

CITIZEN GUIDEBOOK & WELCOME PACKET

FOR THE

CITY OF WEST BRANCH



*The City
With a Smile!*



This guidebook/welcome packet contains helpful information that would be useful to newcomers to the City of West Branch, as well as long-time residents. We have had many requests for something in writing that summarizes the policies, services, and amenities available in the City, and we hope this guide will serve that purpose. However, we are always looking for ways to improve the services that we provide to our citizens, so if we have left out any information that you feel should have been included, please let us know.

The City of West Branch is operated under the Council/Manager form of government. This means that the City Council is the governing legislative body of the jurisdiction, and that the City Manager is appointed by the Council to serve as the City's chief administrative officer.

CITY COUNCIL –The West Branch City Council consists of 7 members who are elected by the voters, one of whom serves as Mayor. Three of the seven Council members are considered “At-Large,” which means that they are elected to serve the entire City rather than just one of its political subdivisions. Three other Council members are elected as representatives for specific “wards” (see attached “Ward Map”). The Mayor is elected by voters for a 2-year term and serves as the chairperson of the Council. The Mayor Pro Tem is selected by the Council from among its members in January of each even-numbered year to preside over Council meetings in the event of the Mayor's absence. Both the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem have a voice and vote in all proceedings of the Council equal to that of other members of the Council, with no special tie-breaker or veto powers.

The Council meets for its regular meetings on the first and third Monday of each month at 6:00 pm. Both meetings are held in the Council Chambers at the West Branch City Hall, which is located at 121 N. 4th Street in West Branch (next to the public library). Members of the public are encouraged to attend these meetings and are always given an opportunity to address Council with any questions, comments, or concerns they may have. Council appreciates any and all input received from residents. In addition, residents who are unable to attend Council meetings in person are always welcome to share their views with the City Council via mail or email. Current members of the West Branch City Council are as follows:
1. Mayor William Ehinger (at large, term expires 12/31/2016); 2. Mayor Pro Tem Rusty Showalter (ward

3, term expires 12/31/2018); 3. Councilman Kim Ervans (at large, term expires 12/31/2016); 4. Councilman Tim Schaiberger (ward 2, term expires 12/31/2018); 5. Councilwoman Denise Lawrence (at large, term expires 12/31/2016); 6. James Hasty (ward 1, term expires 12/31/2018); 7. Councilman David Lucas (at large, term expires 12/31/2016).

CITY MANAGER – The City Manager for the City of West Branch is appointed by the Council and carries out the day to day operations of the city and all duties requested by Council. Examples of these duties include seeing that laws and ordinances are enforced, advising Council as to the financial conditions of the City, preparing the annual budget and submitting it to Council for review and approval, making policy recommendations to the Council, and supervising all City employees and Departments. The City Manager also serves as a Planning Commissioner, the City’s Zoning Administrator and Chief Building Official, an Airport Board Commissioner, the President/Treasurer/Secretary of the City’s Industrial Development Corporation, the Secretary for the West Branch Area Wastewater Treatment Plant Authority, the Chair of the City Recreation Committee, and the Administrative Advisor for the City’s Downtown Development Authority. The current City Manager for the City of West Branch is Heather Grace, who can be reached directly via email at hgrace@westbranch.com.

PLANNING COMMISSION – The Planning Commission for the City of West Branch is composed of nine members, one administrative representative (City Manager), one representative from the City Council, and 7 residents, appointed by City Council. They act as the initial reviewing body for appeals of various zoning decisions, including requests for sign variances. The Planning Commission also reviews site plans for select residential and all commercial developments to help ensure continuity and compatibility of land usages for the benefit of the City as a whole. The Commission meets the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00pm and also on an “as needed” basis on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 6:00pm. All Planning Commission meetings are held in the Council Chambers at West Branch City Hall.

TAX BILLS – Tax bills for the City of West Branch are mailed twice a year. On July 1st, City, State, Community College, and School Taxes are received and payable at City Hall without penalty through August 31st. This is the larger tax bill of the year. Winter tax bills, which include County and School taxes, are mailed around the first of December and are payable at City Hall without penalty through February 14th. After March 1st, all taxes are payable at the Ogemaw County Treasurer’s Office, 806 W. Houghton Ave, Rm 103, West Branch MI 48661. Auto debit is available, with the amount due being withdrawn on the due date, or you may pay by credit card on the internet at www.GovPayNOW.com. Contact City Hall for additional information.

CITY CLERK/TREASURER –The City Clerk/Treasurer maintains voting records, registers new voters, and distributes and receives absentee ballots. To be eligible to vote you must be a US citizen, 18 years of age, a Michigan resident for a minimum of 30 days, and reside in the City of West Branch. Anyone needing assistance registering to vote is encourage to contact City Hall. The City Clerk also manages all City elections, including nominations for elected offices. Any individuals interested in learning more about how to run for elected office are encouraged to contact the City Clerk for additional details. Individuals interested in serving as non-elected officials may also contact the City Clerk for details regarding how to seek appointment on the City’s various Boards and Commissions. Civic engagement through participation in local government is a vital part of our democracy, and all citizens are encouraged to consider such service. The current Clerk/Treasurer for the City of West Branch is John Dantzer, who may be reached directly via email at jdantzer@westbranch.com. Mr. Dantzer is aided in

his duties by the City's Deputy Clerk/Treasurer, Michelle Frechette, who can be reached directly via email at mfrechette@westbranch.com.

CITY POLICE –The West Branch City Police Department consists of a Chief, three full-time police officers, and varying numbers of part-time officers, depending on need and availability. There are two phone numbers for the City P.D. For non-emergency calls, use (989) 345-2627. **FOR ALL EMERGENCIES**, including *POLICE, FIRE, and MEDICAL EMERGENCIES*, **ONLY DIAL 911**. The Police Department encourages you to contact them anytime you observe anything of a suspicious nature. When you are going to be away from your house for vacation, business, etc., you may also call the City Police to schedule a “house watch”, during which City police officers will be aware to keep a special look out for any out-of-the-ordinary happenings around your property while you are away. Current full-time City police officers include: Chief Ken Walters, Sergeant Steve Morris, Officer Michael Godfrey, and Officer Blake Beehler.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS – The City Department of Public Works (or “DPW”, as they are commonly called), consists of a Superintendent, along with several heavy equipment operators and laborers. The list of services provided by this department is long and diverse, including: road and sidewalk repair, monitoring and maintenance of water and sewer lines, brush removal, leaf removal, snow removal, cleaning and maintenance of municipal parks and buildings, and much more.

DEPARTMENT OF WASTEWATER TREATMENT – The City of West Branch has partnered with its neighboring municipalities, West Branch Township and Ogemaw Township, to form a “Wastewater Treatment Plant Authority.” This Board oversees the operations of the West Branch Area Wastewater Treatment Plant, which is located on Steve Norton Drive in West Branch Township. The Wastewater Treatment Plant consists of a Superintendent and several Water Systems Operators, who perform a wide variety of tasks all aimed at ensuring that both our surface water and our drinking water are safe and protected for future generations.

NEWSLETTER – The City publishes a quarterly newsletter which is sent to each resident's home along with their quarterly water/sewer billing. These newsletters contain information that each resident should be aware of. The newsletters are also listed on the city's website at www.westbranch.com. Should you lose your copy or wish to review past newsletters.

ORDINANCES – An ordinance is a piece of legislation enacted by a municipal authority. Ordinances have the force and effect of law and may be enforced by the City Police and the City Attorney. Penalties for ordinance violations vary, depending on the type of penalty specified in the ordinance, but enforcement for violations can involve formal arrests, prosecution at the district or circuit level, depending on the severity of the violation, and fines/costs and/or jail time. All City ordinances are available for review during regular business hours at the West Branch City Hall. They may also be reviewed online by visiting the City website and clicking on the link that reads “Government – Ordinances & Charter.” A selection of some of the City's many ordinances are discussed below. However, since this guide does not provide enough room to discuss all of the City's ordinances, nor does it allow enough space to fully articulate all of the details regarding the ordinances that are mentioned, all residents are urged to familiarize themselves with the entirety of all City ordinances. Questions regarding the interpretation of City ordinances may be directed to cityhall@westbranch.com, whereby they will be forwarded to the City Attorney, Will Engemann.

PARKING – Please take note that there is **NO PARKING** on any street from 2:00am – 6:00am November 1st through March 31st. Violators will be ticketed, and if the situation calls for it, a violator’s vehicle may also end up being towed at the owner’s expense. Such rules are necessary so that we can sweep and remove snow from the streets without obstruction. Some exceptions may be permitted in limited situations, but require approval in advance from the Chief of Police and the Superintendent of the Department of Public Works. If you have any questions regarding this Ordinance please call City Hall.

RECYCLING – Recycling is good for our environment and good for our economy, and is therefore highly encouraged by the City of West Branch, which offers a Recycling Center that is free to use for City residents. To utilize this free recycling service, residents need only come in to West Branch City Hall to complete a short application so that they can receive a “Recycling ID Card,” which must be presented during each visit to the recycling center. The West Branch Recycling Center is located off North Fourth Street on Lucas Lane. Recycling Center hours of operation are Tuesdays from 2:00pm-6:00pm and Saturday from 9:00am – 1:00pm. Recycling Center Acceptable Materials Usage Guides are available on the City website or at City Hall. Though there is no formal charge for recycling at the center, the workers are paid through donations, so contributions are highly appreciated.

YARD WASTE – The City has various policies regarding yard waste, depending upon the type of yard waste that is being collected. Brush pick-up is the last Monday of the month from March to November. Spring and fall leaf pick-up is scheduled annually. Watch your newsletter and our website for specific dates.

TRASH PICK-UP – Select waste disposal services are provided at no additional charge to City residents by virtue of the City refuse millage, which is used to contract with Republic Services, the waste services company that provides weekly trash-pickup for City residents every Wednesday. To participate, you must have your trash in the provided receptacle and curbside on Wednesday mornings. In the event of a major holiday that week, trash pick-up will be delayed one day. You are allowed 2 large items per week in addition to your standard Republic cart. If you do not have a garbage cart, contact City Hall and we will make sure that you get one.

DOGS AT LARGE – No dog shall be permitted to run at large within the City limits of West Branch. Every person, firm, or corporation owning, harboring, or keeping any dog shall keep said dog under reasonable control of some person at all times. Under reasonable control shall mean (a) Secured by a leash held by the owner or the owner’s agent (b) Secured by a leash which is attached to a stationary object and attended by owner or owner’s agent or (c) On the premises of the owner and unable to leave the property or confined in a vehicle. Any dogs found running at large within the City of West Branch may be seized by a City Police Officer or authorized employee and/or a citation may be issued to the known owner for a violation of this ordinance. Dogs seized under this ordinance may be sent to the County Animal Control.

PROHIBITION OF PIT BULL DOGS – Through ordinance that was enacted in 1999, the City Council of the City of West Branch declared it to be unlawful for any person to keep, harbor, possess, walk on a leash, or allow to be at large any Pit Bull dog at any time within the limits of the City of West Branch. This prohibition defines “pit bull dogs” as any of the following: (1) A Bull Terrier breed of dog. (2) A Staffordshire bull terrier breed of dog. (3) An American Pit Bull Terrier breed of dog. (4) An American

Staffordshire terrier breed of dog. (5) Any dog of mixed breed or of other breed than the above listed, which breed or mixed breed is known as a Pit Bull dog or Pit Bull Terrier. (6) Any dog which has the appearance and characteristics of being predominately of any of the above listed breed or any combination thereof.

FIRE ORDINANCE – The City of West Branch allows outdoor fires, but only under certain circumstances. Said fires may only be kindled and maintained in “portable outdoor fireplaces,” with the term “portable outdoor fireplaces,” being defined as follows: “a movable container, which is commercially manufactured [and not homemade] and designed with a chamber to hold an outdoor fire, used for heat or light, but not for cooking, [and also] must be equipped with a screen capable of preventing burning embers from escaping. Additional restrictions apply and must be carefully abided by to avoid violation of the ordinance, so residents are urged to familiarize themselves with the entirety of the ordinance by visiting the City website or stopping in to City Hall to review a paper copy BEFORE they start any fires within the City limits. Additional burning restrictions apply in City parks, along with restrictions governing certain materials that are prohibited from being burned altogether. In NO circumstances is a fire allowed that would pose an imminent threat or danger to persons, property, or public safety.

ZONING CODE AND ORDINANCES – The City of West Branch has a comprehensive zoning code, including various zoning ordinances that apply in different situations, depending on the zoning district. Zoning code violators may be penalized, with the penalty depending on the severity of the violation and also depending on what penalty is specified in the ordinance. Copies of the zoning code for the City of West Branch, as well as corresponding zoning maps may be obtained on the City website or may be reviewed during regular business hours at West Branch City Hall. Zoning questions may be directed to either the Zoning Administrator (the City Manager), or the Zoning Administrator’s designated agent (the City Clerk/Treasurer).

SCHOOL DISTRICTS – The City is serviced by two school districts – St. Joseph Schools, and the West Branch /Rose City Area School District, which includes Surline Elementary/Middle School and Ogemaw Heights High School. Bus service is also provided to the nearby Charter School of Charlton Heston Academy, which is located in St. Helen, Michigan. Administrative office phone numbers are as follows: WB/RC Schools: 989-343-2000, St. Joseph Schools: 989-345-0220, Charlton Heston Academy: 989-632-3390.

POSTAL/MAIL SERVICE – An office of the US Postal Service is located at 122 S. 3rd St, along with U.P.S. located at 615 Parkway Drive.

PUBLIC LIBRARY – The City of West Branch is also blessed with a wonderful public library, which is conveniently located next to the West Branch City Hall at the following address: West Branch Public Library, 119 N. 4th Street. General hours of operation for the Library are 10:00am – 7:00pm Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00am-5:00pm on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, and 10:00am-2:00pm on Saturdays. The Library is typically closed on Sundays, and can be reached via telephone at (989) 345-2235.

We would also like to introduce you to our **CITY STAFF**, of which various employees work nights and weekends, and the City Hall Staff is available to you Monday through Friday, 8:00am – 4:30pm, in person or at (989) 345-0500. City Hall is closed weekends and holidays.

City Manager:	Heather Grace	Police Chief:	Ken Walters
Clerk/Treasurer:	John Dantzer	Officers:	Sgt. Steve Morris
Dep.Clerk/Treasurer:	Michelle Frechette		Michael Godfrey
Executive Assistant:	Kelli Collins		Blake Beehler

DPW Superintendent:	Dennis Jameson	WWTP:	Dan Robb
	Larry Greer		Tim Kirby
	Jeff Brindley		Joe Weber
	Howard Beach		Tony Leach

The Council Members do not have offices at City Hall, but you may get in touch with any of them by contacting City Hall during business hours. Our **CITY COUNCIL** members are:

Mayor:	Bill Ehinger
Mayor Pro-Tem:	Rusty Showalter, Ward III
Council Members:	Kim Ervans, At Large
	David Lucas, At Large
	Denise Lawrence, At Large
	James Hasty, Ward I
	Tim Schaiberger, Ward II

Our **OGEMAW COUNTY COMMISSIONER** is Bruce Reetz, for District 2.

Again, THANK YOU, for choosing to live in the City of West Branch. We hope this packet will answer many of your questions, but we are sure there will be others that come along. Just call City Hall – we are here to help!