IRON RIVER TOWNSHIP—After years of attempting to collect a sewer availability charge on the state-owned former Camp Ottawa facility, Iron River Township may be ready to give up.
At the Township Board's November meeting, Supervisor Mark Polley reported on a recent meeting between representatives from the township and Gov. Rick Snyder's office.
"They owe us," said Trustee Ken Piwarski, who was at the meeting, "but it's not going to happen," regarding the long overdue bill. __PUBLIC__
Despite that, the township did receive some good news: Though the former prison camp was said to be bonded and unable to be sold until 2025, it was recently added to the state's surplus property list and has been put up for sale.
Township attorney Steve Polich explained that the state's position was that the title to the property could be turned over to an industrial, commercial or educational concern for the sum of $1.
Polley noted there is currently one promising prospect looking at the site. Although the land is zoned residential, that could be changed. "I'm sure the board will help if it means jobs." he said. "It could also go back on the tax roll."
Although the state has continued to maintain the building, it has failed to pay the large sewer availability charge, specifically put in place to protect the township and help cover the costs of the sewer lift station and other sewer infrastructure associated with the facility. The charge was added in July 2009 and was never recognized by the Michigan Department of Corrections.
One resident questioned whether the board would continue to charge the fee, knowing that the state does not plan to pay up. He also wondered if sewer charges for the facility would be forgiven or if the new owner would be responsible.
Polley said that would be something the next Township Board would have to decide, although he did say that it would not be fair to charge the residents of the township if the state was not paying.
Township residents had a lot of decisions to make on the November ballot. When all was said and done, three incumbents were un-seated. Sixty-three percent, or 601 of the township's 954 registered voters, took part in the election.
After 12 years, Supervisor Polley was defeated by Scott Tarsi, who received 52 percent of the vote to Polley's 47 percent. Clerk Amber Laturi retained her position, while Robert Tulppo will take over as treasurer. Trustee Alden Froblom held on to his seat, but Kenneth Piwarski was beaten out by Michael Sheehy.
Although the renewal request for one mill for the township's roads passed, it was close, with 291 yes to 285 no votes. Not so lucky was the operational millage, which asked for two mills. Labeled as an increase due to the numerous failed attempts to pass the renewal over the years, the request failed, with 65 percent of voters against it—373 no to 202 yes. If it had passed, the millage would have brought in $105,000 its first year.
With no operational millage money coming in, Piwarski worried about the incoming board. "It doesn't know what they're going to do." he said.
Polley agreed, noting that the township does not have much operating funds left. "In two or two and half years, there will be nothing left." he said. "It doesn't take long."
In need of one regular and one alternate member for the planning commission, the board accepted Dave Clements as the regular member and Steve Van de Hey as the alternate. Four new ordinances, which are currently being worked on, will need to be reviewed by the incoming

board and then referred back to the planning commission to begin the adoption process. Approximately 23 percent of the township water project has been completed thus far, totaling $715,000 worth of work. The board approved payment of $375,641 to Hebert Construction and another $17,879 to GEI for engineering work. Polley was unsure what work would be done through the winter months, but hoped the water meters would be installed during that time. GEI's Jeff Bal also reported that the township is currently ranked 60th out of 102 applicants for the DNR Trust Fund Grant.

Attorney Polich thanked outgoing board members Polley, Piwarski and Treasurer Nancy Clements for their work over the years. Piwarski thanked the people of the township and welcomed the new board members. Polley also thanked the people, saying it was a pleasure to serve the residents of Iron River Township.