

GRAY'S COUNTY GOLD RESOURCE

Cass County, Michigan

Property Records, Permits, Wells, Septic, Environmental and Due-Diligence Guide

Purpose A verified, homeowner-friendly starting point for identifying the correct agency, locating property records, recognizing research gaps and choosing the next factual step. This resource does not replace legal, surveying, engineering, environmental or governmental determinations.

Prepared for homeowners, buyers, sellers, inspectors and real-estate professionals

Version 1.0 | Research verified through August 18, 2026

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1. Start With the Address

1. Confirm the parcel and municipality in Cass County Beacon.
2. Do not use the mailing city, ZIP code, school district or utility provider as a substitute for the legal municipality.
3. Identify zoning, building, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, well/septic, road, drain, soil-erosion, floodplain and wetland authorities separately.
4. Search by address, parcel number, former address and prior parcel number.
5. Request applications, permits, plans, inspections, correction notices, finals, occupancy records and expired/canceled items.
6. Preserve the search log and written agency responses.

Address-first rule Cass County says building, electrical, mechanical and plumbing administration is local. A village parcel must not automatically be routed to the surrounding township.

[Cass County Building, Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing directory](#)

[Cass County GIS / Beacon](#)

2. Cass County Government Structure

Cass County has 20 local governments: 15 townships, one city and four incorporated villages.

Type	Local governments
Townships	Calvin; Howard; Jefferson; LaGrange; Marcellus; Mason; Milton; Newberg; Ontwa; Penn; Pokagon; Porter; Silver Creek; Volinia; Wayne
City	Dowagiac
Villages	Cassopolis; Edwardsburg; Marcellus; Vandalia

Boundary trap A mailing address using Cassopolis, Edwardsburg, Marcellus or Vandalia does not prove the parcel is inside that village. Confirm the mapped municipal boundary before choosing an office.

3. Building and Trade Authority Ledger

The following roster reflects current official sources reviewed through August 18, 2026. Verify personnel and intake instructions before submitting because contractors and direct numbers can change.

Jurisdiction	Building	Electrical	Mechanical / Plumbing	Zoning
Calvin Twp	Adam Dahlgren	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Matthew Jorgensen
Howard Twp	Adam Dahlgren	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Township
Jefferson Twp	Wayne Hardin	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Steve Allen
LaGrange Twp	Luke Wagoner	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Steven Allen; zoning first
Marcellus Twp	Rich McGrew	Chauncey Hackenberg	Ken Jewell	Brian Lamoreaux
Mason Twp	Joe Wickey	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Chelsa Greathouse
Milton Twp	Luke Wagoner	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Township
Newberg Twp	Joe Wickey	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Township

Jurisdiction	Building	Electrical	Mechanical / Plumbing	Zoning
Ontwa Twp	Richard Yoder	David Gongwer	John Dobberteen	Dawn Bolock
Penn Twp	Adam Dahlgren	David Gongwer	John Dobberteen	Roger Leach
Pokagon Twp	Scott Saunders	David Gongwer	John Dobberteen	Joseph True
Porter Twp	Larry Taylor	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Township
Silver Creek Twp	Scott Saunders	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Township
Volinia Twp	Luke Wagoner	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Roger Leach
Wayne Twp	Scott Saunders	Ron Bellaire	John Dobberteen	Mark Davis
City of Dowagiac	City Building & Planning	City department	City department	Steve Allen
Village of Cassopolis	Adam Dahlgren	David Gongwer	John Dobberteen	Village
Village of Marcellus	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt
Village of Edwardsburg	Confirm with village	Confirm with village	Confirm with village	Village
Village of Vandalia	Adam Dahlgren	Confirm with village	Confirm with village	Village

Published roster limitation The municipality publishes permit applications but does not clearly identify every current trade official in the sources reviewed. Contact the village to confirm permit intake, inspection scheduling and historical-record custody.

4. Current Authority vs. Historical Custodian

- The current official may not hold every older permit, plan or inspection record.
- Village of Marcellus appointed SAFEbuilt for zoning and all four construction-code disciplines on January 9, 2024. Ask both the village and current provider about predecessor records.
- Newberg Township currently lists Joe Wickey; older third-party material naming a different building official is not current authority but signals a possible records transition.
- Howard Township publishes a municipality-specific John Dobberteen number that differs from some neighboring municipal rosters. Use the municipality's own routing instructions.
- Porter Township directs electrical applications to the inspector and says the township office does not accept them.
- City of Dowagiac uses an integrated Building & Planning department for permits, inspections, property maintenance and occupancy.

Request both sides Ask: Who administers the permit today? Who holds permits, inspection cards, plans and finals from earlier years? A referral to a contractor does not necessarily resolve historical custody.

[City of Dowagiac Building & Planning](#)

[Village of Marcellus zoning and permits](#)

5. Permit Scope, Inspections and Finals

1. Confirm the permit describes the visible work.
2. Check every required inspection, correction and reinspection.
3. Confirm final approval rather than relying on "issued" status.
4. Check related building and trade permits.
5. Ask whether a certificate of occupancy was required and issued.
6. Identify open, expired, canceled or voided records.

Issued is not final An issued permit shows authorization for a described scope. It does not by itself prove that work matched the approved scope, passed all inspections or received final approval.

6. Well and Septic Authority

Van Buren/Cass District Health Department administers well and onsite sewage functions throughout incorporated and unincorporated Cass County. Cass office: 302 S Front Street, Dowagiac. Environmental Health assistance: 269-782-0064. General line: 269-621-3143 ext. 2006.

2026 published service	Fee
Septic - new, replacement or tank only	\$300
Well - new or replacement	\$300
Type II well permit or alteration	\$500
Home-loan water + septic evaluation	\$250
Home-loan well + water evaluation	\$225
Home-loan septic-only evaluation	\$175
Short-term rental water + septic	\$200
Short-term rental septic-only	\$125
Existing hookup - well or septic	\$300
Qualifying permit renewal	\$150
Lead water test	\$30

Verify fees before relying on them. Applications may require parcel, township, subdivision/lot, bedrooms, occupants, bathrooms, water/sewer availability, a scaled site drawing and contamination sources.

[VBCDHD Water and Septic](#)

[VBCDHD Environmental Health forms and fees](#)

7. Well and Septic Decision Rules

- Permits are valid one year.
- A septic permit is not transferable to a new owner.
- A water permit may transfer only by signed written request from both parties and only when scope does not change.
- A septic installation must not be backfilled before inspection and final approval.
- A new well requires inspection, water results and approval before use.
- A well inactive more than one year requires substantial-compliance review before reuse.
- A change of use that increases water demand triggers review.
- An increase in bedroom capacity can trigger septic review.

Evaluation limitation A home-loan or short-term-rental inspection documents the system and conditions evaluated at that time. It is not the original installation permit, does not establish the complete construction history and does not prove present performance.

Records to request

- Well permit, construction log, inspection, water results, repair and abandonment records
- Septic permit, soil/site evaluation, design, installation and final inspection
- Tank or drainfield replacement records
- Home-loan, short-term-rental and change-of-use evaluations
- Variances, legal restrictions and notices
- Municipal water/sewer connection and private-system abandonment evidence

8. Groundwater Restricted Zones

The VBCDHD Environmental Health Code establishes groundwater-use restricted zones by parcel or address. In a legally established zone, installation or use of a well may be prohibited unless an agency-approved exception applies.

1. Confirm the exact parcel and current water source.
2. Ask VBCDHD whether the parcel lies in an established groundwater-use restricted zone.
3. Request the legal instrument, map, effective date and applicable conditions.
4. Do not infer a restriction merely from a nearby environmental site or monitoring well.

[VBCDHD Environmental Health Code](#)

9. Property, GIS, Tax and Deed Records

System	Best use	Key limitation / cost
Cass County Beacon GIS	Parcel, municipality, mapping layers	Screening tool; boundary is not a survey
BS&A property search	Assessment and tax information	\$6 per search since Sept. 5, 2023; owner can access own record free with account
Register of Deeds / Tapestry EON	Recorded deeds, mortgages, easements and restrictions	\$8.75 per search and \$1/page effective June 12, 2026; verify current charges

Keep the sources separate GIS answers mapping questions, assessment records support taxation and mass appraisal, and recorded instruments establish the public land-record chain. None substitutes for a licensed boundary survey or legal title opinion.

[Cass County Property Tax Search](#)

[Cass County Recorded Document Search](#)

10. Drains, Lake Levels and Special Assessments

Cass County Drain Commissioner functions include county drains and districts, maintenance and construction, apportionments and special assessments, development drainage, court-established lake levels, soil erosion and survey/remonumentation. Office: 340 N O'Keefe Street, Cassopolis; 269-445-8611 ext. 315.

- A visible ditch, creek or pipe is not automatically a county drain.
- A lake association does not automatically control a court-established legal lake level.
- Drain approval does not replace lake-level, soil-erosion, wetland, road, septic, zoning or building approval.
- Review drain-district and lake-level special assessments when applicable.

[Cass County Drain Commissioner](#)

11. Roads and Right-of-Way

Cass County Road Commission permits cover work such as piers, boat lifts, road bores, sewer hookups, utilities and right-of-way activity. A road permit does not eliminate approvals required by another agency.

- Confirm whether a road is county, state, city/village or private.
- Verify driveway/entrance, culvert, utility and right-of-way permits.
- Review recorded private-road access and maintenance agreements.
- Do not treat maintenance history or a road sign as proof of public status.

[Cass County Road Commission General Permit](#)

12. Soil Erosion, Floodplain and Wetlands

- Cass County Drain Commissioner administers soil-erosion and sedimentation-control review. Qualifying earth change within 500 feet of a water body may require a permit.
- Use FEMA's current official map products and revisions for flood screening; mapped status does not guarantee a property will or will not flood.
- Use EGLE wetland and water-resource screening and obtain a jurisdictional determination when required.
- An approval in one program does not waive another program's requirements.

[FEMA Flood Map Service Center](#)

13. Environmental and PFAS Research

Research flag	What the official material supports	What it does not prove
M-60 Tanker Spill - Howard Township	Significant PFAS detections occurred in some monitoring wells; residential wells have had nondetect or trace results at various times	A monitoring-well result does not establish the concentration in a nearby private well
Fibrosan proposed air permit - 2026	EGLE public comment ran June 25-August 27, 2026 for a proposed major HAP/VOC source	A permit proposal does not establish contamination or an unsafe condition at a particular property

1. Confirm the subject parcel, water source and distance/direction.
2. Open the current agency page and identify the site lead.
3. Review sampling date, location, medium and laboratory result.
4. Request current status and property-specific testing guidance.
5. Use a qualified environmental professional when a Phase I/II or other property-specific opinion is needed.

Environmental wording A mapped environmental site is a research flag, not proof that the subject parcel is contaminated. Absence from one map is not a universal environmental clearance.

[MPART - M-60 Tanker Spill](#)

[EGLE - Fibrosan public notice](#)

14. Radon

County, ZIP-code and neighborhood radon data cannot determine the level in an individual home. Testing the dwelling is the only way to know its measured concentration under the test conditions.

- Michigan recommends retesting about every two years and after major changes that may affect entry or ventilation.
- EPA recommends mitigation when the result is 4 pCi/L or higher; follow current test and confirmation guidance.

- Michigan's current test-kit directory still lists the legacy name "Cass County Health Department," 201 M-62, Cassopolis, 269-445-5280. This conflicts with the current VBCDHD structure; confirm availability, address and pickup instructions before travel.

[Michigan Indoor Radon Program](#)

[Michigan radon test-kit directory](#)

15. Rental, Manufactured and Special Properties

Property branch	Records to investigate
Rental / multi-unit	Approved use and unit count; rental registration; inspections; occupancy; fire separation; open violations
Mason Township rental	Township rental-property ordinance and inspection requirements
Manufactured/mobile home	Land ownership; title; affixture; installation/foundation; park/local approvals; additions and decks
Waterfront	Floodplain/wetland; shoreline; dock/pier; lake level; drain; well/septic setbacks; assessments
Private road/shared drive	Recorded access and maintenance; entrance permit; drainage; emergency access; association assessments
Boundary/cross-jurisdiction	Municipality containing structure and entrance; parcel/county; road; utility; fire/EMS; environmental authority

16. Repair, Weatherization and Financing

- Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency serves Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties with weatherization and qualifying utility, rent, mortgage and property-tax assistance. Eligibility and funding apply; weatherization generally is not repeated within 15 years.
- Michigan Saves may offer septic-replacement financing. Eligibility, contractors, terms and funding can change.
- Cass County submitted a 2026 CDBG application seeking \$1.5 million for approximately 30 homes and up to \$40,000 per home. An application does not prove funding was awarded or homeowner intake is open. Verify live status.

[Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency programs](#)

[Cass County 2026 CDBG application](#)

17. When a Record Cannot Be Found

1. Confirm the correct municipality and agency for the date of the work.
2. Search current and former addresses, parcel numbers, owner names and contractor names.
3. Ask about paper files, microfilm, archived software and predecessor providers.
4. Ask whether the record was destroyed under an approved retention schedule.
5. Request a written response stating the systems and date range searched.
6. Compare assessor records, historical imagery, seller records and physical observations without turning absence into a conclusion.

Approved missing-record language No record was located in the sources reviewed. Confirm with the enforcing agency. Do not state that work was never permitted unless the responsible agency makes that determination based on its complete records.

Neutral addition wording The differing foundation configuration may indicate phased construction or a later addition. This observation alone does not establish when the work occurred or whether permits were required or obtained. Review assessor records, historical imagery, building permits and available inspection records.

18. Evidence Grades and Action Levels

Grade	Evidence	Use
A	Recorded instrument, survey, final inspection, occupancy certificate or written agency determination	State documented fact within scope
B	Issued permit, approved plan, assessor card, health installation/final or official GIS layer	Report record and limitation
C	Historic aerial, directory, listing card or dated photo	Corroborate timeline or clue
D	Listing, seller/contractor statement, association summary or third-party database	Attribute and verify
E	Physical observation needing verification	Describe neutrally and identify follow-up

Level	Meaning	Action
1 - Informational	Difference without apparent present safety/approval concern	Retain with records
2 - Records follow-up	Incomplete, inconsistent or unclear source	Request complete file and written confirmation
3 - Professional verification	May affect title, boundary, structure, use, utilities, drainage or environment	Consult appropriate licensed specialist
4 - Prompt safety/government	Potential immediate hazard, failure or unsafe occupancy	Protect occupants and promptly contact qualified help

Safety exception Do not delay for paperwork when there is suspected gas or carbon-monoxide exposure, electrical overheating, structural instability, sewage discharge, unsafe occupied space, active flooding or another immediate threat. Protect occupants first.

19. Ready-to-Use Request Language

Complete permit history

Copy/paste Please provide all available building, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, demolition, zoning, occupancy, rental and code-enforcement records for [address], parcel [number], former addresses and prior parcel numbers. Include applications, issued/expired/canceled/voided permits, plans, inspection results, correction notices, final approvals, certificates of occupancy and unresolved violations. Please identify any current or predecessor provider holding part of the file. Electronic copies are preferred; advise before processing if charges apply.

Permit final status

Copy/paste Please confirm whether permit [number] received every required inspection and final approval; whether corrections remain; whether it expired, was canceled or remains open; whether related building or trade permits should be reviewed; and whether a certificate of occupancy was required and issued. Please provide the inspection history and final documentation.

Well and septic history

Copy/paste Please provide all available well permits/logs, inspection and water results; septic permits, soil/site evaluations, designs, installation and final inspections; repair, replacement and abandonment records; home-loan, short-term-rental and change-of-use evaluations; and variances or groundwater restrictions for [address/parcel]. If no record is located, please identify the date range and systems searched and whether another custodian may hold earlier files.

Current authority and historical custody

Copy/paste Please confirm the current official or contractor administering [discipline] for this parcel and identify who holds historical applications, permits, plans, inspection cards, correction notices and finals for work performed during [year/range].

20. Official Sources

[Cass County permit directory](#)

[VBCDHD Water and Septic](#)

[VBCDHD Environmental Health Code](#)

[Cass County GIS](#)

[Property Tax Search](#)

[Recorded Document Search](#)

[Drain Commissioner](#)

[Road Commission permit](#)

[City of Dowagiac Building & Planning](#)

[Village of Cassopolis building inspections](#)

[Village of Marcellus zoning](#)

[Village of Edwardsburg permits](#)

[Newberg Township contacts](#)

[Michigan Indoor Radon](#)

[MPART M-60 Tanker Spill](#)