

***“Reclaim Richland”*: wrong on the facts, wrong direction for our community**

The “Reclaim Richland” web site and its group members have made a staggering number of untrue statements in posts and responses to submitted questions in an effort to solicit “Yes” votes. Here are some of them.

<u>They say:</u>	<u>The facts</u>	<u>Supporting info</u>
<i>“Taxes will be reduced and Village service will be expanded and improved under disincorporation.”</i>	Of course, this is impossible. Someone has to pay. In their proposal, it would be the Township and eventually, more than likely, Village residents through imposition of a special assessment tax district.	Reference statements made by Township Board attorney at joint meeting April 14, 2016
<i>“Government would be more efficient after disincorporation.”</i>	Replacing services such as contracting police coverage, buying or contracting plowing services, maintaining roads and sidewalks, etc., would add cost right back; either a special assessment tax district for the village, or a substantial township-wide tax increase. Net costs would go up, efficiency down. The Village would lose many thousands of dollars of state revenue-sharing funds that are invested for streets maintenance in the Village. Instead, these funds would be lost from local control, swept into the County Road Commission and diluted across the entire county.	Reference statements made by Township Board members at joint meeting April 14, 2016
<i>“A Village police officer was probably involved in an assault on the Village Clerk’s husband.”</i>	This is an incredible and slanderous assertion. The Village Clerk’s husband did indeed claim that an unknown masked intruder assaulted him in his backyard. The Michigan State Police investigated the alleged assault at length and in depth. Their final finding was that the assault never happened.	Michigan State Police Incident Report and Supplemental Reports 0001, 0002, and 0003, available by FOIA request from MSP.
<i>Richland residents pay more than 6.5 times what others pay in similar villages.</i>	Here are tax rates from area villages. Note that Richland is lower than all of them. Village of Vicksburg (Schoolcraft Twp) - 46.5757 Village of Vicksburg (Brady twp) - 46.5054 Village of Schoolcraft - 46.3904 Village of Augusta (Ross Twp) - 45.1406 Village of Augusta (Charleston Twp) - 43.9645 Village of Climax - 41.6444 Village of Richland - 38.2406 The millage rate in the village has not increased for more than three decades. At the same time, thanks to grant acquisition, growth in housing because Richland Village is such a desirable location, and state revenue sharing, the Village has been able to expand and improve services.	Various public and government web sources

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<i>The Village Clerk was illegally removed from her position.</i>	The Village had reason to terminate the Clerk due to many documented performance issues. After careful deliberation and several attempts to get the clerk to change her behavior, Council decided on the basis of these issues and attorney advice to suspend the Clerk. As happens in many such personnel cases these days, even when there is just cause for termination, employees can bring lawsuits against their employers, and most often, regardless of their merits, the insurance companies involved push for an out-of-court settlement. This was the case with the Village Clerk.	Minutes of April 13 Village Council meeting; letters of suspension and reprimand available through FOIA requests only
<i>A judge found the Village Council at fault for “illegally firing” the Village Clerk</i>	The Clerk was never fired. The Village was not judged to have acted illegally. The Council suspended the clerk from her duties upon return from a medical leave she took on her own volition. The suspension was enacted on advice of Village attorney. Judge Lipsey reviewed the suspension in a preliminary and despite noting that even though her performance as documented was “...irritating, discriminatory...and even unprofessional..” and in a manner that is distasteful to others and reflects poorly on the institution as a whole” that it nonetheless did not warrant suspension, and he decided that she should be reinstated to her role until such time as a case was heard in court or otherwise settled. No judgment was found against the Village or Village Council by any judge. A court never heard the case itself. Only this preliminary hearing was held prior to a settlement.	9 th Circuit Court proceedings case # 2015-0787-AW dated Monday September 28, 2015 pp 5 and 6
<i>Richland police department is an unnecessary and replaceable expense.</i>	Contracting for similar service from the County would cost several times what the village currently budgets for police. Richland is one of the few if not only Villages in Michigan that resides at the confluence of two state highways. Tens of thousands of vehicles a day transit the village. Schools with hundreds of vulnerable children are located within the village limits; many businesses that value protection and safety are within the village limits. Illegal drugs and guns have been regularly seized inside and going through the Village. Our village’s special needs make thorough police coverage an advantage. Speeders are notoriously common in Michigan’s unincorporated areas, often with tragic consequences.	MDOT traffic data from MDOW report; Ross County budget for part-time County deputy; Village of Richland annual budget

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<i>The Police Department is constructing a jail Holding Cell at the DPW building that will require extra personnel to oversee.</i>	There is no jail or holding cell being built. The renovation at the DPW building is to relocate police offices to this building. For which, only \$1900 of taxpayer funds – a small fraction of the cost - are being used; it is funded almost entirely from the more than \$39,000 drug forfeiture revenues generated from seized illegal drug property being moved and manufactured in and through the Village.	Richland Village police budget and records
<i>The Village Police are overly aggressive and use a quota system for traffic tickets that the Council has mandated in order to boost village revenues.</i>	There are no quotas. Such quotas are illegal and are never used. Average ticket issuance is 3.8 citations per day. MDOT traffic counts report about 40,000 vehicle transits a day in and through the village (created by an indeterminate number of separate vehicles, as multiple counting “clicks” are recorded). By conservative estimates counting only 20,000 vehicles, the percentage of traffic flow being ticketed in a day is about .02% - less than one in very 5,000.	MDOT reports; Richland Village Police records available from police clerk
<i>The Village Council continues to make illegal decisions</i>	The “Reclaim Richland” web site chides the Council for minor procedural mistakes made three years ago in a transition period when a highly experienced council president was replaced. Village government is thoroughly audited each year by professional Certified Public Accountants. Every year – including the years when the Reclaim Richland people say illegal actions were taken - the Village received a clean audit that did not cite any illegal actions or practices. The minor procedural issues that did occur have long since been thoroughly addressed.	Annual audits on file at Village
<i>The Village Council refuses to meet and work with the Township Board.</i>	Examples of Township/Village collaboration in the past few years abound: (1) The rescue and joint restoration of the Richland Community Hall; (2) Joint purchase and installation of area-wide tornado alert sirens; (3) Agreement of the village to plow the township-located extension of DE Avenue outside the village and the High School entrances; (4) Joint agreement to maintain and service the road surrounding the Village Green and its parking spaces. (5) Joint township and village council meetings.	Various Township/Village joint meeting minutes on Village web site
<i>Richland Village residents do not have freedom of choice for their services.</i>	Dissolving the Village would reduce freedom of choice. Village residents get to elect their trustees, suggest revisions, and review and comment on a local budget every year. Because we are small and the government is local, all citizens have an opportunity to shape and manage Village ordinances, local zoning, and expenses with far greater control than if the Village were absorbed into the larger township. If you want to have a say and influence, there are many opportunities for service and engagement.	State of Michigan general Village Law available from Michigan.gov

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<i>Village Council is not willing to listen to community input.</i>	Here is an excellent example to the contrary. Just a few years ago, the Village was pressured by the sewer authority to take advantage of a large federal grant and install sewers on D Avenue. Council proposed a resolution to do this, but D Avenue residents rose up strongly to oppose it. A local volunteer citizen group worked with Council to develop an alternative funding approach that would allow road re-construction with no sewer. Another volunteer group brought forward solid research showing that a sewer was not necessary given D Avenue topology. Working together, the Council passed a new plan and the new road was built with major federal grant assistance. No name calling; no threats; no lawsuits: just constructive and thoughtful collaboration for the good of all. And, in the end, the leader of the opposition group ran for and became a Council trustee.	Various Village Council minutes
<i>The Village Council is isolationist and does not let citizens control their own fate.</i>	Community input is consistently sought, listened to, and acted on For example: Community input saved the Village Green from being turned into a four-lane highway through the village. Community input drove the rescue and renovation of the Community Hall. Community input puts flower planters throughout the village every Spring. Community input helped get tornado alert sirens in and near the village. Community input makes Richland the smallest National Tree City in the state.	Action taken by Council many years ago to create national Historic district status to halt MDOT plans to re-route M-43 through the park; various meeting minutes and budget reports Council Policy
<i>People who do not agree with the Council are removed from meetings.</i>	All opinions and input are welcome and actively sought, in addition to being legally required. People who scream obscenities and ignore the public comment procedures at meetings and thus violate others’ rights have been asked, and will continue to be asked, to comport themselves with respect and civility.	
<i>Disincorporation leads to better government.</i>	The disincorporation process itself would be expensive, with many legal and personnel time costs. In 2013, Onekama became the only village in the state to explore a suggested Township/Village merger through a consequences study following a Michigan General Village Law ordinance procedure. A special commission of township and Village representatives spent many months to complete their analysis and prepare a proposed merger Plan. This Plan was then provided to the Township and Village residents for their review and approval. The consequences predicted in the study were so disagreeable that the voters rejected the merger.	<u>Citizens' Research Council memo:</u> http://www.crcmich.org/PUBLICAT/2010s/2013/rpt381.html