way.'

Newcomers and natives alike can be confident that the Ottawa County public services you receive are high-quality and cost-effective. Ottawa County's property tax levy is not only lower than neighboring counties, but it is the sixth lowest in Michigan. We care about people and take our jobs serving you very seriously. Whether you find yourself navigating the halls of our office buildings or muscling through unfamiliar government processes, you can rest assured that we are here to help!



Ottawa County
Where You Belong

Help 'freeze' heating costs for less fortunate

With the cold weather comes a seasonal fear for some families: heating bills and how to pay for them. Community Action Agency in Ottawa County assists financially qualifying families with utilities, but they need your support. Join Walk for Warmth so that, together, we can keep kids warm this winter. ALL of your gifts stay in Ottawa County. A one-time helping hand paying an energy bill can make a big difference to a neighbor struggling to stay financially afloat. You can:

- Walk the 2-mile stroll in Zeeland on Saturday, February 5 at 8:30 a.m. Register online at miOttawa.org/w4w. You can also register that morning at City on a Hill located at 100 Pine Street in Zeeland. Make a donation of any amount and join others walking for the cause. If a financial gift is not in your budget, you can simply walk to raise awareness that there are people grappling to make ends meet right here in Ottawa County.
- Walking in the bitter cold not for you? Unable to make it on February 5? You can donate to Walk for Warmth at miOttawa.org/w4w. Checks payable to Walk for Warmth can be sent to Community Action Agency, 12251 James Street, Suite 300, Holland, MI, 49424.

A group participates in Walk for Warmth in 2019



**If you need
utility assistance or
other services, please
call 211.**

Oral health program delivers 'Miles of Smiles'

Many of us take our visits to the dentist for granted, but for some Ottawa County residents, access to dental care is not financially feasible. Ottawa County's 2020 Community Health Needs Assessment identified that 22.6% of survey respondents had not had a routine teeth cleaning in the previous year. For those who can't afford to see a dentist, the stigma of poor oral health can have long-lasting social and psychological impacts, including a lack of self-confidence, poor mental health or fewer employment opportunities.

For more than 26 years, the Ottawa County Department of Public Health (OCDPH) Miles of Smiles program has met this critical oral health care need by providing dental services to Medicaid insured and financially qualifying uninsured children, age birth to

20. The work of Miles of Smiles protects the future dental health of the individuals served, preventing expensive restorative needs.

The Miles of Smiles mobile unit is a 40-foot, custom designed dental office on wheels. The unit is equipped with dental treatment rooms, a reception area, a sterilization center, digital x-ray system, wheelchair lift and cloud-based dental software.

A former patient's parent said, "You were out at school yesterday and you worked on my son. I just wanted to let you know how thankful I am. He got off the bus and had the biggest smile I've ever seen. Then he gets in the car and he looks at me and smiles even bigger...he says 'look mom they fixed my teeth.' He had decay in his

front teeth and kids had started teasing him about it, so he wasn't really smiling a lot. You did the fillings, and I can't thank you enough. The smile you put on my child is just...I don't have the words, but thank you."

Miles of Smiles is able to provide these services through community partnerships as well as a network of approximately 100 volunteer dental professionals and students. Funding for Miles of Smiles is provided by Ottawa County, donations and grants.

For more information on Miles of Smiles or to learn how you can volunteer, visit www.miOttwa.org/dental or call 616-393-5694.



Miles of Smiles welcomed a new mobile unit in the fall of 2020. The unit administers nearly all of the oral health services you would receive at an annual visit to a traditional dental office.

Miles of Smiles volunteer dentist Stephen C. Meade examines a patient.



Miles of Smiles Registered Dental Hygienist Megan Arreola prepares for a dental x-ray.

Benefits for veterans

The County could not be more grateful for veterans. The Ottawa County Department of Veterans Affairs is available to assist those who are applying for benefits. The department can help with:

- Federal benefits like injury compensation, pensions and more
- Medical transportation
- Emergency financial assistance
- Retrieving military service records

To make an appointment or request medical transportation, call the office on Monday, Tuesday or Friday between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. at 616-393-8387.

Thanks to millage, county's mental health needs are being met

Ottawa County cares about its people. In 2016, residents declared that compassion when voters passed a 10-year millage dedicated to mental health. "The millage has given us the flexibility to direct vital supports and services when and where they are needed," said Lynne Doyle, Executive Director of Community Mental Health of Ottawa County. Five years on, programming funded by this millage has reached thousands of Ottawa County's most vulnerable residents. Examples of millage funded programming include:

- Social recreational programs: enhances well-being for adults with disabilities by adding additional meaning to their life. Ottawa County partners with the Momentum Center, Heritage Homes Inc. Social Rec program, IKUS Life Enrichment Services Rec Connect, and Pioneer Resources LARC program to offer a variety of activities and opportunities throughout the county.
- Ottawa Pathways to Better Health: assists people with accessing community services to improve physical and mental health. The program works to decrease unnecessary hospitalizations and emergency department visits with early intervention and referrals.
- Ottawa Community Schools Network: ensures that students are physically, emotionally and socially well and have strong family support so that each child reaches their potential.
- Senior Reach: provides mental health services to seniors, allowing them to remain independent in their communities.
- Housing: assists in securing grants for homeless and permanently disabled persons.



Pam and a Heritage Homes Direct Caregiver enjoy social time.

Understanding property taxes

Taxable values. Assessments. Millage rates. What do they mean? More importantly, how do they relate to residential property taxes?

In Michigan, assessments are placed at 50% of market value. Calculating those assessments is the responsibility of either the local municipality or the Ottawa County Equalization Department (who provides this service on behalf of some local municipalities). Assessors review properties to ensure accuracy of data on the assessment roll.

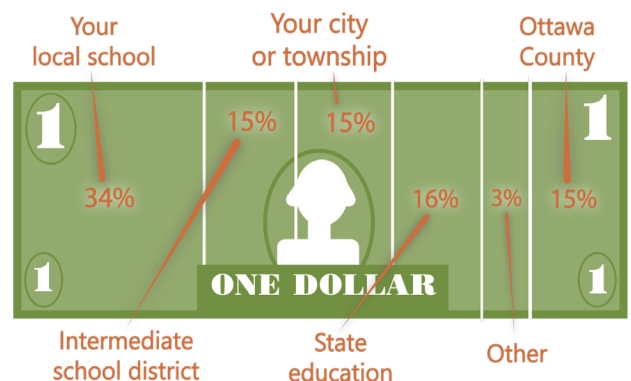
What determines whether my assessment increases? Township or city assessors place assessments on every property in their jurisdiction based on sales of like properties. To aide assessors in this and to confirm assessments are placed uniformly, the Ottawa County Equalization Department analyzes the real estate market using sales and appraisal studies every year to determine how much classes of property should change to match the market. Equalization safeguards fair and equitable assessments across the entire county.

What about taxes? How much property tax you pay is based on your taxable value and your millage rate. Your taxable value is calculated from the initial purchase price of your property. In the year following the transfer of ownership, your taxable value is set to your assessed value. Each year thereafter it may increase by the lesser of 5% or the rate of inflation (absent any new construction on the property). In areas where property values are

increasing quickly, a property's taxable value will frequently lag behind its assessment.

Calculating your property tax bill is not complex. The equation to determine your tax bill is: taxable value x millage rate ÷ 1000. For math challenged folks, rest assured your tax bill does this for you. For those interested in digging in further, you can use the formula to compute how much of your bill goes to your local library, school district, and to all the other public agencies. Incidentally, residents will be happy to learn that Ottawa County boasts the sixth-lowest millage in the state.

How is a property tax dollar divvied up?



In other words, 15¢ of each property tax dollar you pay funds law enforcement, parks, mental health and other county operations.

Deputy awarded after rescuing woman from burning house

Deputy Cassie Tolman from the Ottawa County Sheriff's Office was honored with the Lifesaving Award after rescuing a resident from her burning Grand Haven Township home. On October 1, 2021, Ottawa County Central Dispatch received a call from a woman who was trapped in her bedroom as her house was quickly becoming engulfed in flames. Unable to escape through the blaze and the thick, dark smoke, the caller, Joyce Stille, was directed by the 9-1-1 dispatcher to get low to the ground and cover her mouth in an attempt to filter the air. Help was on the way. Ottawa County's Deputy Tolman was the first to arrive at the scene. Taking swift action, Deputy Tolman was able to extricate Ms. Stille through the window, saving her life. In a brief ceremony at the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners meeting on November 23, 2021, Deputy Tolman was presented the Lifesaving Award in the company of family, colleagues and friends. Several Ottawa County Central Dispatch employees were also recognized for their roles in the lifesaving incident.

Keep your loved ones safer with Smart911®

Smart911® allows you to create a safety profile for your household. You'll include information that 9-1-1 might need in an emergency. Then, when someone in your household dials 9-1-1 from any phone associated with your safety profile, your details are immediately displayed to the dispatcher providing knowledge to facilitate the best, fastest response possible. In an emergency, seconds count. To sign up, please visit Smart911.com or download the app.

Your Smart911® safety profile can include:

- phone numbers for all of your devices
- home, work and other addresses
- floor plans
- medical conditions
- medications
- vehicles
- pets
- and more



Smart911®

Download the Smart911® App
It Could Save Your Life



Joyce Stille and Deputy Tolman



The Stille residence after the home was engulfed by flames on October 1.



Exterior of the Stille residence after the blaze on October 1.



Sheriff Steve Kempker presents the Lifesaving Award to Deputy Tolman.

Venture out for a winter StoryWalk®

Many residents are already familiar with the sledding, snowshoeing and skiing available at Pigeon Creek County Park. (If you're not, check out miOttawa.org/winter-rec) A StoryWalk® is another great way to get outside this winter as a family. Pages from a featured book are posted along a path for your family to read together during park hours. Thank you to our local libraries for making StoryWalk® possible. Stories, dates and parks are:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| • Thank You, Omu!/Gracias, Omu! | Jan 2-16 | Paw Paw Park East |
| • Winter Dance | Jan 17-30 | Hager Park |
| • Once Upon a Winter Day | Jan 24-Feb 6 | Hemlock Crossing |
| • Ten Ways to Hear Snow | Feb 7-20 | Hawthorn Pond Natural Area |
| • Over and Under the Snow | Feb 14-27 | Riley Trails |
| • Almost Time | Feb 28-Mar 6 | Hemlock Crossing |



Farmland programs support vital local agriculture industry

No matter where you live in Ottawa County, chances are you are not far from a local farm market or farm stand. It's one of the things we love about our county, and it's one of the reasons that in recent years Ottawa County leadership has placed a greater programming emphasis on supporting our food and ag industry.

The County's anchor program for supporting agriculture is its Farmland Preservation Program. This program protects our vital farmland by placing permanent conservation easements



Three generations of the Klein family pose around their preserved property

on agricultural property, ensuring it will be available to produce food, fiber and more for generations to come. Landowner interest in the program has grown significantly in recent years, with 32 farmers applying to preserve 3,300 acres of farmland. One of the reasons more farmers are interested in this program is that many of them lack an heir to take over their operations, which led us to a new effort to support our ag industry – a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) grant.

The BFRDP funded the MiFarmLink project that began in 2020. The project supports new farmers coming into the industry to take over for aging farmers by increasing access to farmland, mentorship opportunities and succession planning resources.



Programs like Farmland Preservation and MiFarmLink are ways the County achieves the goals set forth in their Focus on Agriculture Plan, an ag economic development guide that was approved during 2020's National Agriculture week. This plan identifies key ways to support and enhance the second biggest industry in our County – agriculture.

Discover more at miOttawa.org/farmland and mifarmlink.org.

Countywide groundwater monitoring project

Ottawa County and its partners are working to map the groundwater beneath their feet in order to guide local policy decisions and effectively manage a dwindling aquifer supply.

In 2018, a Michigan State University Institute of Water Research groundwater study revealed that without intervention, the quality and quantity of Ottawa County's bedrock aquifer system will continue to decline. Since that time, the County has developed a detailed plan to mitigate the issues, formed a Groundwater Board to guide local policies, and begun the difficult task of raising awareness of water shortage in West Michigan.

The County's Department of Strategic Impact (DSI) is spearheading the Groundwater Sustainability Initiative and is currently engaged in a multitude of mitigation strategies. In August of 2021, DSI partnered with the Michigan Geological Survey (MGS) to drill several wells in strategic locations across the county. This joint effort allowed the County to share the cost of drilling the wells with MGS, who is working on a separate project – drilling down into the bedrock layers and analyzing core samples to confirm the location of glacial and bedrock aquifers and to map the regional movement of glaciers during the last ice age.

The wells are currently in the process of being converted into monitoring stations, and the County has entered an agreement to share data with the U.S. Geological Survey's model, the National Groundwater Monitoring Network.

The severity of Ottawa County's groundwater situation has been recognized by the State of Michigan, which has recently approved the appropriation of \$1.1 million to be used towards additional groundwater monitoring.



County to break ground on new Family Justice Center

This spring, Ottawa County will break ground on a new Family Justice Center to better serve residents. This project will bring the entire Family Division of the 20th Circuit Court under one roof in centrally located West Olive. The Family Court, Friend of the Court and Juvenile Court will be in the new building.

To finance the construction project, the County will sell bonds to investors who will be repaid with interest. The interest rate paid is based on the County's bond rating, akin to an individual's credit score. Like credit scores, a better bond rating means a lower interest rate. Ottawa County boasts a AAA credit rating, the best score possible. Borrowing also allows the County to spread the cost of the facility across multiple generations.



Left: The Family Justice Center will be built in West Olive on existing county-owned property at the Fillmore Street Complex.

Below: An architectural rendering of the Family Justice Center to be constructed in 2022.



Thoughtful planning underway for American Rescue Plan Act funds

This past year, Ottawa County received \$56.6 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The Act, passed this past March, is intended to deliver relief in the wake of COVID-19. More specifically, the primary purposes of these funds, as highlighted by the U.S. Treasury Department, are:

1. Support urgent COVID-19 response efforts
2. Replace lost revenue for eligible state, local, territorial and tribal governments
3. Support immediate economic stabilization
4. Address systemic public health and economic challenges

To ensure the public has a voice in how Ottawa County utilizes these ARPA funds, the County Board of Commissioners on June 8, 2021 appointed 19 community members to serve on an American Rescue Plan Act Advisory Committee. Representing

a cross-section of the community, these 19 committee members include local government, charitable foundations, economic development, nonprofit and human service agency professions.

The committee went straight to work prioritizing how the \$56.6 million should be spent. Following extensive discussions, fact-finding and outreach, the Advisory Committee settled on this funding hierarchy recommendation:

1. County operations: Offsetting costs and strain on resources due to the pandemic
2. Countywide broadband: Address persistent gaps in high-speed internet service
3. Affordable housing: Leverage federal dollars through public/private partnerships to build needed affordable housing units
4. Social and human needs: Uplift and

expand upon social programs and assistance, such as child care and mental health

5. Business stabilization needs: Provide support services to businesses such as necessary working capital, technology improvements, workforce retention and training

What's next?

Once the priorities are reviewed and approved by the Board of Commissioners, the Advisory Committee plans to finalize the application forms and logistics associated with funding distributions for approved projects, along with reporting and accountability requirements. When these plans are in place, the Committee expects to receive its first round of funding requests from various Ottawa County entities aligned with the recommended funding priorities. The County looks forward to seeing the positive impacts of this federal assistance.

Your County Commissioners

The Board of Commissioners provides leadership and policy direction for all County activities. The Board is comprised of 11 members elected every two years from districts of equal population.

The Board of Commissioners meets the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month at 1:30 p.m. in the Board Room at 12220 Fillmore Street in West Olive. You can view meetings live on [youtube.com/miOttawa](https://www.youtube.com/miOttawa) or watch them later at your convenience. Meetings are open to the public and include opportunities for participation.

In lieu of speaking at the meeting, you can contact your County Commissioner at any time via phone, email or letter. Letters should be addressed to Ottawa County Administration, 12220 Fillmore Street, West Olive, MI 49460 and include your County Commissioner's name. If you are unsure which district you reside in, use our interactive mapping tool at miOttawa.org/BOC.



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