



Union Township fiscally sound, treasurer declines comment on state of township finances

By **Randi Shaffer**, *The Morning Sun*

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Financial conditions at Union Township have become a hot-button issue in the race between Republican State Rep. Kevin Cotter and his Democratic challenger, who sits on the Union Township board.

But finding the source of the allegations or the facts behind them has proven elusive.

Union Township’s treasurer is declining to comment on the state of the municipality’s budget following resident concerns on fiscal soundness brought about on behalf of Cotter.

When questioned at Wednesday’s meeting by resident Matt Mertz whether the Union Township budget had been “run into the ground,” Treasurer Ruth Ayris said she didn’t believe so.

“I think the reports ... tell us that we’re not losing ground,” she said.

However, when asked later that week if she had any insight into the advertisement claims made by the Michigan Republican Party, Ayris declined comment.

“I don’t know that I really have any information for you,” Ayris said. “I am the township treasurer, but I’m going to decline.”

Mailed advertisements paid for by the Michigan Republican Party, 520 Seymour Avenue in Lansing, claim Bryan Mielke, township trustee and 99th district state representative candidate, “drained” the township budget from a \$466,000 surplus to a \$349,000 deficit in two years.

Television advertisements, paid for by the House Republican Campaign Committee, similarly claim Mielke turned a \$450,000 surplus into a \$350,000 deficit.

Union Township states the statutory duties of Ayris include keeping an account of township receipts/ revenues and expenditures.

Ayris, a Republican, is seeking reelection to her position this November.

Mertz asked Ayris at the Wednesday meeting why she was not defending her office.

“You are also up for election, so this would be a good time to let us know whether you’re doing a good job or not,” he told her.

Earlier this month, township trustee Tim Lannen said he had approached township management, requesting a public review of the township budget in light of “misinformation” being spread in conjunction with the 99th district state representative race.

Lannen’s request was turned down, and township supervisor Russ Alwood, a Republican, said at the beginning of the Oct. 8 meeting that the board would not allow residents to speak about “political issues,” before he closed the meeting mid-public comment when residents became upset about the decision.

The 2014 township budget, approved unanimously Dec. 19, 2013, lists a general fund anticipated operating deficit of \$348,568 for the year with an ending general fund balance of \$1.972,617.

In July 2013, [Union Township was told it had a “very healthy fund balance”](#) by its auditor.

Township trustee Tim Lannen said while there is an anticipated deficit in the budget, Township Manager Brian Smith budgets conservatively, which has helped the township remain in a positive position with its general fund, which currently sits at just about \$2.1 million.

“Our revenue sharings are a bit over what we had budgeted for,” he said. “My understanding is we won’t be in a deficit spending situation.”

Lannen said that budgets are reviewed by the entire board and the township prior to their approval.

Trustee Phil Mikus echoed Lannen’s statements.

“There’s not a deficit,” he said.

Smith could not be reached for comment.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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