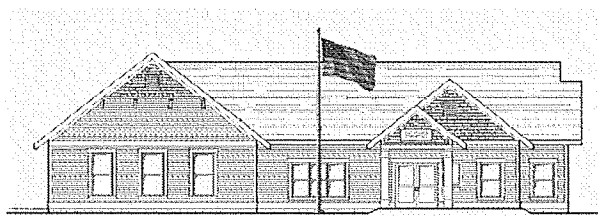


West Traverse breaking ground on new township hall

TOWNSHIPS

*By Harbor Light News Staff
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West Traverse Township will break ground for its new township hall on Aug. 24, part of what leaders envision as a 'Centennial Campus'. (Courtesy image)

A groundbreaking ceremony for the beginning of West Traverse Township's "Centennial Campus," will take place on August 24 at 11 a.m. The event will celebrate the start of construction for a new township hall that will be located in the parking lot area across from the old township hall on the corner of Lake St. and M-119.

The groundbreaking ceremony, which will include some brief remarks by State Representative Parker Fairbairn, will happen in the parking lot where the new building will be built. Light refreshments will follow across the street, at the existing township hall, which has clocked 122 years of service to the community.

The new building is more than 30 years in the making, noted West Traverse Township Clerk Jay Olson.

"I've only been here three years, but our treasurer has been here 20 years and witnessed many up and down cycles of 'we should get a new hall,' a conversation that started probably a decade before she was in her position. It was one of those things that just kept getting kicked down the road," Olson said.

The project as it exists now took almost two years to come to fruition. The township first hired a consultant to look at the current facility, and the work has been discussed at nearly every monthly township meeting since around October 2024.

Once the township board got serious about constructing a new hall, a building subcommittee was formed, and from there a design and finance committee was also formed.

"I'd say it's been at least 55 meetings, if not more," Olson said of the work put into making this goal a reality.

The current hall is limited by both its historic construction and limited opportunities to catch its set-up. The business offices of West Traverse Township are in a basement space that Olson noted have no privacy and very little warmth during the winter months.

He noted one of the biggest concerns— besides the fact that people often go to the hall's locked front door, not realizing they need to go around back to the lower level—is that it is woefully out of compliance when it comes to ADA accessibility. The new building, he said, will not have either issue.

The new building will be 4,100-square feet and all one level. The existing building is two stories (including the lower level) and 2,800 square feet. The township meeting room will be roughly the same size in the new building, Olson noted.

The township clerk also did some homework, visiting other area township halls and talking to residents about issues like poor sound systems. The new hall will have upgraded audio-visual capabilities, meeting the needs of a more modernized approach to accessibility and engagement, and allowing for more clear transcriptions of township meetings, Olson explained.

One other thing the new township hall will have is a shower and a generator. Having experienced the ice storm in 2025, the goal is to have the hall also serve as a place residents can come during any such emergency.

All in, the project will cost \$3 million, including a healthy contingency fund. The goal, Olson said, is to build a facility that will last another hundred years, hence the "Centennial" part of this story.

Olson said it's important to understand that just as a modernized building will be better for township staff and boards to conduct business, honoring and preserving the historic West Traverse Township Hall will be important for the community.

"My personal vision is this concept of a 'Centennial Campus.' The new building will serve as the anchor, but it will also include the old township hall. My dream is for a nonprofit organization to take it over as a gateway to the Tunnel of Trees, and have it be used as a historic and cultural center of the township," Olson said.

But Olson's campus concept doesn't actually stop there. The township also owns six acres of land adjacent to the current parking lot and future township hall that includes the old Cook barn. He noted there is some community interest in the preservation of that barn, and in the best-case scenario, it could be saved and a path could be created connecting the property to the township hall. Olson said he imagines a pavilion and picnic area for the community to use one day.

"There's a lot of value to generate here," he said of the properties, adding when it comes to the historic hall, "I'm open to talking to anybody at any time who has an interest in saving it."

Construction on the new hall is slated to be complete within a year.

"Please join us," Olson said of the groundbreaking ceremony at 11 a.m. on August 24. "It will be brief, and when we're done with the speeches and shovels, we will invite people back to the old hall for light refreshments, and to see the blueprints and finishing samples for the new building." The groundbreaking will take place at 5626 Lake Road, right across the street from the existing West Traverse Township Hall.