

Litter, A Pervasive Problem, And the Need to Address It.

By Gerald Kozlowski

Members of the Council.

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I have generated handouts for your use to follow along with my presentation.

The slogans

“Pure Michigan”.

“Now and always”

“Where the North begins and pure waters flow”.

“A trail for every season”.

Each of these slogans are demeaned by litter, trash, unenforced and or unregulated private land use and pollution.

I would like to start out with excerpts from.....

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT (EXCERPT) Act 451 of 1994

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324.8901 Definitions.

Sec. 8901.

As used in this part:

(a) "Litter" means any of the following:

(i) Rubbish, refuse, waste material, garbage, offal, paper, glass, cans, bottles, trash, debris, or other foreign substances.

This is both narrow and broad in scope of meaning.

I have 2 parcels of land by me that have dwellings on them. 1 in Lincoln township and 1 in Wilcox township that look like junk yards. The parcel in Wilcox Township on M-20, traveled by tourists, has a couch with no cushions right next to the road and has been there for quite some time. And that is just a piece of what amounts to being in non-compliance with state law. A third just outside the White Cloud city limits on M-37 before M-20, looks like a year-round flea market. With plenty of what the state describes as litter all over the property. Is this Legal? And why do our locale leaders, who must go past these properties turn a blind eye. I have been informed the occupant has just passed away. The renovated house just north of the County offices, on M-37, has litter in its front yard from some public source. The unfortunate occupants surely see this and do nothing to have it picked up. Are they violating the law? The answer may be yes as will be discussed in the next part of the state excerpt. We all need to be good stewards of our area in which we live. I moved here from Walker Michigan where this same problem existed. Our leaders or appointed person with oversight, do nothing unless someone complains. We have laws, but do not proactively enforce them. This puts citizens in a position of being viewed as an unliked neighbor in which someone may harbor animosities toward if they complain. We all need to get along and do the right thing. Which includes how the actions and habits of someone or someone's property management affect others. A property that is in noncompliance with the law has an effect on adjacent properties. That is like someone who works in Human Resources at a company that never goes out to interact with the employees. Can they be as affective without the knowledge of the people they are basically the go between of employees and management?

Social economics should not be a factor on the proper storage of material or items on residential property.

**NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT (EXCERPT)
Act 451 of 1994**

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324.8902 Littering property or water prohibited; removal of injurious substances dropped on highway as result of accident.

Sec. 8902.

(1) A person shall not knowingly, without the consent of the public authority having supervision of public property or the owner of private property, dump, deposit, place, throw, or leave, or cause or permit the dumping, depositing, placing, throwing, or leaving of, litter on public or private property or water other than property designated and set aside for such purposes.

(2) A person who removes a vehicle that is wrecked or damaged in an accident on a highway, road, or street shall remove all glass and other injurious substances dropped on the highway, road, or street as a result of the accident.

Again, Social economics should not be a factor on the proper storage of material or items on residential property.

As residents or “tourists”. We all should expect and deserve better as Stuarts of this State, County, City, Townships, and parklands.

Tourism is the most important economic activity in Newaygo County.

Littering is, as it should be, Illegal.

But as a community we are allowing this law to be just words on paper.

We all need to be part of the solution.

It affects every facet of life in public.

It would be nice to just wave a magic wand and think it will just go away.

We need to be the model for other municipalities.

How and where the littering mindset becomes acceptable is not hard to find.

Our children are not being taught in a way that their actions, if taught at all, that they too are citizens with civic responsibilities, and why you should not litter or that it is illegal.

Self-esteem also plays a roll.

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We need to find ways to connect with the citizens of this community and its visitors.

We put up adopt a road signs. And the people or organizations that clean the litter from those areas should be commended.

But we are no longer putting up unnecessary signs to deter littering. So, they must become necessary.

I have seen many juveniles and adults just toss their food packaging or containers on the ground without a thought.

Alcohol, water, coffee, fountain drink and fast-food containers, snack packaging, chewing tobacco containers, disposable vaping devices, used oil containers, large pieces of carboard and plastic and store shopping bags are all pervasive on the sides of our roads and in our waterways.

Used Vaping devises and Oil containers are just 2 items that can have effects on the environment.

Mainly amphibious and invertebrates.

It is visible, all you have to do is open your eyes and look around.

Although the city of White Cloud is what I would consider a cleaner city, Trash and litter is still getting into our waterways. Take Wesco as an example. They provide plenty of easily accessible trash receptacles, yet behind the store. Between the pavement and the railroad tracks, it is littered with trash. How can this be? This is not the fault of Wesco. But the actions of its clientele. Our citizens. Any roads with curbs and drains, or parking lots with drains are a direct connection to our waterways for the introduction of what is mostly plastic trash.

The main sources are really not that many.

The biggest and most obvious is just littering from conscious human action. Such as tossing fast food and beverage containers from their vehicles.

But other somewhat unconscious actions play a big role in the amount of litter in our public domain.

One of the biggest thoughtless actions are articles thrown in the back beds of passenger pick-up trucks, that will easily blow out onto the sides of our roads and waterways. We need to craft and pass legislation so that items placed in the bed of a truck are secured. Cargo nets may be just 1 answer. Waste cannot just be thrown into the bed of pick-up trucks to just be blown out at highway speeds.

Littering in Michigan is illegal. A person shall not knowingly cause litter or any object to fall or to be thrown into the path of or to hit a vehicle traveling upon a highway. A person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment for not more than 1 year or a fine of not more than \$500.00, or both. A person shall not knowingly, without the consent of the public authority having

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supervision of public property or the owner of private property, dump, deposit, place, throw, or leave, or cause or permit the dumping, depositing, placing, throwing, or leaving of, litter on public or private property or water other than property designated and set aside for such purposes.

This narrows the interpretation of what littering means.

Another pervasive trash item on the side of our roads are the failed recapped tire treads that can cause damage, not only to the trailer it comes from, but also vehicles that may hit them if in the road. These failures can be very violent. I have seen the results of tire failure damage firsthand. This is a MDOT oversight failure. Although they would disagree. Operators are required to do inspection checks of their equipment before their trip begins. Again, **economics should not be a factor.** It is not hard to see the beginning failure of a recapped tire. Also concerning is the fact that there are a lot of petroleum vehicles traveling through this area. If tire dealers were required to report recapped failed tires they replace, and heavy fines were imposed on the offending hauler, it would go a long way to eliminate the problem. Economics is not the problem here. Before or after a failure, the tire still got replaced. Sounds too easy.

Private snowplow trucks are another case in point. Some that use bag rock salt as part of their service will just toss the empty bag in the bed of their truck just to blow out. Rock salt bags will once again litter the sides of our roads. The permitting process should require they have waste containers for this purpose. And if not complied with, their license/permit should be revoked if they don't have a container to store the empty bags. That is an action that talks money. Both in the lost license/permit fee, but also in the money that they would have to refund their customers. Sounds too easy you think.

Another large contributor is waste haulers. If household waste is not contained in a garbage bag, it will blow away when being tipped into the waste haulers truck in windy conditions. Or if said hauler does not cycle the compactor enough. Again, **economics should not be a factor.** This comes down to a time factor, as cycling takes time and fuel. This too should be regulated. Fines are not good for their bottom lines.

Also speaking of household waste haulers, there is one in this area that picks up bagged refuse into a three-sided wire wall trailer that when traveling at higher speeds, bags fall out. Is this even legal. Again, **economics should not be a factor.**

Then there are the waste dumpsters at businesses. In some instances, they are over filled, or the cover is not closed.

And then there are merchandise store parking lots that are just a litter generating site from some customers that throw their litter on the ground as soon as they open their car door, too store ad flyers and the ever-present plastic bags. Have you seen the bottle return area in some stores. This is an indicator of the said clientele.

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Also, these large parking lots generally have a man-made wetland for rainwater runoff where litter accumulates.

Then one of the most offensive trash items are the human waste containers tossed out from truck drivers. The intersection of M-20 and M-37 is a dumping ground. This is a felony. Apply for a CDL license, submit a DNA sample. Solvable.

Also, there is an individual in my area that hangs trash items (including a toilet seat) from trees, signs, and reflector posts. You cannot stop a person that litters by hanging trash from trees, signs, and reflector posts. They too become the problem.

I have been picking up litter and trash ever sense we moved here from Walker Michigan in 2020. I just picked up 5 trash bags of litter on a 1 mile stretch of M-20 by Centerline Road. I live off of Adams Street, a no outlet road less than a mile long. With less than 10 dwellings, I still find trash. I don't have a adopt a road sign in my name. But I picked it up because it is not what I moved away from the city for. I moved here for the natural beauty of the open spaces and wildlife. I do not want my friends and family to see that I live in an area littered with trash. But there is no hiding it. There is plenty of trash in the Grand Rapids area. And it has migrated north to include M-20, M-37, and M-82. which are just overwhelmed with litter and trash. And come spring, it will become very visible everywhere amongst the dead un-snow-covered sides of the roads.

In closing, I am approaching this issue with no instructions, way points, or meaningful knowledge of dealing with government entities. But my convictions are strong. and this is an all-to-observable problem that must be dealt with. But as a willing community, with strong local, Township, City, County, and State representation, we can do the right thing by addressing this scourge that affects human, economic, and environmental aspects of living. And the future of our children and so on. We cannot continue to turn a "blind eye" and think this problem will just go away. I know this term too well from working in management in the food industry for over 30 years. Ended by a disabling fall. I have always pushed back on what I believed to be lack of management. And sometimes paid a price in doing so. But my work ethics and beliefs also helped me. When it was time for inspections, there would always be a big push to make things right. Instead of being always inspection ready by doing things right. Also, my wife's great grandfather was Michigan's Governor Green. And her father was an advocate for the protection of the great lakes. So it is with that heritage, and the belief that this is something we can help change, I look forward to doing this needed public service. And achieve the goal of making a difference. Quote: If you are not part of the solution, you are most likely part of the problem. With your help, and partnership, I look forward to us being part of the solution.

Thanks for taking the time to hear me out.

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J. Hole



PS. “J. Hole” is a nickname given to me by my co-workers because they said, “My work standards and expectations were too high”. To that end, I responded, “That must mean yours are too low”.