



Bridgewater Township Good Neighbor Practices

The purpose of this Good Neighbor Practices document is to promote good community relations.

Bridgewater Township is an agricultural community committed to maintaining its rural character and small community values. This commitment requires sustaining an environment in which responsible agriculture can flourish while also providing for compatible rural residential and small business development.

When considering the benefits of rural residential living, it is also important to consider that the business of agriculture requires activities that involve noise, dust, odor, slow moving vehicles and late nights in the fields. Today's farms are dedicated to providing a safe, quality product for consumers, protecting and preserving the environment for the next generation, and being good neighbors in the community. At the same time typical farm activities may have some effect on adjoining property owners. Good Neighbor Practices and resulting relationships seek to balance the interests of agricultural operations which those of rural residences.

Any sound relationship is built on trust and building trust starts with openly sharing information and respecting each other. Building positive relations will pay dividends in the future. The best way to build understanding and appreciation for the agricultural story is through one-on-one conversations. If a conflict occurs in the future, it is beneficial to have a solid neighborhood relationship already in place.

General Considerations of Living in Rural Areas

Bridgewater residents value the rural character and quality of life in the township. The following general principles and characteristics are set forth in an effort to assist in building understanding about, and maintaining the quality of, rural life.

- ✚ Respect private property, easements, and right-of-ways and always ask before you use. You are criminally trespassing on private land unless you get permission from the owner. Land does not have to be posted with signs unless it is adjacent to public land (including private forest lands expressly open to public hunting/use). Understand that your neighbor's land isn't available to you for off-road vehicles or hunting, any more than your backyards are open to others without permission.
- ✚ Keep pets on your own property, especially at night (so they don't chase neighboring pets, livestock and wildlife).
- ✚ You are living in the country so there is often a slower response time for police, fire and animal control services in rural areas. Snow plowing takes longer to complete in a rural area. Your road may not be plowed before you have to leave in the morning. Major roads such as state highways and county roads get first priority.

- ✚ During storms, etc., it may take longer to restore phone or power service. Utility providers generally try to first restore the areas with the largest number of customers.
- ✚ Farm fields and ditches are not for dumping your trash, clippings, branches, yard waste, etc. Farm fields are for growing crops – not for riding equipment in or for taking your animals for a walk. Field accesses are not for parking cars.
- ✚ Drivers and bikers should be cautious when moving around large farm equipment on the roads. When in doubt – slow down. Never pass on the right behind someone making a left turn – this is extremely dangerous and can be fatal – that extra minute is worth less than a life. Visibility and the ability to maneuver are often limited. Walkers need to remain alert on rural roads
- ✚ Manure is an inevitable and valuable byproduct of livestock production. Unfortunately, the odor does not smell like money to all people. Most farmers have a nutrient management plan for their farm which is based on soil tests and the crops grown. Proper use of manure helps to grow crops efficiently and minimize fertilizer run-off. Remember, the farm operation was likely in place before you chose to locate nearby.
- ✚ Open burning of piled vegetative debris (brush, wood) may occur in ditches and fields, resulting in smoke from time to time. Always exercise extreme caution regarding open fires in rural areas. Consider the wind speed and direction as well as adjacent areas that could be endangered – your best choice may be to wait for another time.
- ✚ Outdoor animals experience many potential dangers. They can be hit by vehicles while crossing the road; they can meet a hungry predator. As such, you are likely to come across dead animals along the roads.

Tips for Rural Neighbors

1. **Plan neighborhood events** and get to know each other.
 - Farmers, take opportunities to educate. Consider hosting an open hour or picnic for this purpose. For example, invite neighbors and their children over to see new calves. Explore if there's a way you can assist the local 4-H club. Take the time to explain what you do and why. For instance, spreading manure on cropland recycles nutrients and puts manure to productive use. Don't assume non-farmers know this; what's obvious to you might be new information to them.
2. **Offer to help with home maintenance.** Clean the snow off your neighbor's driveway. Clear the roads for them. Offer to cultivate your neighbor's garden.
3. **Maintain your property.** Mow and pick up trash along the roadside, mow around the buildings, plant flowers and scrubs, use trees as windbreaks and fencing, and keep

buildings looking clean and neat. Your help in cleaning, mowing and caring for ditches is appreciated by your rural neighbors.

4. **Notify your neighbors.** Notify your neighbors when you are planning to conduct activities that might be important or have a high impact on neighbors. For farmers this might include spreading manure, spraying pesticides, working late in fields, etc. For rural residents, this might include planning an important event, etc. This isn't for permission – it's a courtesy. Consider the following options.
 - Call or drop a postcard in the mail to your neighbors explaining it is the time of year for manure application or chemical applications and ask them to notify you of any upcoming events. Avoid applying manure on weekends whenever possible or target fields that least expose neighboring residences to odors. Remember that rural mail boxes are for mail – don't assume you can put a flyer in your neighbor's mail box.
 - Let neighbors know when activities may infringe on entertainment or other special plans. Ask them to respond back with any special activities they are planning.
5. **Support the local community.** Get involved in community activities. Consider volunteering on a board or commission.
 - 🗳️ Attend a town board meeting and/or planning commission meeting and get to know your local appointed and elected officials.
6. **Open dialogues to avoid conflicts.** Being proactive (working on relationships before there is an issue) will lead to less, or less severe conflict. If conflict occurs, be truthful and respectful of other people's positions. Listen carefully to what the other person is saying and what they are not saying. Restate their position to have a clear understanding of the issue and then work together to resolve the issue. Agree upon a solution and take action.
 - 🗳️ Be truthful and honest, accept responsibility for any mistakes and work toward an agreeable solution for all people involved.

Building Neighborhood Relationships

Get to know your neighbors. Set aside time in your busy schedule to sit down with your neighbors and introduce yourself and your family. When you know your neighbors, it is easier to talk to them. If problems occur, this can help keep them from escalating into blame, misunderstandings, hard feeling or larger conflicts. If you expect your neighbors to be good neighbors, you must also be a good neighbor to them. Being neighborly means being friendly to your neighbors, helping them when needed, and being willing to accommodate them. It's the small things that matter when establishing and maintaining good relations with neighbors.

- ✚ Have a list of surrounding neighbors and their contact address and phone numbers in an easily accessible location – this will save time when there is a reason to contact them.
- ✚ Stay in contact with neighbors on a quarterly basis to answer any questions or concerns. Regular communication brings to light problems that you may not have realized.

Don't forget about new neighbors who move into the community. Visit with them and invite them to visit.

Summary

Good neighbor relations begin with you. The time commitment to building these relationships may be your greatest investment in your home or business. Be proud of your community and demonstrate your pride in the appearance and maintenance of your property. Ask the question: "What am I doing today to make a positive difference in our township and neighborhood?" Remember, "neighborliness" is a hallmark of the proud rural heritage that we all strive to foster.

Thank you for all you are doing to build stronger relationships in our township. We look forward to an increasingly welcoming and caring community of committed neighbors who listen, respect and are courteous to each other. Together we can work to live in harmony and in accord – every day.