

## Bates Township Seeking Residents Input

Bates Township officials are currently considering future plans for their township buildings. The township currently owns three buildings, the Bates Township Hall and adjacent shop and the former Bates Township School. At their July 8, 2020 meeting, the board opted to create an unpaid volunteer Building Committee to gather information and explore options. The committee, comprised of Bates Township residents, Krist Atanasoff, Margee Brennen, Mike Franzene, Ernie Schmidt, and Mike Stafford have been having periodic meetings and presented their findings to the board at their October 14<sup>th</sup> meeting.

The historic Township Hall, built under the direction of Bates Township Supervisor Victor Benson, was the result of a conversation at the 1907 annual meeting. Up until then, board meetings were held in the homes of board members and elections were held in schools. The township safe, which was extremely heavy, had to be moved each time a new treasurer was elected. A building committee was established, and an architect drew up the plans for the new building. Local workmen Andrew Erickson and Eric Berg were the carpenters on the project and Albert Johnson, a stone mason, built the sturdy stone foundation. The rough-cut lumber came from Pete Carlson's sawmill. Total cost for the building was \$2,296. Two barrel wood stoves provided heat, privies were located behind the building and water was carried in. The township safe, which no longer required a man and horse to bring it to the meetings, was moved to its new permanent home. The first township meeting at the newly built hall was held on March 27, 1908. In 1918, when women were granted the right to vote, many Bates Township women cast their first vote ever at the Bates Hall.

Over the years, improvements were made to the hall. In 1922, electricity and water were installed and in 1955 indoor plumbing and restrooms finally arrived in the hall. Throughout the years, the Bates community has been strong supporters of the hall, rallying with fundraising efforts to purchase chairs, dishes, and cutlery for community and private events held at the hall such as wedding receptions, dances, funerals, craft sales and auctions.

While the hall has been the site of many noteworthy events during its 113-year history, it is now, not surprisingly, in need of some repair. According to Township Supervisor Jon Oberlin, "While the building is still sound and standing square, the foundation needs repair. There are water issues in the basement and the front stoop, gutters and associated landscaping will also have to be repaired. These items are estimated to be between \$60,000 and \$80,000."

The shop for the township was built in 1994 as part of the township water grant project. It is located directly behind the hall and houses equipment, vehicles, and associated maintenance equipment. The township office archival materials are stored in loft area of the building. Machinery storage space is becoming limited at the shop.

Bates Township residents passed a bond issue to build a new elementary school in the mid 1950's and the new school was completed in 1959. District wide school consolidation took place in 1968 and ownership of the building was transferred to the West Iron School District. Bates Township residents continued to pay off the building after consolidation. The township acquired the former Bates Township School back from West Iron County School District in 2018 for \$100 plus closing costs. A roof was immediately replaced at a cost of \$62,000 using monies from the general fund. 80% of the building is currently rented out to various entities such as the Intermediate School District and the West Iron

School District and this covers current operating costs. While the boilers are dated, they are functional and parts for future repair are available. Twenty percent of the school is available as possible space for the Township offices and storage.

While the hall needs repair, because of its 113-year history, it meets the criteria for Michigan historic designation and may qualify for grants that would aid in its repair as well as upkeep.

The Township is exploring options of whether to move its offices to the School, or to remain at the current hall location. Moving the offices to the school would separate office personnel from shop personnel.

The board is extremely interested in the opinion of township residents regarding these buildings before making a final decision. As such, they are asking Bates Township residents to complete a brief survey. The survey can be found online on the Township's website at [www.batestownship.com](http://www.batestownship.com). A resident may also pick up a copy of the survey outside of the Township offices in a brochure holder located by the back door. Surveys will be accepted until November 30, 2020. The Building Committee will tabulate the results of the survey and present their findings to the board at the December board meeting.

Bates Township meetings are held every month and the public is welcome to attend and public comment is welcome. For more information visit [www.batestownship.com](http://www.batestownship.com). The website contains direct contact information for township officials as well as meeting information.