



VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Public Property Information & Homeowner Resource Guide

A public starting point for parcel identification, permit research, wells and septic systems, coastal conditions, roads, radon, and environmental information.

PUBLIC EDITION

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START WITH THE PROPERTY

A mailing city does not necessarily identify the governing township, village, or city. Confirm the parcel and legal municipality before researching permits, zoning, utilities, or records.

PURPOSE AND LIMITATION

This guide is educational and navigational. It is not a title examination, legal opinion, boundary survey, environmental site assessment, code-compliance certification, or substitute for property-specific inspection or testing. Government records and online systems can be incomplete or change over time.

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Relationships First. Excellence Always.

1. Address-First Research Workflow

1. Confirm the parcel and legal municipality in the current county Parcel Viewer.
2. Do not substitute mailing city, ZIP code, school district, fire district or utility provider for the legal municipality.
3. Identify zoning, each construction trade, well/septic, road, drain, soil-erosion, floodplain, wetland and coastal authorities separately.
4. Search current and former addresses, parcel numbers, owner names and predecessor providers.
5. Request applications, plans, permits, inspections, corrections, finals, occupancy records and expired/canceled items.
6. Preserve the search log and written agency responses.

Four separate questions Identify (1) the issuing and record-owning agency, (2) the person performing inspections, (3) the local zoning authority and (4) the historical record custodian. They are not always the same.

[Van Buren County Interactive Maps](#)

2. County Structure and Boundary Traps

Van Buren County has 29 incorporated local governments: 18 townships, four cities and seven villages.

Type	Local governments
Townships	Almena; Antwerp; Arlington; Bangor; Bloomingdale; Columbia; Covert; Decatur; Geneva; Hamilton; Hartford; Keeler; Lawrence; Paw Paw; Pine Grove; Porter; South Haven; Waverly
Cities	Bangor; Gobles; Hartford; South Haven
Villages	Bloomingdale; Breedsville; Decatur; Lawrence; Lawton; Mattawan; Paw Paw

Village rule A village parcel must not automatically be routed to the surrounding township. Confirm the incorporated boundary and the authority for each discipline.

3. Construction-Code Authority Matrix

The official statewide jurisdiction list revised July 29, 2026 is the controlling screening source reviewed. "Local" means a local enforcing agency; "State" means LARA/Bureau of Construction Codes. Verify intake before filing.

Jurisdiction	Building	Electrical	Mechanical	Plumbing
City Bangor	Local	Local	Local	State
City Gobles	Local	Local	Local	Local
City Hartford	Local	Local	Local	State
City South Haven	Local	Local	State	State
Vlg Bloomingdale	Local	Local	Local	State
Vlg Breedsville	Local	State	Local	State
Vlg Decatur	Local	Local	Local	Local
Vlg Lawrence	Local	Local	Local	Local
Vlg Lawton	Local	Local	Local	Local
Vlg Mattawan	Local	Local	Local	Local
Vlg Paw Paw	Local	Local	Local	Local
Almena Twp	Local	Local	Local	State
Antwerp Twp	Local	Local	Local	Local
Arlington Twp	Local	State	Local	State
Bangor Twp	Local	State	Local	State
Bloomingdale Twp	Local	Local	Local	State
Columbia Twp	Local	Local	State	State
Covert Twp	Local	Local	Local	State
Decatur Twp	Local	Local	Local	Local
Geneva Twp	Local	Local	Local	State
Hamilton Twp	State	State	State	State
Hartford Twp	Local	Local	Local	State
Keeler Twp	Local	Local	Local	Local
Lawrence Twp	Local	Local	Local	Local
Paw Paw Twp	Local	Local	Local	Local
Pine Grove Twp	Local	Local	Local	Local
Porter Twp	Local	Local	Local	Local
South Haven Twp	Local	Local	Local	State
Waverly Twp	Local	Local	Local	Local

[Michigan Statewide Jurisdiction List](#)

4. Provider Routing Ledger

Jurisdiction	Building	Electrical	Mechanical	Plumbing
City Bangor	Bill Snider	Michigan Township Services	Walter DeVisser Jr	State
City Gobles	Michigan Code Inspections (MCI)	MCI	MCI	MCI
City Hartford	Bill Snider	City/local	City/local	State
City South Haven	Ross Rogien	City/local	State	State
Vlg Bloomingdale	Artie Wilcox	Artie Wilcox	Walter DeVisser Jr	State
Vlg Breedsville	Confirm village	State	Confirm village	State
Vlg Decatur	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt
Vlg Lawrence	MCI	MCI	MCI	MCI
Vlg Lawton	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt
Vlg Mattawan	Rich McGrew	Artie Wilcox	Scott Paddock	Rich Goris
Vlg Paw Paw	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt
Almena Twp	Antwerp / Kevin Cardiff	Antwerp / Artie Wilcox	Antwerp / Rocky Sherburn	State
Antwerp Twp	Kevin Cardiff	Artie Wilcox	Rocky Sherburn	Local
Arlington Twp	Bill Snider	State	Walter DeVisser Jr	State
Bangor Twp	Bill Snider	State	Walter DeVisser Jr	State
Columbia Twp	Michigan Township Services	MTS	State	State
Covert Twp	SAFEbuilt - verify transition	SAFEbuilt - verify	SAFEbuilt - verify	State
Decatur Twp	New local intake - verify	New local intake - verify	New local intake - verify	New local intake - verify
Geneva Twp	Michigan Township Services	MTS	Walter DeVisser Jr	State
Hamilton Twp	State	State	State	State
Keeler Twp	Scott Saunders / Cloudpermit	Township routing	Dobberteen Inspection	Dobberteen Inspection
Lawrence Twp	MCI	MCI	MCI	MCI
Paw Paw Twp	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt	SAFEbuilt
Pine Grove Twp	KABA	KABA	KABA	KABA
Porter Twp	Garrett Reitenour	Chauncey Hackenberg	Gary Heckman	Gary Heckman
South Haven Twp	Michigan Township Services	MTS	MTS	State
Waverly Twp	Confirm township	Confirm township	Confirm township	Confirm township

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

5. Active Contradictions and Provider Transitions

- Decatur Township: the July 29, 2026 state list says all four disciplines became local effective June 8, 2026, while the township page still routes users to state inspectors. Confirm the new local intake and ask who owns pre-June 8 records.
- Covert Township: the current page identifies SAFEbuilt, but the township issued a July 20, 2026 request for proposals for new trade services. Verify the contractor before filing and identify historical custody.
- Almena Township: building, electrical and mechanical are handled through Antwerp Township, but the parcel remains in Almena Township for land-use and municipal identity.
- Village of Decatur: SAFEbuilt began service July 17, 2021. Ask the village and SAFEbuilt about predecessor files.
- Porter Township: current contacts differ from older county-hosted documents. Use the current township roster and ask about older files.
- The county drain overview says 11 lake levels while the dedicated current lake-level page says 15. Confirm the current legal list rather than repeating an unverified total.

Request both sides Ask who administers the permit today and who holds earlier applications, permits, plans, inspection cards, corrections and finals. A current contractor referral does not necessarily resolve historical custody.

6. Permit Status and Completion

1. Confirm the permit describes the visible work.
2. Review all required inspections, correction notices and reinspections.
3. Confirm final approval—not merely issued status.
4. Check related building and trade permits.
5. Ask whether occupancy approval 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 the work matched the approved scope, passed all inspections or received final approval.

7. Well, Septic and Water Records

Van Buren/Cass District Health Department administers private-well and onsite-sewage functions. Van Buren office: 260 South Street, Lawrence, MI 49064; 269-621-3143. Dedicated well/septic records requests: EH-FOIA@vbcassdhd.org.

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 renewal	\$150
Lead water test	\$30

- Permits are generally valid one year.
- A septic permit is not transferable.
- A water permit may transfer only by signed request from both parties and without a scope change.
- Do not backfill a septic installation before inspection.
- A new well requires inspection, water results and approval before use.
- A well inactive more than one year requires review before reuse.
- Changes in use, demand or bedroom capacity may trigger 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.

[VBCDHD Water and Septic](#)

[VBCDHD FOIA Requests](#)

8. Almena Groundwater Restricted Zone

A groundwater-use restricted zone was adopted October 8, 2024 and became effective February 28, 2025 for a legally defined portion of Almena Township west of 22nd Street and north of M-43, including portions of Fish Hatchery Road and Sunset Drive. It relates to contamination migrating from the West KL Avenue Landfill in Oshtemo Township, Kalamazoo County.

- New wells are prohibited unless EPA, EGLE and VBCDHD approve.
- Obtain the official property/address list or map and confirm the parcel; do not generalize the restriction to all of Almena Township.
- Request the controlling legal instrument, current water source, exception status and property-specific guidance.

[VBCDHD Almena Restricted Zone notice](#)

9. GIS, Assessment, Taxes and Deeds

Source	Best use	Limitation
Current Parcel Viewer	Parcel, municipality, tax/valuation, dimensions and screening layers	Not a survey; old viewer lacks newest updates
Assessor / tax records	Mass appraisal, assessment and tax history	Not title or permit proof
Register of Deeds online search	Recorded deeds, easements, mortgages and restrictions	Recorded instrument system; images may require purchase
Wellogis / scanned well logs	Newer and pre-2000 well construction records	Search gaps require VBCDHD follow-up

Register of Deeds search tip: individual names are entered “Last First” without punctuation. Published copies are \$1 per page and certification is \$5 per document; verify current charges.

Keep sources separate Recorded documents, assessment records and GIS each answer different questions. None substitutes for a licensed boundary survey or legal title opinion.

[Van Buren Register of Deeds](#)

[Online Recorded Document Search](#)

[EGLE Well Record Retrieval](#)

10. Addresses, Roads and Private Access

The county assigns addresses for all 18 townships and some cities/villages by agreement. Township fee: \$50 including reflective sign; replacement sign \$25. Participating city/village assignment: \$25, with sign separately \$25. Verify current fees. Phone: 269-657-8243.

- Since August 1, 2024, a driveway permit is required before a new address: county road through VBCRC, state road through MDOT; private roads require a site plan; cities/villages follow local rules.
- Vacant land generally receives an address only when development is planned within 12 months. A Rural ID is not valid for building permits or development.
- Address assignment is identification/911 service—not zoning, building, driveway or development approval.
- For roads, confirm whether jurisdiction is county, state, city/village or private. Review recorded private-road access and maintenance agreements.

[How to Obtain an Address](#)

[Van Buren County Road Commission Permits](#)

11. Drains, Lake Levels and Soil Erosion

Van Buren County has more than 540 county drains. A drain can include a creek, river, ditch or sewer. County-drain work and crossings require Drain Commissioner review; property owners are responsible for crossings/culverts, and EGLE approval may also apply.

- A visible ditch is not automatically a county drain.
- County-drain projects are funded through special assessments within the drainage district, not the general fund.
- The dedicated lake-level page currently identifies 15 Part 307 lake levels, with structures inspected every three years and last inspections reported in December 2023. Confirm the current legal list.
- A lake association does not automatically possess legal lake-level authority.
- For many site condominiums, the Drain Commissioner receives a Notice of Intent but is not required to review the stormwater plan.

Soil erosion triggers

- More than 225 square feet of earth change within 500 feet of waters of the state, including lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and county drains.
- More than one acre of earth change anywhere.
- Earth change of any size may require review in a critical dune area.
- Agricultural exemption is limited; exemptions under other laws do not automatically waive Part 91.

SESC contact: Heath Jorriy, jorriyh@vanburencountymi.gov, 269-657-8241. Drain permits: Joshua Griffith, griffithj@vanburencountymi.gov.

[County Drains](#)

[Lake Levels](#)

[SESC Permitting](#)

12. Wetlands, Floodplain and Lake Michigan Coast

- Use the county Hydric Areas Viewer only for screening; it combines NWI wetlands, hydric soils, FEMA floodplain and watershed information. A delineation or agency determination may still be required.
- Critical dune areas are mapped by EGLE and may overlap wetlands, floodplain, shoreline and submerged-lands jurisdiction.
- High Risk Erosion Areas are officially designated in Covert Township, City of South Haven and South Haven Township. The designation runs with the land after parcel splits or combinations.
- HREA maps include 30- and 60-year setback lines; the 60-year setback applies to non-readily movable structures and septic systems.

Coastal warning A Lake Michigan view, existing house, seawall, stairway or neighboring development does not prove that new construction, replacement, expansion or shoreline work is currently approvable.

[EGLE Critical Dune Maps](#)

[EGLE High Risk Erosion Area Maps](#)

13. Environmental and PFAS Research

Verified MPART investigation pages in Van Buren County include Du-Wel Bangor, Du-Wel Metals in Hartford, Paw Paw Plating, Production Rubber Products in Paw Paw, the Elkenburg Area of Interest, Former Four Star Property and 1421 Kalamazoo Street in South Haven. Status pages may not be routinely updated; contact the listed site lead.

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 site-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.

[Michigan PFAS Site Inventory](#)

[Du-Wel Metals - Hartford](#)

[Paw Paw Plating](#)

14. Radon Information and Considerations

County or ZIP-code 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 testing about every two years; EPA recommends mitigation at 4 pCi/L or higher under current guidance.

Directory conflict Michigan's current test-kit directory still lists the legacy "Van Buren County Health Department," 57418 County Road 681, Suite A, Hartford, 269-621-3143. The current VBCDHD Van Buren office is in Lawrence. Confirm kit availability and pickup location before traveling.

[Michigan Indoor Radon Program](#)

[Michigan Radon Test-Kit Directory](#)

15. Utilities, Water, Sewer and Broadband

- Confirm service with the municipality or provider using the exact parcel and proposed use.
- A nearby main, hydrant, meter, fiber pedestal or neighboring connection does not prove capacity, tap availability, connection cost or permission.
- Ask about assessments, connection charges, meter/tap ownership, private-system abandonment, easements and extension agreements.
- For private wells or septic systems in a planned municipal service area, ask both VBCDHD and the municipality what connection or abandonment rules apply.
- County broadband reporting indicates extensive fiber expansion, but availability must be checked by exact service address.

Utility rule Service-area maps and nearby infrastructure are screening evidence. Obtain written provider confirmation for availability, capacity, cost and conditions.

16. Home Repair, Weatherization and Assistance

- SMCAA serves Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties with weatherization and qualifying utility, mortgage, rent and property-tax assistance. Funding and eligibility apply.
- The 2026 Van Buren County CDBG Home Repair Program opened August 18, 2026 for listed townships and villages. Eligible work includes critical health/safety repairs—not cosmetic work.
- Published eligibility includes owner-occupancy, at least one year of ownership, current property taxes and household income at or below 80% AMI.
- Repairs under \$10,000 are described as grants. Assistance over \$10,000 is described as a zero-interest, no-monthly-payment loan forgiven after five years of continued occupancy. Verify live terms and funding before relying.
- Communities not in the county program may operate their own funding; check Market One.

[Van Buren 2026 Home Repair Program](#)

[SMCAA Programs](#)

17. When a Record Cannot Be Found

1. Confirm the correct municipality and authority for the date of work.
2. Search current/former addresses, parcel numbers, owner and contractor names.
3. Ask about paper files, microfilm, archived software and predecessor providers.
4. Ask whether records were destroyed under an approved retention schedule.
5. Request a written response identifying systems and date ranges searched.
6. Compare assessor records, historical imagery, seller records and 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 - Information	Difference without apparent current safety/approval concern	Retain with records
2 - Records	Incomplete, inconsistent or unclear source	Request complete file and written confirmation
3 - Professional	May affect title, structure, use, utilities, drainage or environment	Consult appropriate licensed specialist
4 - Prompt safety	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 Record Requests

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.

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.

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 Source Index

[Van Buren Interactive Maps](#)

[Register of Deeds](#)

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