

GRASSROOTS

The Official Newsletter of the Indiana Township Association

2015 Year In Review & 2016 Preview

The Indiana Township Association is pleased to present an overview of some of the events and accomplishments of the past year...

JANUARY 2015

- The lobby team geared up for another legislative session. The year started with 570 Senate Bills and 667 House Bills – all of which had to be read to determine their impact on townships. Twenty-five bills were determined to be “priority bills” for the ITA’s lobby team – many of which were labeled “onerous”.
- A full day of training for 290 newly elected township officials was provided in Fishers. The facility was at capacity and the responses to the sessions were very positive. Several township trustees joined the ITA as new members that day. The overwhelming response called for another training in February.

FEBRUARY 2015

- As the first half of Session wrapped up, the lobby team had made great strides in pushing back much of the potentially harmful bills, including an amendment to HB1433 which would have eliminated township boards. HB130 (Rep. Ziemke -elimination of township government) failed to get a hearing and SB427 (Authored by Senator Niemeyer) passed the Senate handily, allowing townships a portion of Public Safety LOIT. The annual attempt to consolidate township fire departments in Marion County failed in the Senate’s Local Government Committee.

MARCH 2015

- Our Legislative Conference & Convention was held at the Hilton downtown which allowed easy access to and from the capitol building.
- The election of officers to the ITA Board brought several new faces to the table, including President John Henry. A tribute was given to the presiding President, Mary Hart, for her many years of service to the association.
- Representative Kevin Mahan spoke to the attendees and gave the charge to the ITA that during the course of the next 9 months, focus be given in discussions with members regarding the elimination of township boards and all oversight to be held by the trustee. Rep. Mahan

(Chairman of the Government and Regulatory Reform Committee) has for several years been a proponent of township government but with the elimination of boards.

- The legislative reception, which closes the conference, was well attended by legislators and, unexpectedly, Governor Pence attended and made his way around the room.

APRIL 2015

- The General Session adjourned sine die a few minutes before midnight on April 29th with little harm done to township government. The Senate passed 121 bills and the House passed 139. Most of the onerous provisions died in committee. Some of the new provisions become/became effective in 2016:
 - Volunteer Firefighters were reinstated the ability to hold office (HB1433)
 - Internal Controls & Variance Policies for all local units (HB1264)
 - SBOA examination fees were increased (HB1137)
 - Local Option Income Taxes were restructured & simplified – impact unknown
 - SBOA may now examine on a schedule based upon the “risk” of a unit
 - Insulin rendered as all other forms of assistance (SB318)

MAY 2015

- ITA President John Henry sent a letter to all members asking for volunteers who would like to be involved in the association. He determined that adding co-chair positions would be an effective way to include more members in the working process. After John appointed the committee chairs and co-chairs, several of the committees were immediately put in motion to plan the annual educational conference.

JUNE – AUGUST 2015

- ITA Staff spent the summer months making preparations for the fall conference, attending county meetings around the state, and developing tools for townships.
- For the first time, we offered an all-day financial seminar for trustees, clerks and board members. Professionals were secured to assist in the presentations to a full crowd of officials. Again, new members were attracted to be involved in the association.
- Staff developed a professional partnership in order to provide financial technical assistance to townships via a contract with the ITA. Several townships have found success in the program, including winning several budget appeals that would have otherwise not been utilized and “losing” the additional needed funding.

SEPTEMBER 2015

- The annual educational conference & trade show was again a success, passing attendance totals over the past several years! Some of the highlights:
 - Trustee of the Year: Dan Combs, Perry Township – Bloomington
 - Township of the Year: Wayne Township, Marion County – Andy Harris, Trustee
 - Board Member of the Year: Lesia Meers – Center Township, Delaware County
 - Employee of the Year: Nina Rivas - Portage Twp., Porter County
 - 25+ trade show booths – exceeding our records for the past decade
 - 30 classes held – many with brand new curriculum, topics & presenters
 - We said “goodbye” to many faithful township representatives who passed away during the past year:
 - Richard Mochel –Madison Township Trustee, St. Joseph County (he was known as the “longest serving township trustee” having served consecutively for 48 years.)

- Diane Kuntz – Taylor Township Trustee, Howard County
 - Marjorie Himes – Prairie Township Board, Kosciusco County
 - Harold Stegomoller – Brown Township Trustee, Ripley County
 - James Babcock – Paoli Township Board, Orange County
 - Ann Knox – Investigator, Marion Township, Lawrence County
 - Bob Kelso – White River Township (past trustee), Johnson County
 - James Spade – Bearcreek Township Board, Jay County
 - Steve Needham – Fairfield Township Board, Tippecanoe County
 - James Jones – St. Mary Township Board, Adams County
 - Barbara Inman – Jackson Township Board, Hamilton County
 - Bruce Westrick – Aboite Township Board, Allen County
 - Greg Balmer – Georgetown Township Board, Floyd County
 - Rosemary Vogel – Robb Township Trustee, Posey County
 - Sandra Nobbe – Laugherty Township Trustee, Ripley County
 - Ron Hines – Hickory Grove Township Board, Benton County
 - Will Sims – Past Hanover Township Trustee, Jefferson County
 - Richard Griebel – Past Marion Township Trustee & Board Member, Allen County
 - Gale Ferris, Sr., Shelby Township Trustee, Jefferson County
- ❖ This list represents only those officials who were recognized by their peers at the annual conference or for whom notice was sent to the office. Should a reader be aware of others who should be listed, please let the ITA office know and changes will be made to the on-line edition of this newsletter.

OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 2015

- IACIR (Indiana Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations) initiated a study of fire protection costs & funding. ITA Staff was invited to participate. Initial reports should be distributed 1st quarter of 2016.
- The Indiana Court of Appeals decision in Belork v Latimer was handed down on November 16. According to this case, a fence is not a partition fence unless it is “used” by both property owners. Use appears to be based on both parties having livestock to restrain. In this action a grain farmer doesn’t need a fence and therefore wouldn’t be using it. This is a complete change in the partition fence law as we have known it. Stay tuned as we monitor the situation.
- ITA lobbyists had one-on-one meetings with several lawmakers, many of whom are in leadership positions, in order to make recommendations to the ITA Board & Legislative Committee.
- The Legislative Committee met and developed an agenda and positions for the upcoming 2016 session of the General Assembly. Here are some details:
 - Continue to support voluntary merging of townships and oppose mandatory plans. Develop a phase-in plan to help incentivize merging where it makes sense.
 - In an effort to continue being transparent to our citizens, support the elimination of publishing trustee’s annual report in return for mandatory publishing notice of all township board meetings.
 - Oppose the decrease in the 2% property tax cap on agricultural property unless a viable replacement is given.
 - Continue to work to insure that townships are considered and included in any potential additional revenues available to local governments.
 - Continue to pursue reinstatement of levy appeal for Township Assistance (up to \$.01)
 - Continue to use the ITA’s 2010 Task Force recommendations as tools in leveraging positive legislative results.

DECEMBER 2015

- In response to the directive for variance policies and internal controls handed down by the State Board of Accounts in November, we developed and distributed a guide with templates for townships' reference and use. We recommended that a variance policy be put in place as early as possible in January, preferably during the annual meetings to be held January 5th.
- An outline has been drawn for the internal controls guide and templates.

What Can You Expect in 2016?

- During the 2016 "short session", we anticipate it to be "quiet" on issues related to township government and local government as a whole. However, we will not become complacent nor sedentary. The lobby team will continue to pursue good measures that will enable officials to work for the citizens of the townships in an equitable and economic way.
- The 2016 Legislative Conference & Convention will be held February 7-9 at the Hilton Hotel in Indianapolis. Please make every effort to attend! If unable to attend two full days, consider joining other township officials as we welcome state legislators and office holders to our reception Tuesday evening (Feb. 9) from 5-7 p.m.
- If you are having difficulty making ends meet for your township, you might consider the ITA's Financial Technical Assistance Program as we continue to promote it statewide. Your township can contract with the ITA for specialized services such as filing levy appeals or establishing a fire cum fund.
- The ITA Board and Staff members will continue being available to meet with trustees and board members, upon invitation, on a county wide or regional basis. The local officials set the meeting place and time with an expected agenda that works for others in their area.
- The ITA's Internal Controls Guide & Templates will be published this spring in order for adoption by township boards prior to the July 1st deadline.
- If you have a large township, it may prove cumbersome to develop the required internal controls policy. The development of an Internal Controls Technical Support Contract for large townships is in the works. The ITA will sub-contract with other professional firms for the actual work while your contract is with the association in the same way that our Financial Technical Assistance Program is set up.
- A full-day Township Assistance Training is a potential for this year. Please let us know of your interest and we will confirm the training based upon your responses
- Lastly, mark your calendars now for the 2016 Educational Conference & Trade Show which will be held at the Sheraton Hotel September 18-21. Don't let this opportunity pass you by. The responses to this conference have been overwhelmingly positive and considered to be the best training made available to township officials.