VERMONT'S VOICE
FALL 2024
TOWN OF VERMONT, WISCONSIN

AGRICULTURE • ENVIRONMENT • RECREATION

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- A new meaning for "fall"
- Jim Elleson
- ATVs and UTVs
- Part Four of the Soil Series
- Town Picnic
- Township News

FALL IN THE TOWNSHIP
Change is in the air

The sunsets are happening just a bit sooner each day. The trees that survived our severe weather this summer are showing a hint of color. Welcome to the fall issue of *Vermont's Voice*. In this issue:

- ATVs and UTVs are now legal on town roads. Do you know the rules?
- Meet Jim Elleson, an example of a resident who has dedicated 30 years of service to the township.
- Nick Balster explains how soil impacts and is impacted by climate in the fourth installment of his series on the soil beneath our feet.
- Attend the annual town picnic September 8th and visit with your neighbors over good food and good music.

If you have a story idea or a photo to share, please email coxco@chorus.net.
We hope you enjoy this issue of *Vermont's Voice*.— Gary Cox

TOWNSHIP TREES
Changes in the landscape

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30 years of service

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Part four of the series on soil

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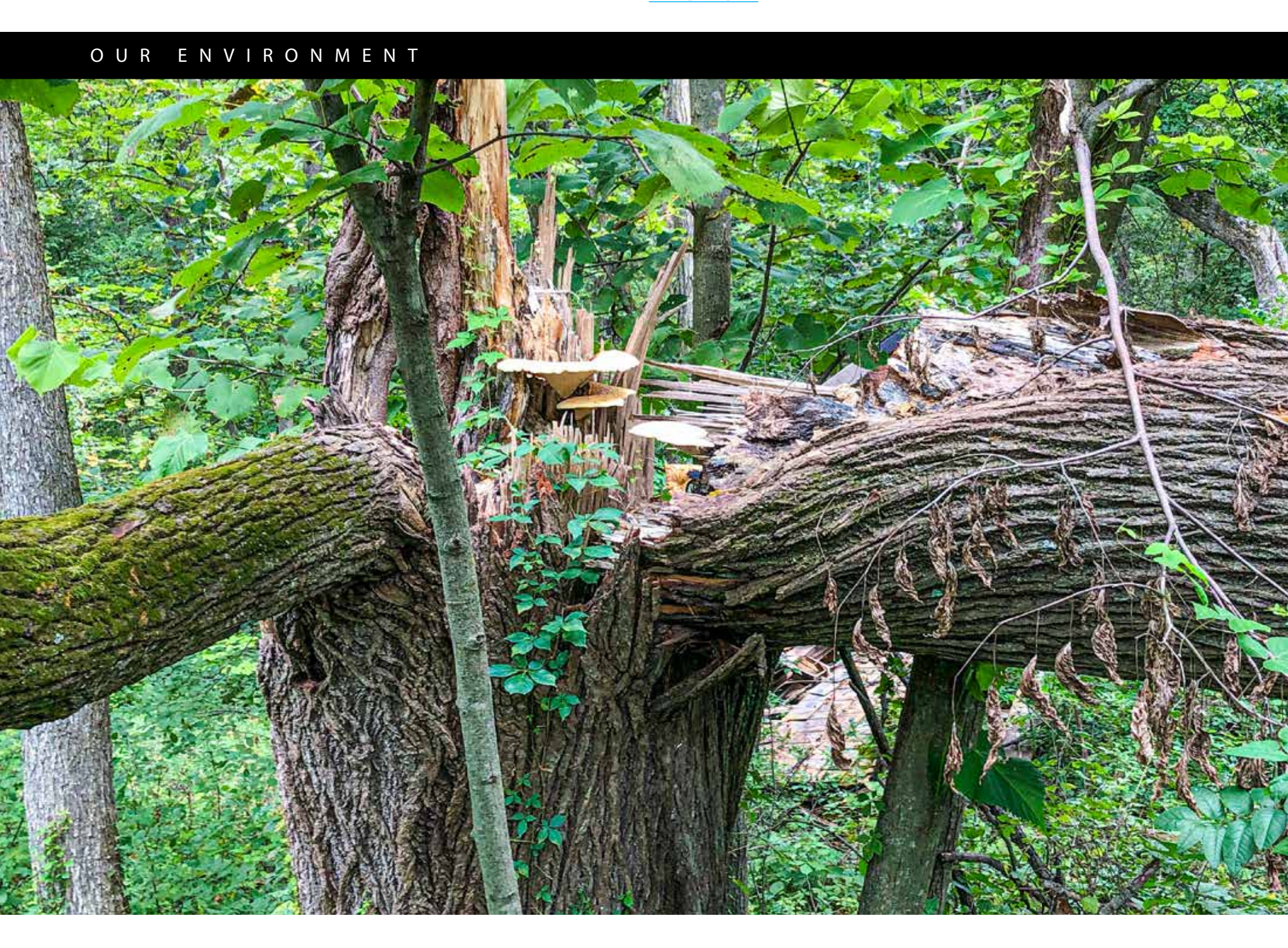
OUR ENVIRONMENT



A NEW MEANING FOR "FALL"
Weather takes a toll on trees in the township

The weather this summer has taken a toll on our local trees. Several storms have dumped significant amounts of water in short periods. In combination with some straight-line winds, they have toppled over trees, sometimes directly on local roads. The weather and resulting destruction have kept our town patrolman Jack pretty busy keeping the roads clear. But not all the toppled trees were immediately visible. These weather events have kept a lot of town residents busy clearing downed or partially downed trees on their property. And not just immediately after each event, but even during relatively calm weather, trees seem to topple or have branches shear off for no discernible reason.

The rain that came in torrents dug out culverts and washed debris over roadways. Culverts needed to be cleared and the shoulders of roads needed to be repaired. The town board has been tallying the cost associated with the cleanup with an eye to reaching the threshold set by Dane County for receiving aid, but it's likely we won't reach that marker.

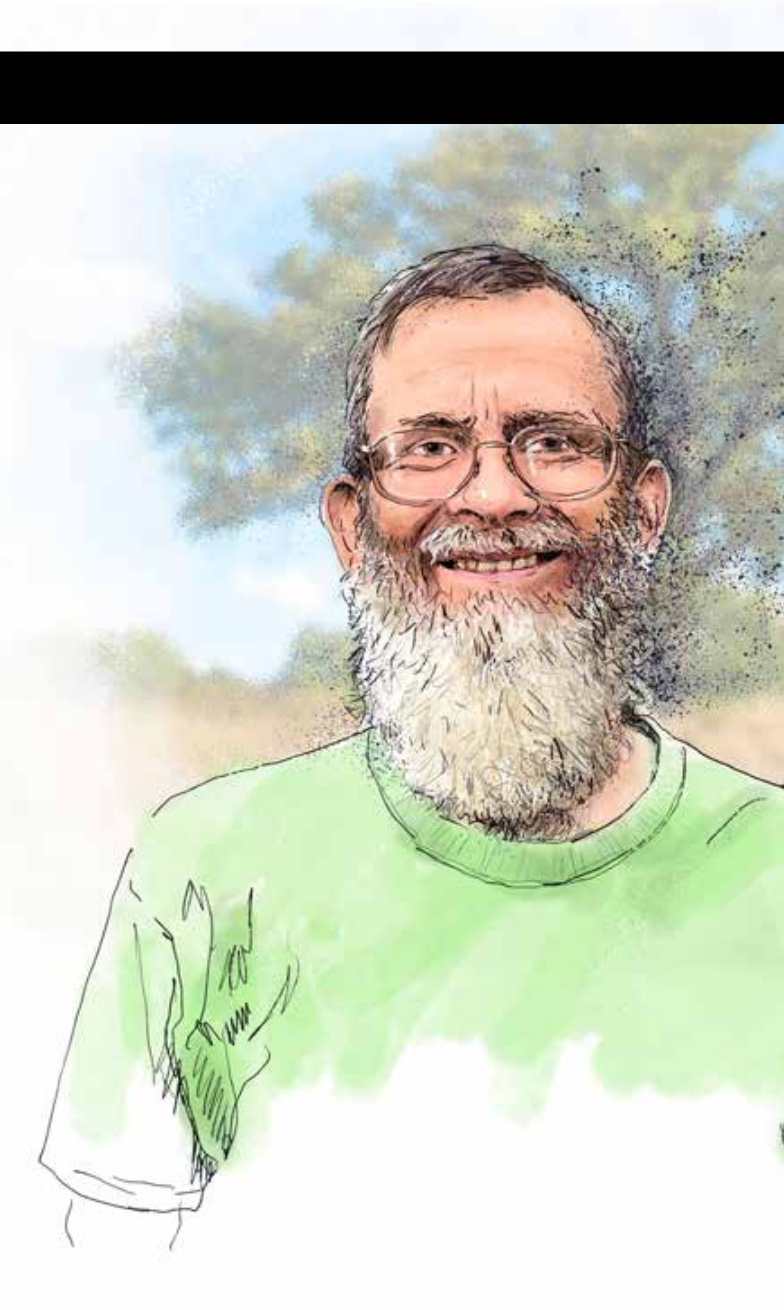
With all downed trees on right-of-ways and roads, the question may come up about who has to clear what and then who owns that cleared wood.
Here's what the State of Wisconsin has to say on the topic:

86.03 Trees on and adjacent to highway.
(1) Removal of fallen trees. If any tree falls from adjacent land into any highway, the owner or occupant of the land shall immediately remove the tree from the highway. It shall be the duty of every highway patrolman, street commissioner, or other officer in charge of the maintenance of streets or highways, to remove from any highway any fallen tree or trees therein.
(2) Ownership. All trees on land over which any highway is laid out shall be for the use of the owner of the land or person otherwise entitled thereto, except trees that have been acquired by and for the public in the acquisition of the highway right-of-way and except such trees within the highway as may be requisite to make or repair the highways on the land or within one mile of the same; but no trees reserved for shade or ornament, unless acquired by the public, shall be used for such purpose.

POP QUIZ
How many dead end roads are there in Vermont Township?
11 26 36 62
Answer in "Our Government" section.

OUR PEOPLE

JIM ELLESON
30 years of service to the township



Jim Elleson is that quiet guy with the big beard you see at Plan Commission meetings, site visits and giving background information at a Town Board meeting. When he speaks it's clear he knows his stuff. His recent appointment to the Plan Commission for another term means that Jim will mark 30 years as a member of this vital component of town government during this term.
Tim Pierce, the current chair of the Plan Commission, says, " Jim is both our Town Geographer and the Town Historian because of his 30 years of service on the Plan Commission."

This kind of dedication to the unsung work of small-town government is an inspiration. The monthly meetings and weekend site visits carve a chunk out of a person's schedule, but it is important work. Jim's expertise as an engineer and his day job as the founder of a land stewardship service give him a unique perspective on matters that come before the board. And with his 30 years in that position, he has the added historical element to his contributions.

A commitment to participatory democracy

Jim explains that he began by attending Plan Commission meetings around 1995.
He saw a way to contribute to the community and was appointed to the Plan Commission in 1996.

Here are some insights in Jim's own words on the important work done by the Commission.

> I've always had an environmental consciousness and I'm very interested in grass-roots democracy. Town government is the shining example of grass-roots democracy - local people coming together to make decisions for where they live. I was aware of the development pressure coming from Madison and I wanted to do my part to prevent what I had seen happening in formerly wide-open rural areas being fragmented and overtaken by large houses. I volunteered as a citizen member to help the Plan Commission update the Land Use Plan. We went through a pretty intensive process of going through the existing plan section by section. At the time there was a group of people who were adamantly opposed to allowing new houses to be built and a group who were adamantly opposed to limiting what landowners could do with their land. I went in sympathetic with the view of preventing new development, but as a landowner with a libertarian streak in my background, I soon found myself in the middle of the two camps.
>
> Participatory democracy works best when you consider everyone's point of view and work to come to a consensus - which by definition is that everyone accepts the agreed conclusion even if it isn't their preference. I've always tried to be sure that all viewpoints get considered in our decisions, even if there isn't someone there to express them. That's probably been maddening to some as it tends to slow down the process when Jim is always saying "Wait, before we decide this let's consider this other point of view".

"wait, before we decide this, let's consider this other point of view"

> In the 1996-97 revision of the Land Use Plan we wanted to articulate our four Goals for what the plan was to accomplish, and from which our Policies would flow. We clarified that while some were using arguments like loss of farmland and erosion potential against new residential development, the actual objections were rooted in aesthetic concerns about the natural beauty and rural character of the town. These are subjective concepts that are hard to define, but we tried to describe what they mean to the people of the Town.
>
> To address potential erosion on our steep slopes, we defined specific standards for erosion control, thanks to Gordon Stevenson's expertise, which were later made part of Dane County's erosion control standard.
>
> To address the loss of farmland, we acknowledged that much of Vermont's farmland is not high quality, but we want to preserve the best, especially for some future time when farmland is more valuable and food is more expensive and we might need it.
>
> In my former life I had a lot of experience writing engineering standards and specifications, where the words have to mean the same thing to everyone. So I was always pushing to be sure that what we were writing would be clear and unambiguous and not open to multiple interpretations. That also led to some long intensive discussions about lots of what-if scenarios. I think we were pretty successful with what we came up with though there have been a few instances showing that you can't anticipate everything that might come up.

The fun part

Jim believes that while the Plan Commission work is important it can also be fun! He points to the people he has met through his service that he would never have come in contact otherwise. Between site visits and his work with Quercus, the land stewardship organization he founded, he has walked or looked at nearly every 40 acre parcel in the township. His love of the land and our particular corner of it is evident in the way he relates how much he enjoys exploring it all.

Looking forward

Through 30 years of meetings, reviewing ordinances, and comprehensive planning, Jim has helped define the land use planning goals and has set safeguards in place to ensure the character of the Township and the areas that are at risk. His expertise in defining engineering standards has given our ordinances clear and concise language that focuses the intent as narrowly as possible.

While the future of the township is on a solid trajectory, Jim's is the rising price of purchasing a home in Vermont Township. Specifically Jim points to the fact that his children could not afford to live in the area they grew up.

Jim's service to the township and his commitment to hearing all voices and making fair and reasonable decisions is an inspiration to us all. Thanks Jim!

OUR ROADS

ATV/UTV ROAD ACCESS IN THE TOWNSHIP.

ATV ROUTES
ALL TOWN OF VERMONT ROADS ARE ATV AND UTV ROUTES

You may have noticed some additional signage popping up on Vermont township roads. Those green signs mark the ATV/UTV routes in the township. Recently the town board added an ordinance that now allows for ATV/UTV's to legally drive on all township roads. Residents may be unaware of the details of that new ordinance or the process that generated that ordinance.

A bit of history:
In April of 2020 Vermont had an advisory referendum on the question of should ATVs be allowed to use town roads. The result of the referendum was that the majority of the town residents did not want ATVs on town roads. Since that time Dane County has made it legal for ATV use on all county roads. With that in mind and with a show of support from ATV riders the town board attempted another survey of all town residents. An advisory referendum was not possible for this survey as the legislature has since taken away the advisory referendum option. A postcard detailing access to the online survey was mailed with the tax bill. The survey was not as conclusive as was hoped. The question fell back to the board to make a decision the decision to enact an ordinance was to be enacted and if so what the parameters of that ordinance would be.

The town board attempted to balance the two divided viewpoints of the township residents who want access and those who do not want access for ATVs on town roads. The topic was on board meeting agendas each month for just under one full year, offering opportunities for residents to provide feedback. The board settled on the option of setting the ordinance in place and then seeing if town residents had a significant amount of issues with ATV use. The challenge will be evaluating complaints. Take a moment to read through the TOV ordinance and excerpts from the DNR regulations. If you ride on town roads you should be aware of all the regulations. If you don't ride, being aware of the legal regulations may help you understand the distinction between legal and illegal behavior and avoid unnecessary complaints.

Here is the full text of the TOV ordinance:

TOWN OF VERMONT: ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE AND UTILITY TASK VEHICLE ROUTES AND OPERATION ORDINANCE

Section 1.1 - AUTHORITY
The Town Board of the Town of Vermont, Dane County, Wisconsin, has the specific authority to adopt this ATV/UTV Route Ordinance under Wisconsin Statute 23.33(8)(b) and 23.33(11).

Section 1.2 - PURPOSE
The Town of Vermont, Dane County, adopts the following all-terrain route for the operation of All Terrain vehicles (UTV/ATV) on town roads. Following due consideration of the recreational value to connect opportunities and weighted against possible dangers, public health, liability aspects, terrain involved, traffic density, and history of automobile traffic, this route has been created.

Section 1.3 - ROUTES
The following roads are designated as routes: All Town roads unless posted otherwise. No County or State highways are designated as routes, except those that have been designated as routes by the County or State. The Town Board may suspend any route, at any time, for any reason.

Section 1.4 - CONDITIONS
As a condition for use of this route, the following conditions shall apply to all operators and passengers.

A. Operators of ATV or UTV vehicles shall abide by all traffic laws, including the rules and operation and equipment requirements contained in Wisconsin Statute 23.33 and Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter 64, unless further restricted by this ordinance.

B. ATV and UTV vehicles shall operate at a safe speed not to exceed 35 miles per hour unless a reduced speed is otherwise noted by this ordinance, by law or roadway conditions.

C. Routes must be signed in accordance with NR 64.12 and NR 64.12(7)c. All required designed route signs and posts and their installation shall be paid for by an ATV/UTV Club, with approval, installation, and maintenance of the signs by the Town of Vermont. Repair of any damaged or vandalized signs will be paid for by the ATV/UTV Club. No ATV/UTV designated route will be open for use until properly signed.

D. ATV and UTV Vehicles may only operate during the hours of 5:00am and 10:00pm on Town Routes.

E. No ATV/UTV may operate within the town roadway with open intoxicants on or in the vehicle.

F. All ATV/UTV must be at least 16 years of age and possess a valid driver's license.

G. ALL ATV/UTV may not be operated on road shoulders or in road ditches. No straddling of the shoulder or ditch is allowed, unless moving over to make room for passing or oncoming traffic.

H. All ATV/UTVs being operated on designated routes must have fully functional headlights, taillights and brake lights. Headlights and taillights must be always on.

I. All ATV/UTVs shall be equipped with a muffler system with a maximum noise level of 96 decibels.

J. ATV/UTVs shall yield the right of way to all other vehicular traffic and pedestrians.

K. All ATV/UTV operators shall maintain liability insurance for their ATV/UTV in the amount established by the State of Wisconsin for motor vehicle operation. By utilizing any ATV/UTV, the operator agrees to fully indemnify and hold harmless the Town of Vermont for all liability arising from use on town roadways.

L. All ATV/UTVs will ride single file along the extreme right side of the roadway, with the exception of left turns which may be made from any part of the roadway if it is safe given then occurring conditions.

Section 1.5 - ENFORCEMENT
This ordinance shall be enforced by any law enforcement officer authorized to enforce the laws of the State of Wisconsin. Pursuant to Wisconsin Statute 23.33(1)(b), if a town adopts an ordinance regulating all-terrain vehicles, utility terrain vehicles, or both, its clerk shall immediately send a copy of the ordinance to the DNR, the State Patrol, and to the office of any law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over any of the roads or highways to which the ordinance applies.

Section 1.6 - PENALTIES
Wisconsin State All-Terrain Vehicle penalties, as found in Wisconsin Statute 23.33(13)(a), are adopted by reference.
Wisconsin DNR Rules, Penalties, and regulations as found on the DNR website are adopted by reference. Dane County Ordinance 79.01 – 79.023(3) in its entirety is adopted as written and published.

Section 1.7 - SEVERABILITY
The provision of this ordinance shall be deemed severable, and it is expressly declared that the Town of Vermont would have passed the other provisions of this ordinance irrespective of whether one or more provisions may be declared invalid. If any provision of this ordinance or the application to any person or circumstances is held invalid, the remainder of the ordinance and the application of such provisions to other person's circumstances shall not be deemed affected.

14.08 EFFECTIVE DATE
This ordinance shall take effect and be in force from and after the day of passage and publication as required by law. The Town of Vermont has the right to revoke this ordinance at any time.
Adopted [April 8], 2024, by the Town Board.

Karen Carlock Town Chair, Kirk Lynch Town Supervisor, Alex McKenzie Town Supervisor, Doug Meier Town Supervisor and Nick Balster Town Supervisor
Attested by:
Katie Zelle, Town Clerk

Facts to know

- ATV/UTV's are not regulated by the DOT, they are considered recreational vehicles and are under the jurisdiction of the DNR.
- ATV status as a recreation vehicle limits their speed on the roadway to 35 mph.

DNR Regulations
When legally operating on a roadway:

- You cannot pass other motor vehicles or ATVs/UTVs unless stationary and parked.
- No person may ride in or on any part of an ATV or UTV that is not designed or intended to be used by passengers.
- You must use hand signals to indicate your turning or stopping intentions if ATV/UTV is not equipped with turn lamps.
- Operate at the extreme right side of the roadway surface.
- Left turns can be made from any part of the roadway surface as long as it's safe and legal to do so.
- You must operate single file.
- You must have your head lamps and tail lamps on.

NOTE: No ATV operators under age 12 and no UTV operators under age 16 may operate on public roads.

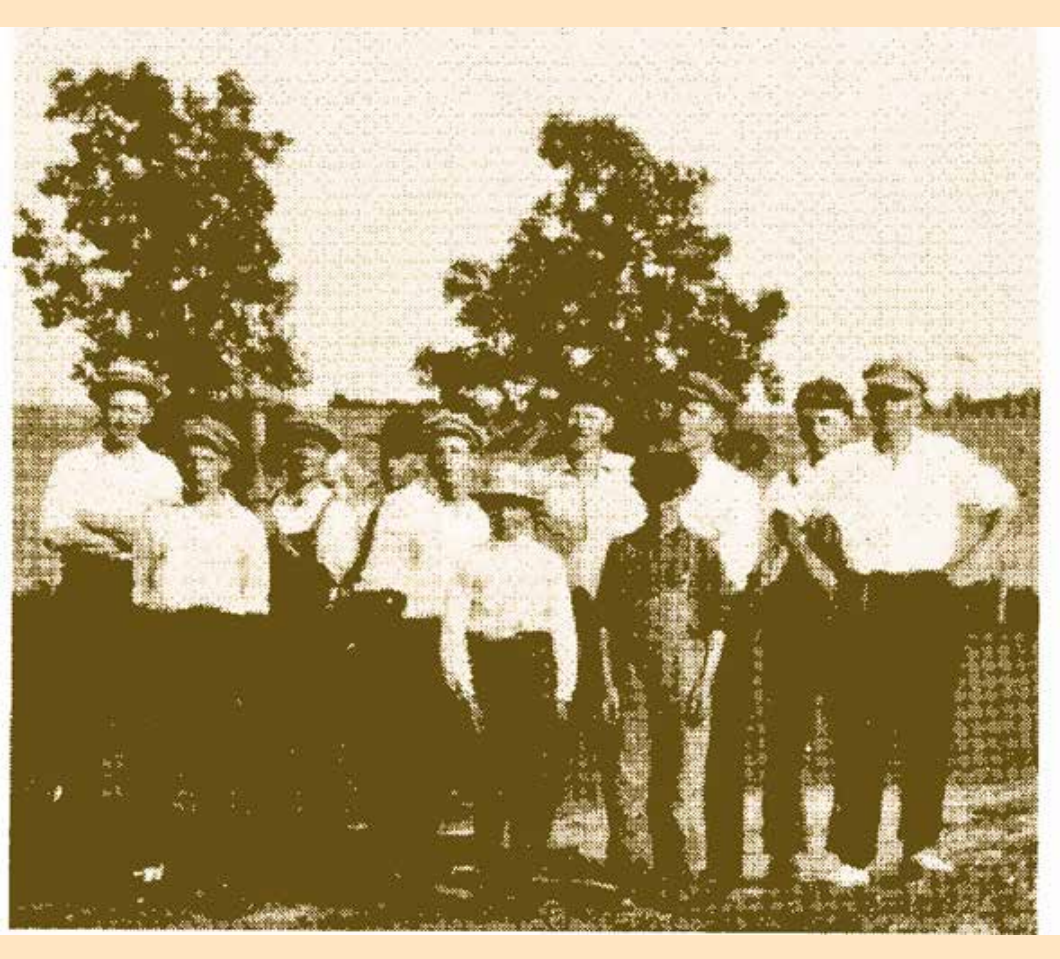
In addition to state regulation, the TOV ordinance is more restrictive in these ways:

- ATV and UTV Vehicles may only operate during the hours of 5:00am and 10:00pm on Town Routes.
- All ATV/UTV must be at least 16 years of age and possess a valid driver's license.
- All ATV/UTVs shall be equipped with a muffler system with a maximum noise level of 96 decibels.
- All ATV/UTV operators shall maintain liability insurance for their ATV/UTV in the amount established by the State of Wisconsin for motor vehicle operation. By utilizing any ATV/UTV, the operator agrees to fully indemnify and hold harmless the Town of Vermont for all liability arising from use on town roadways.

Let's be careful out there
With the addition of ATVs/UTVs to our roadways, all town residents and anyone using our town roads will need to use extra caution when out on our wonderful, curvy, hilly roadways. Farm vehicles, bicycles, and the occasional escaped goat or cow already demand our full attention. Let's all limit our distractions as much as possible and keep everyone safe. If you see unsafe or illegal behavior, you can report it to the Dane County Sheriff's office non-emergency number. The town board will be updated on the content of those calls.

OUR HISTORY

From the 1977 book *History of the Town of Vermont*



Vermont had a baseball team?

Vermont Baseball Team
(Left to right): Elliott Mickelson, Clarence Sweum, Jake Baumgartner, Anton Steensrud, Melvin Severson, Ban!ord Olson, Martin Olson, Selmer Severson (on right end).

OUR AGRICULTURE

The "C" in CPORT, "Soil's role in Climate?"
Thank you for *digging* into the next installment of our series on that thin, living skin of the Earth called SOIL.

By Nick Balster

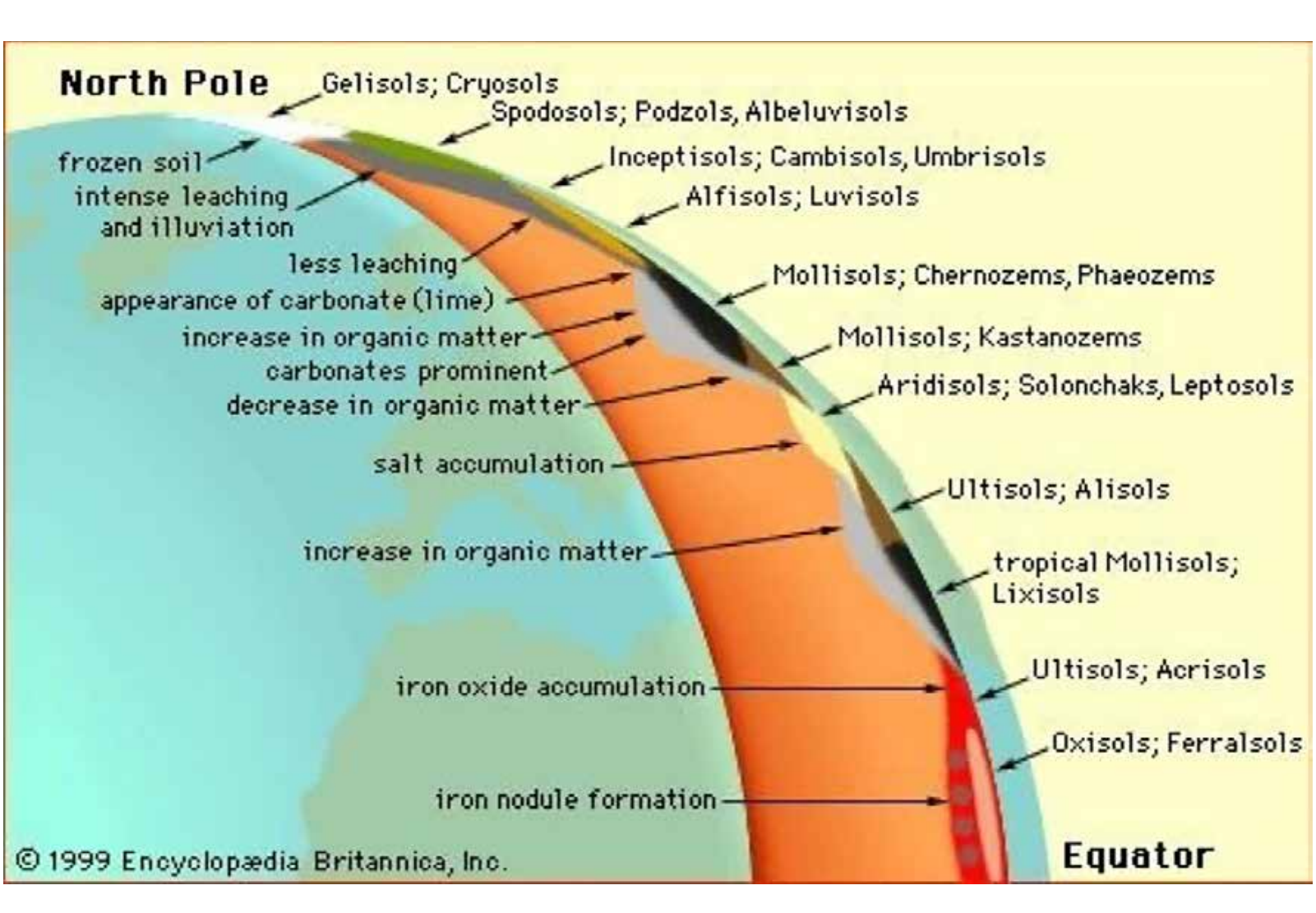
Town of Vermont Plan Commission member and Town Board and UW-Madison Professor

For those following this down-to-earth series on SOIL, here's a pop quiz. Other than solids, what makes up ~50% of an ideal soil? Did you say pore space? Nice work and thanks for following along, as that soil space will play a central role in today's topic.

Whether reading the newspaper, watching a television show, hearing a political speech, playing on social media, or even having a casual conversation at the local Kwiktrip, it is difficult to escape the word *climate* these days. When we think about climate, we often picture the sky, the weather, and the seasons. But did you know that there's also a **soil climate** right beneath our feet that plays a crucial role in supporting life on Earth? In fact, when Dr. Vasily Dokuchaev, a 19th-century Russian geologist credited with the founding of Soil Science, started thinking about soil development, he argued that climate was the most important factor. By the way, Dokuchaev has a moon crater named after him – (now there's a factoid you will never use)

Climate shapes SOIL!

To properly describe climate, we consider many factors such as wind, ocean currents, atmospheric pressure, humidity, and many more. However, most soil scientists focus primarily on temperature and moisture. After all, it is the dynamic yet generally predictable global changes in temperature and moisture that largely determine the beautiful variety of soil types on Earth, from the tropical soils at the equator to the desert soils at 300 North and South latitude to the temperate soils at 600 North and South latitude to the polar soils. Each of these soil types displays a wonderful array of distinct physical, chemical, and biological characteristics shaped by the climate in which they developed (*generally, the rate of development (speed of reactions) increases with increases in temperature and moisture*). At the extremes, the equatorial soils are old and weathered *(I like to say 'wise')*, while the arctic soils are young and underdeveloped. So lay a global map of climatic zones over a soil map, and you will find the boundaries of each virtually overlap.


North Pole
Gelisols; Cryosols
Spodosols; Podzols, Albeluvisols
Inceptisols; Cambisols, Umbrisols
Alfisols; Luvisols
Mollisols; Chernozems, Phaeozems
Mollisols; Kastanozems
Aridisols; Solonchaks, Leptosols
Ultisols; Alisols
tropical Mollisols; Lixisols
Ultisols; Acrisols
Oxisols; Ferralsols
frozen soil
intense leaching and illuviation
less leaching
appearance of carbonate (lime)
increase in organic matter
carbonates prominent
decrease in organic matter
salt accumulation
increase in organic matter
iron oxide accumulation
iron nodule formation
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Equator

A global map of climatic zones laid over a soil map showing the boundaries of each virtually overlap.

And SOIL also shapes climate!

Here is where that space between the soil particles takes center stage! Most soil textbooks refer to the soil's pore space as the place that houses its air and water. I tell my students it's better to think of "Atmosphere" and "Solution" because the soil's climate found within this pore space is way more interesting than simply air and water.

Let's take the soil solution, for example. Yes, water is a huge component, but it is much more dynamic than that. The solution is where plants feed on their liquid diet of all but 3 of the 17 essential plant nutrients *(can you name which three?)*. It is where nasties such as soluble pesticides and herbicides are found to either bioaccumulate or leach into groundwater. It is where the water component goes through its spontaneous phase changes from liquid to solid (ice) to gas (vapor) essential for life on Earth via a profound soil temperature and the daily exchange of thermal energy between the soil and the atmosphere above *(google "latent heat")*. This exchange determines when seeds germinate, how organisms interact with soil, the annual cycles of life, and the very temperature of the surface. Have you ever laid on hot sandy soil or cool clayey soil in the middle of a sunny day? – *think soil climate the next time you do; in fact, there is no time like the present.*

Did you know the concentration of CO_2 in the soil atmosphere is typically 10 to 100 times higher than the atmosphere aboveground?

And how about the atmospheric component of soil climate? Wow, talk about an interesting mix of gases! It is this very atmosphere that aerobic soil organisms (macro/microorganisms, plants) depend on for gas exchange, breathing in oxygen that diffuses into the soil and releasing CO_2 from respiration that diffuses out into the atmosphere above. Yes, as heterotrophic soil organisms grow and process soil organic matter, they respire, exactly like you and me. In fact, did you know the concentration of CO_2 in the soil atmosphere is typically 10 to 100 times higher than the atmosphere aboveground – we couldn't survive in this level of CO^2! So, if we disrupt the connections between the pores (e.g., compaction), limit its drainage (e.g., flooding), or limit the food for soil organisms (by losing soil organic matter), biology suffers. Carbon dioxide can accumulate to levels where the aerobic organisms can no longer breathe (called hypoxia), ushering in the soil anaerobes that provide comparably less energy to the system, all the while "exhaling" gases like methane, hydrogen sulfide, and nitrous oxide (stinky!!).

So as Dr. Dokuchaev recognized long ago (and I am sure many before him), climate plays a critical role in soil development. What he likely did not recognize, however, was the importance of soil in shaping global climate and maintaining healthy ecosystems. Modern-day scientists now understand this role, which is why we are intensively studying such things as the thawing of polar soils with all their frozen carbon ready to be turned into CO_2 or temperate soils *(think Vermont Township)* where the management of soil organic carbon is critical to changes in climate. So the next time someone mentions changes in atmospheric CO_2 and its effect on climate, ask them about the role of soil!

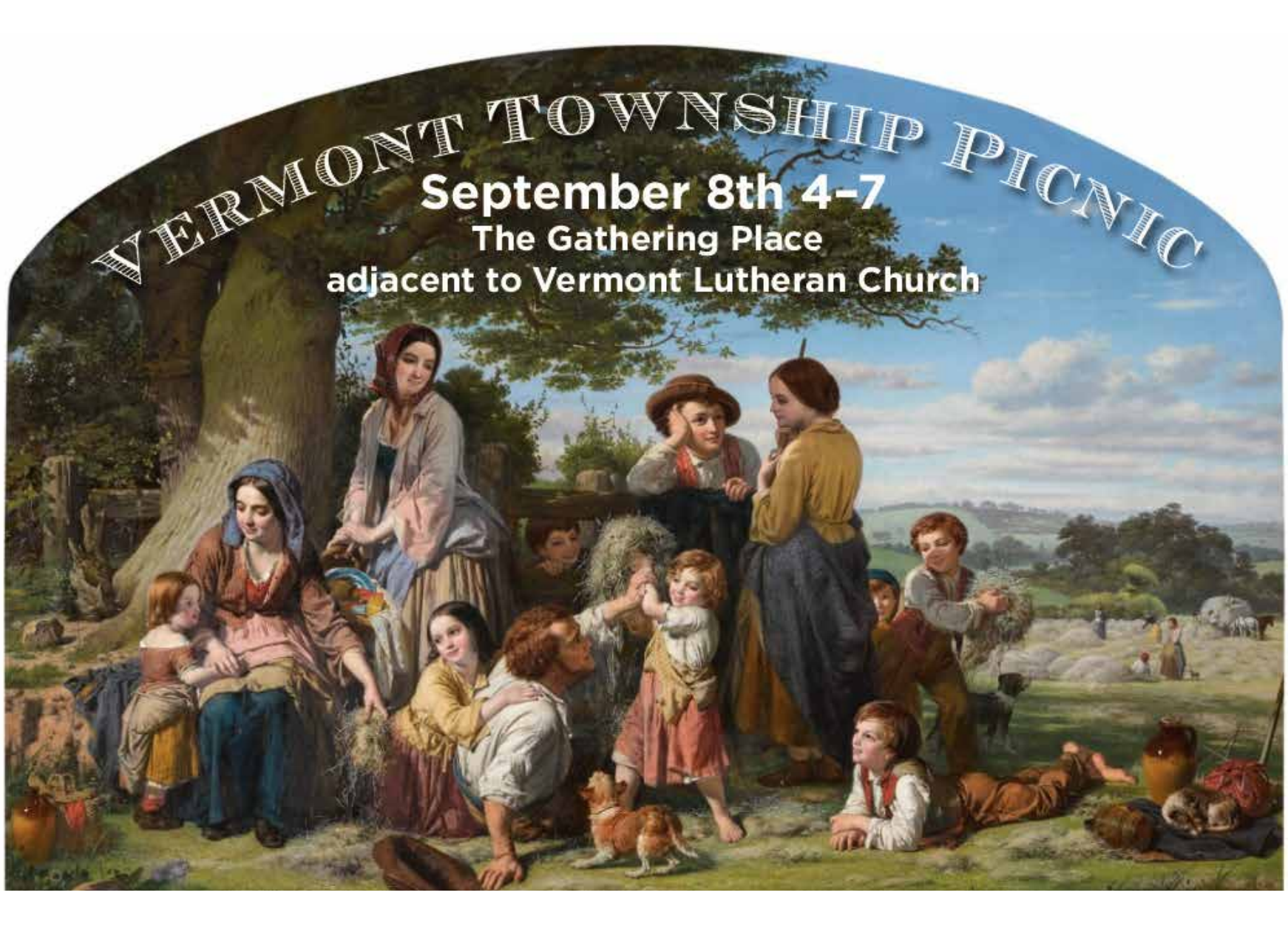
What happens with our changing climate is difficult to predict) given it's a complex system. However, I can confidently say that, however it turns out, SOIL and our stewardship of it will play a critical role.

Stay tuned for the next installment on SOIL. The Parents of SOIL will be entering the conversation (watch out for Dad jokes!). I'll spill all the dirt on this topic next time.

^{222}Rn
RADON

Important postscript – Remember this value: ***4.0 picocuries per liter (pCi/L)***. Why, you ask? This is the concentration of Radon gas in your home you should be seriously concerned about. Radon is a deadly carcinogen recognized as the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking, and guess where it is found, yes, the soil's climate! More specifically, it is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that comes from the decay of uranium and thorium in the earth's crust, which then diffuses into and through the soil atmosphere. It can then seep through cracks in foundations, gaps in pipes, or other openings in contact with soil and accumulate in your home, which has become more of an issue with the increased sealing of construction to conserve energy. The good news is that it is very easy to test for and mitigate through proper ventilation. The more concerning news is that 1 in 10 homes are susceptible to Radon in Wisconsin, and Vermont Township is among the highest. If you haven't tested your home, please do so today! Any level of 4 pCI/L and above needs to be addressed. This website has all the information you need: https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/radon/index.htm. It's so easy to do and will save lives!

OUR COMMUNITY



September 8th 4–7
The Gathering Place adjacent to Vermont Lutheran Church

- The meal will be chicken fajita tacos with sides. Just bring a dessert to share if you like.
- Live, local music from John Widdicombe and Larry Stout.
- Visit with your neighbors, friends and soon-to-be friends.

Watch for details on the website.

OUR GOVERNMENT

A BUSY ELECTION YEAR

- Tuesday, November 5th General election

1855
TOWN OF VERMONT

NEW SIGN AT TOWN HALL

After years of repair and repainting, the town hall sign was retired and replaced with a new hand-carved sign. Jack has found a place of honor for the old sign inside the town garage.

POP QUIZ ANSWER
Vermont township has
36 dead end roads.

CONTACT VERMONT'S VOICE

Gary Cox *Production* .... coxco@chorus.net

VERMONT TOWNSHIP BOARD

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email clerk@townofvermontwi.gov

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email treasurer@townofvermontwi.gov

Town Board Supervisor Doug Meier 608-219-1886

Town Board Supervisor Nick Balster .... supervisor2@townofvermontwi.gov

Town Board Supervisor Alex McKenzie 608-437-9842

Town Board Supervisor Kirk Lynch .... supervisor1@townofvermontwi.gov

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Plan Commission Member Scott Moe 608-767-4738

Plan Commission Member Nick Balster .... supervisor2@townofvermontwi.gov

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HOME