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Volunteers are Key to Scott Govitz’ Vision

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On the Cover:
Scott Govitz, president of the Beaverton Activity Center, is surrounded by some of the red-vested volunteers who keep the center humming. Front: Joan Cashin, Scott Govitz. Middle: Sally Hicks, Margie Dittmer. Back: Judy Johnston, Caroline Johnson

Cover photo by Lacy Wooduff

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Keeping Our Mobility Options Open

As you probably know by now, I’m a big movie enthusiast. Some of you may recall the film *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*, a comedy film from the late 80s starring Steve Martin and John Candy. It is about two strangers who serendipitously find themselves trying to get home for the Thanksgiving holiday through a series of uncontrollable comedic mishaps and delays caused by weather, broken down trains, and just plain bad luck. Thirty years later, the parody of the movie should not be lost on us.

Trains and street cars were once a convenient, affordable way to get from one city to the next and move around within cities. Then the expansion of the highway system in the 1950s sliced and diced its way through the country. Investment in alternative transit options began to fall by the wayside, generating almost exclusive dependency on the automobile. Despite the burgeoning freeway system, some cities and regions around the country had the foresight to continue investing in alternative modes of transit. Meanwhile, Michigan was building cars and riding the wave of freedom that the automobile offered. Now, in the year 2017, we have some serious catching up to do.

But the chance of that happening anytime in the near future was temporarily halted by voters in November. The passage of the Regional Transit Authority ballot would have provided a seamless, coordinated and connected regional transit system throughout Macomb, Wayne, Oakland, and Washtenaw counties, building for a strong economic future that would attract and retain talent and jobs for the region and the state. We are the only major region in the United States without a connected, coordinated public transportation system. For now, anyway, we have lost that potential competitive edge with other cities and regions who are building for the future. Southeast Michigan won’t be competitive for new-economy jobs until it figures out how to better move people around throughout the region. The voters said no to the RTA, but transit advocates need to continue to push their message and live to fight another day.

We need to be paying attention to millennials who continue to be significant drivers of change. They are ditching the automobile and demanding more mobility options. Some just don’t want to bother with the ownership of a car. For others, the cost of owning a car is financially unattainable. From 1983 to 2014, there’s been a significant drop of 47 percentage points in 16-year-olds with drivers’ licenses. It’s not a matter of if we should be investing, but how we’re going to make this happen so that we can attract this demographic to Michigan communities. The economic and social stakes are just too high.

Despite financial constraints and partisan politics, dreams and vision, big and small, continue to be part of Michigan’s DNA. Whether you supported the Regional Transit Authority ballot or not, it’s important that you still read the article on the Regional Transit Authority. Other articles of interest include the multitude of reasons that trains, buses, bikes, and walking are important to a community’s future, and how Marshall bridged the transportation gap with its neighboring city, Albion. Designing walkable, bikeable streets continues to be a priority for Michigan communities. A Marquette conference highlights rail transit as part of a balanced transportation system. Our 2015 CEA entry – Transforming Woodward Together talks about the communities who were significant players in bringing the RTA to a ballot proposal. And there’s a lot more.

If it’s not already on your calendar, be sure to jot down March 21-22 for the Capital Conference in Lansing. You will find information about the conference in this issue as well as on our website. You cannot afford to miss out on the important policy discussions that directly affect your communities. We look forward to seeing you there!

Daniel P. Gilmartin
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Working in downtown development for 20+ years, I’ve learned that there are no silver bullets. But every so often a game changer comes along. The RTA is one.

Washington D.C., Denver, San Francisco and others took advantage of opportunities to change their trajectories by investing in regional transit systems. This investment boosted their economies, made their suburban communities more vibrant and walkable, leveraged connections to their airports to attract more business and tourist travelers, and offered an attractive alternative for combating traffic congestion.

With these goals in mind, the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) was legislatively created to connect Washtenaw, Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties and the City of Detroit by coordinating existing transit provided by the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (AAATA) and the Detroit Transportation Company (People Mover), as well as establishing new service.

RTA staff evaluated current transit needs and gaps, studied trends, heard from thousands of residents, and developed the RTA plan in close concert with elected and community leaders. A draft was presented in late May 2016, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

The RTA plan built on existing service, and strategically added bus rapid transit lines, commuter rail, premium airport express bus service, commuter express and cross-county buses, local service connectors, and a universal fare card. More than lines on a map, the plan offered high quality transit to 1.1 million residents, connecting them to major job centers across the region, 22 hospitals, 23 colleges and universities, 100 grocery stores, 47 libraries, 410 parks, and 310 schools.

The RTA board postponed plan approval to address concerns from the Macomb and Oakland county executives. Both leaders emphasized that they supported a regional transit plan, but required additional safeguards to guarantee the 85 percent return of funds raised in the county as required by state legislation. After much angst, a compromise was struck just days before the deadline for inclusion on the November ballot. The plan was approved with the addition of a new funding allocation subcommittee plus reassignment of some funds for Flex senior transport services in the north part of Oakland County.

To fund this plan, voters were asked to approve a 1.2-mill levy, projected to cost the average homeowner about $95 per year. Because it was a 20-year millage, the region could leverage federal and state dollars that were otherwise unavailable.

The plan was endorsed by the major newspapers; business groups; large companies including DTE, Ford Motor Company, and General Motors; major hospitals and health care organizations; labor; and groups representing seniors and persons with disabilities. The broad coalition of support made it possible to believe that, finally, this was our time. But it was not to be. The RTA millage lost by 1 percent.

A Vehicle For Talent Attraction

I was part of that coalition. I’m a choice rider, meaning I enjoy using public transit. The lack of public transit between Ann Arbor and Detroit has kept me from getting into the city more. It is also a big reason we have so many help-wanted signs at our downtown restaurants, hotels, and retail shops. Further, technology CEOs participating in a recent Ann Arbor SPARK roundtable pointed to the critical problem they all face finding the talent they need to grow their businesses. Recruitment is tough because workers want to stay connected while they commute, or they aren’t able to afford the cost of a car. Without regional service, the talent pool is geographically constrained.

A telling statistic is that 92 percent of the jobs in Southeast Michigan cannot be reached within 60 minutes using transit.

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A telling statistic is that 92 percent of the jobs in Southeast Michigan cannot be reached within 60 minutes using transit.

"And the narrow margin of defeat indicates that many of our residents recognize the value of the plan and the region’s needs for it."

This statistic took human form last year when the Detroit Free Press reported the inspiring yet heart-breaking story of James Robertson. He was dubbed the “Walking Man” because transit gaps had him trekking 21 miles a day to his job. This remarkable man put a face on the challenge faced by countless others in our region trying to get to and from work.

Losing Our Way
It wasn’t always this way. In fact, 100 years ago Detroit had the nation’s number one street car system. And metro Detroit was connected through its Department of Street Railways, with its many hundreds of miles of track.

Post war, the popularity of the automobile reshaped the American city. Now, Detroit stands alone as the last major metropolitan area in the country without regional transit. Moreover, we’ve let our transit funding slip to less than a third of what Cleveland or Pittsburgh are spending, and superstar Seattle outspends us seven times over.
Southeast Michigan continues to lose Millennials to other places, which works against our goal of rebuilding our population. This is a Baby Boomer issue too, as AARP reports that “the availability of transit alternatives [is] the second greatest challenge to older adults behind healthcare access, which is also impacted by regional public transit.” This is understandable as people outlive their ability to drive by many years.

Ironically, the night the RTA millage failed, transit ballot initiatives and referenda were passed elsewhere, including in Atlanta, Los Angeles County, and Puget Sound, Washington. These votes are a good bet, given the national studies that show communities can expect $4 in economic benefit for every $1 invested in regional transit.

**Getting Back On Track**
The day after the election, RTA Board Chairman Paul Hillegonds and RTA CEO Michael Ford said in a joint statement, “The fact remains that we have made significant progress over the last 18 months in developing a truly regional plan that meets the needs of the people and communities of this region. And the narrow margin of defeat indicates that many of our residents recognize the value of the plan and the region’s needs for it.”

It’s not clear what will happen next. But we definitely need to understand the mindset behind the “no” voters, to understand what changes may need to be made to the RTA plan or how to better explain the benefits, particularly to those that don’t believe they’ll personally use transit. Despite the setback, I remain hopeful we’ll get another chance to build the regional transit system we need to move our region forward.

Susan Pollay is executive director of the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority and chairperson of the Regional Transit Authority–Citizens Advisory Committee. You may contact her at 734-994-6697 or spollay@a2dda.org.
11 REASONS

Why Trains, Buses, Bikes, and Walking Move Us Toward a Brighter Future

By Jay Walljasper

Adapted with permission from Jay Walljasper’s blog of the same title originally published by Project for Public Spaces.

According to the pundits and prophets who dominate the media, the future of transportation is all figured out for us. Cheaper gas prices mean we can still count on our private cars to take us everywhere we want to go in the years to come. The only big change down the road will be driverless autos, which we will still privately own, making long hours behind the wheel less boring and more productive.

But this everything-stays-the-same vision ignores some significant social developments. The rate of increase in miles traveled has gone down for the past decade, bucking a century-long trend of ever-increasing dependence on automobiles.

Spearheading this trend of less driving is the Millennial generation, who are eager for a wider range of transportation choices. They account for a good share of the unexpected rise in transit use, biking, and walking. Although aging baby boomers, many of whom are less excited and less able to drive all the time, are also a factor.
A close look at the changing state of transportation today makes one thing very clear: buses, trains, bikes and walking represent more than an efficient means of getting from one place to another. They move us toward a brighter future because of the numerous social and economic benefits they foster.

1. Stimulating New Development Along Transit Corridors
Today we are experiencing a renaissance of urban growth, thanks in large part to new urban rail systems. This not-so-new phenomena is called Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), and helps explain why 19 U.S. regions without train transit have built light rail systems since 1981 (and nearly all regions with rail have expanded theirs).

Salt Lake City’s new S-line streetcar garnered more than $400 million in development before boarding its first passenger. “In Salt Lake City, rail transit has catalyzed vibrant development,” says Mayor Ralph Becker. “It has been key to achieving mobility and prosperity goals in our city.”

2. Cashing in on the Power of Clusters
“Public transit is worth way more to a city than you might think,” trumpeted a headline in The Atlantic magazine’s influential CityLab news service. That’s because it fosters “agglomeration,” which writer Eric Jaffe explains this way: “as more people collect in a city center, more jobs cluster there too, boosting both wages and economic productivity.”

A research paper in the journal Urban Studies finds “a ten percent increase of transit seats or rail service miles per capita” translates into $1.5 million to $1.8 billion in wage increases, depending on the size of the city.

3. Driving the Real Estate Market in a New Direction
A Recent Study from the George Washington University (GWU) Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis suggests that auto-dominated suburban development has passed its peak. The greatest potential for future real estate growth is Walkable Urban Places (WalkUPs), which depend upon quality public transportation and biking opportunities.

4. Attracting the Talent that Makes a Region Thrive
Reliable public transportation has become a key indicator of future economic vitality in a metropolitan region. It’s no longer simply a nice amenity, but an essential requirement for keeping and attracting growing businesses and the highly skilled employees these firms need to thrive.

Denver is the envy of cities coast-to-coast for its number one rank in attracting educated people aged 25–34, the so-called “young talent” that businesses everywhere covet. One of the city’s big drawing cards is 122 miles of light rail and commuter rail lines now in service or under construction throughout the metropolitan region.

5. Saving Money for Millions of Households
Transportation costs rival housing costs for many American families, especially those living in areas with inadequate transit service. Transportation accounts for 25 percent of household costs in “Auto Dependent Exurbs,” compared to 9 percent in walkable communities with good transit connections.

Commuters taking a train or bus instead of a car save $9500 on average per year. The rapid rise of carshare programs make it practical for many more households to rely on transit, biking and walking as the backbone of their
personal mobility, with carshare available on select occasions when needed. This reduces the pressure for families to buy a car or a second car.

6. Making a Difference in Economic and Racial Inequality
The economic benefits of transit are even more important to low- and moderate-income families, which spend 42 percent of their annual income on transportation compared to 22 percent for middle income families.

Civil rights activist Lexer Quamie, Counsel for the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, notes that 19 percent of African-Americans and 13.7 percent of Latinos lack access to cars, compared to 4.6 percent of whites. This means that jobs in areas with poor or no public transportation “are disproportionately inaccessible to people of color.”

7. Meeting the Needs of Coming Generations
The car is only one way to get around for Millennials, who are now entering the workforce in massive numbers. They want a variety of transportation choices, including transit, biking and walking.

Young people today are driving less than previous generations. Research from the Federal Highway Administration found miles traveled by drivers 16-24 dropped five miles per day (22 percent) between 2001 and 2009. A study done by the National Association of Realtors found that 62 percent of people 18-29 would prefer to live in a neighborhood with transit options, sidewalks, and businesses nearby than in a neighborhood with large lots but without transit or sidewalks.

8. Meeting the Needs of America’s Aging Generations
A transportation crisis looms as more and more baby boomers become senior citizens, with many of them unable, unwilling, or unsafe to drive. So it’s not surprising that 58 percent of people over 60 in the National Association of Realtors study preferred neighborhoods that offer nearby transit, walking and businesses to those with large lots but no transit or sidewalks.

9. Boosting our Health (and Cutting America’s Medical Costs)
Biking and walking allow you to get exercise in the course of your daily activities. Transit also boosts your physical activity as almost all bus and train trips involve a walk on both ends of the ride. If you take transit just twice a day and your walks are only seven-and-a-half minutes each, you’ve already hit the magic healthy number: 30 minutes of moderate daily physical activity.

10. Relieving Traffic Congestion
Transit critics frequently charge that buses and trains don’t make a dent in congestion levels, but a study from University of California-Berkeley professor Michael L. Anderson concludes that “transit riders are likely to be individuals who commute along routes with the most severe roadway delays. These individuals’ choices thus have very high impact on congestion.”

11. Curbing Global Climate Change
Between 1990 (when global warming was first widely recognized as a threat) and 2006, transportation accounted for almost half of all growth of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S., with surface transportation accounting for 85 percent. By contrast, more than 35 percent of public transit buses on America’s streets now are hybrid vehicles or use alternative fuels, both of which reduce CO2 pollution. Trains, buses, biking, and walking also encourage close-knit, energy-efficient neighborhoods.


Jay Walljasper is a senior fellow at Project for Public Spaces. You may contact him at jay@jaywalljasper.com.

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Mr. Shifman is aided by Brandon Fournier who has extensive experience in municipal operations, including both public safety and general municipal operations. Prior to joining the firm, Brandon served as the City Administrator for the City of Southgate.

Also with the firm is Attorney Robert J. Nyovich with over 30 years of experience in public sector labor and employment law. Prior to joining the firm, Mr. Nyovich also served previously as a public safety officer and as the Oakland County Undersheriff.

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Imagine if all of your community parks were transformed into parking lots. Would that be considered a great placemaking strategy? Enhance the quality of life for your residents? Improve public health outcomes? Be an economic development “best practice”? (Correct answer: No).

In many communities, the amount of land dedicated to public rights-of-way is three to four times greater than a community’s park acreage. Yet, greater deference is oftentimes given to the use of public rights-of-way for cars instead of people. It wasn’t always like that. There were horses, people, and bikes before the automobile. But, over time, changes in technology and policy have transformed what were once active commons areas that facilitated face-to-face commerce and dialogue into stark, barren streetscapes that favor the smooth movement of machines.

How do we, then, transform policy and practice to create “seams” in our communities where all persons can mingle and get to know one another, rather than “edges” where only those who are privileged enough to own a car feel comfortable and safe? Smart Growth America’s National Complete Streets Coalition website states: “Streets are a vital part of livable, attractive communities. Everyone, regardless of age, ability, income, race, or ethnicity, ought to have safe, comfortable, and convenient access to community destinations and public places — whether walking, driving, bicycling, or taking public transportation.”

By Suzanne Schulz
Moving From Policy to Implementation

The concept of Complete Streets has been around for a while. There are 86 Michigan communities that have adopted resolutions or ordinances pertaining to that idea. In 2010, Michigan adopted Public Acts 134 and 135, which define Complete Streets as roadways planned, designed, and constructed to provide appropriate access to all legal users—whether by car, truck, transit, assistive device, foot or bicycle. The law further requires that Complete Streets policies be sensitive to the local context, and consider the functional class, cost, and mobility needs of all legal users.

Complete Streets in concept and policy is one thing. Actual implementation can be quite another. The integration of people and place in the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of streets is complicated. For decades, engineers have relied upon the guidance of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials’ (AASHTO) Green Book—considered the “Bible” of road design—as well as documents issued by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE). There is plenty of room for debate about the degree of discretion and flexibility that can be found within their pages.

One thing has become obvious: the standards of AASHTO and ITE are struggling mightily to keep up with today’s evolving understanding of safety and placemaking. Antiquated
rules, based on studies from the 1950s and 1960s, favor the movement of vehicles instead of people. Measures are defined in terms of average daily traffic instead of person throughput. Level of Service (LOS)—a measure of vehicle delay and congestion—is a key consideration, which oftentimes equates to more travel and turn lanes. Ironically, studies have demonstrated that this approach only begets more traffic.

The entire philosophy of how to design streets has been backwards. The old, traditional way of building roads starting at the centerline (inside-out) rather than the sidewalk (outside-in) focuses on the automobile and truck first and everything else is secondary. The question has been what do vehicles need to move quickly and efficiently through this corridor? The question should consider what people need to live productively within this space.

New guidelines have recently been issued by AASHTO and ITE on bicycle and pedestrian design. The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) has strongly advanced the idea that context matters, and that a transportation system that only relies on cars and trucks is not complete. This guidance, however, has not yet been adopted within the State of Michigan. Engineers rely on the 2004 edition of AASHTO’s Green Book even though there is a 2011 version available. This affects the design of every street project in your community that has State or Federal monies attached to it.

Funding types and the extent of construction can determine whether a context-sensitive street that achieves the desired goals of a community can be built. Oftentimes sidewalks are viewed as “extras,” even in a commercial or urban context, and the possibility of street lighting to improve pedestrian visibility is rare. Current standards find it acceptable to have a 5-foot sidewalk on one side of a street alongside a 6-lane road. And, there are many design engineers that regard street reconstruction projects as the time to “get it right”—meaning that 12-foot travel lanes in an urban center can push out and chew into “excess” space, resulting in uncomfortably narrow sidewalks that fail to buffer pedestrians from fast-moving traffic.

**Locally-Driven Efforts**

Efforts such as Grand Rapids’ Vital Streets Plan and Ann Arbor’s Downtown Street Manual have taken on the notion of conventional street design and established their own guidance. A reframing of traditional thought was deemed necessary to understand how to build streets as places that contribute to the vibrancy of a community, support economic development, and enrich the lives of citizens. A quality public realm—streets, sidewalks, and plazas—encourages community cohesion. The connectedness within a transportation network that is designed for all modes and all users provides access to opportunities for employment, education, shopping, and recreation. Self-enforcing design controls that reflect the context of the street, as well as the expected behavior of street users, reduces crashes and improves safety. These goals can be realized using a Complete Streets approach.

Local communities have a right to advocate for good street design. A Complete Streets resolution or ordinance sets the policy direction. There must, however, be an intentionality to the work and a willingness to challenge today’s design standards that are based on yester-year’s science. The question should be asked of every street infrastructure investment in your community: “Are we creating a corridor to move cars or making a place for people?”

Suzanne Schulz is the managing director of Design, Development and Community Engagement for the City of Grand Rapids. She is also the former chair of the Michigan Complete Streets Advisory Council. You may contact her at 616-456-4100 or sschulz@grcity.us
Bridging Communities
By Lisa Donovan

Twelve miles can seem like 12,000 when you don’t have access to transportation. That was the situation for many Albion residents in 2014. The city’s only hospital had closed in 2002 after operating in the red for many years. The same fate befell the local high school in 2013. Many seniors, people with disabilities, and students now had to find a way to traverse the dozen miles to health care facilities and schools in Marshall.

That’s when the City of Marshall stepped in.

“Our Oaklawn Hospital was handling a lot of patients from Albion for services such as dialysis. They were having transportation problems, so we asked how we could help Oaklawn get their patients here,” said Marshall City Manager Tom Tarkiewicz. “That started the conversation about the Albion-Marshall Connector.”
Setting The Plan in Motion

Marshall had already amassed decades of experience in providing transportation service to its own residents. Since 1974, the city’s Dial-a-Ride Transit (DART) has helped community members travel back and forth to work, school, doctors’ visits, shopping, dining, and more. With that framework in place, they began exploring options to provide transportation services to the Albion community.

“It’s about creating opportunity for people in both communities and being able to share our resources,” said Natalie Dean, Marshall’s assistant city manager and director of community services.

Funding option number one was a grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation’s New Freedom Program. Marshall was able to tap into this funding source to get the new transportation service – dubbed the Albion-Marshall Connector – up and running. The grant was designed to provide both capital and operating assistance to reduce barriers to transportation services for people with disabilities, so that’s where their initial efforts were focused.

Although helpful, the grant alone wasn’t sufficient to operate the Connector. Fortunately, Marshall was able to assemble a variety of partners willing to help fund the service. In addition to MDOT, Oaklawn Hospital, and the cities of Marshall and Albion, the partnership included the Albion and Battle Creek Community Foundations, Area Agency on Aging, Community HealthCare Connections, Albion Health Care Alliance, Calhoun County Senior Services, Marshall and Albion Rotary Clubs, and the United Way.

Members of the partnership participated in a committee that offered guidance on funding and operating the Connector. To help raise the necessary funds, the Albion Community Foundation stepped up to provide grant writing assistance. They also contributed about $10,000 to the effort, with the other partners contributing similar amounts.

“Transportation was always one of the biggest challenges in Albion,” said Elizabeth Schultheiss, executive director of the Albion Community Foundation until March 2016. “We saw this as an opportunity to increase access to health care services so that people didn’t end up in the emergency room with more severe symptoms.”

Collectively, the committee decided that curb to curb service—rather than specific pick up points—would be most efficient. And Connector fares were kept low so everyone could use the service. One-way fares are $2 for adults and children 13 and over, and $1 for disabled, seniors 60 and over, and children ages 5-12. Caretakers and children under five ride free with a paid rider. Many sponsors even provide free tokens to their clients.

Getting Up To Speed

Fliers were distributed all over Albion to announce the new Connector service, which launched in 2014 using a bus from Marshall’s existing fleet. Then funds from the New Freedom grant kicked in, enabling them to purchase a new bus. Initially, the service ran three days a week. By the third month, Josh de St. Aubin, Marshall’s transportation manager, said more than 100 passengers a month were taking advantage of it. After a short period of time, they saw the need to increase service to five days per week. That switch resulted in ridership
jumping to as high as 600 per month. In addition to health care visits and daily student trips to the high school, people were finding a variety of other reasons to jump on the bus to Marshall.

“I think the ridership demonstrates that it’s a tremendous asset and resource,” said Sheryl Mitchell Albion city manager. “The service has expanded from seniors to people of all ages—going to community college, jobs, shopping, and more.”

**A Bump In The Road**
The downside to such a diversity of ridership was that, after two years of operating with the New Freedom grant, the number of disabled riders fell below the required criteria. But the service had brought so much value to Albion residents that they were quick to rally around efforts to find new funding. In the summer of 2016, with the service facing a shortfall of $45,000, the Albion City Council agreed to advance that amount to keep the Connector in motion for the coming year.

“When funding was becoming an issue, lots of riders showed up at the Albion City Council meetings to show support. They’re integral to having the service continue,” said de St. Aubin. “I think the service will grow as more people become aware of it.”

The summer of 2016 brought another big change to Albion as Marshall’s annexation of its financially troubled school district took effect. Now, Albion’s middle school and high school students would be transported to classes on regular Marshall school buses. The Connector would become their primary means of travel for getting to and from after-school activities.

“The Connector reinforced the good will between our two communities and showed that Marshall is truly concerned about helping Albion,” said Tarkiewicz. “When the school annexation started, we had already developed a good working relationship.”

In addition to good will, the Connector has sparked discussions about developing a county-wide transportation service. In fact, a group headed by Calhoun County mayors and city managers has already held several meetings about the possibility of creating a county transportation authority. Perhaps down the road, many other Calhoun County communities will be able to enjoy the benefits of a service similar to the Albion–Marshall Connector.

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How Autonomous Cars Will Fundamentally Reshape our Cities
By Janelle Hibler, Jason Sudy, and Justin Robbins

It’s Monday morning. You walk out of your house and hop into your ride to work. During the 20-minute commute, you shave and have a meeting via videoconference. At the office, you get out and the car drives on to pick up another commuter. After that, it takes a group of children to school.

This scenario isn’t a Jetsons cartoon fantasy. Self-driving or autonomous vehicles are coming, and faster than you think. Goldman Sachs predicts North American auto sales could be almost 60 percent autonomous by 2030.

Justin Robbins, AICP, a senior planner with OHM Advisors urges action, “As municipal leaders and planning professionals, we should begin to think about the impacts of this technology now.”

Robbins and fellow planners Jason Sudy, AICP, OHM Advisors, and Rick Stein, AICP, principal and owner of Urban Decision Group, have teamed up to deliver multiple presentations at planning, architectural, and municipal conferences. According to the trio, there are three factors speeding the development of autonomous vehicles: the rate of technology adoption, social changes, and heavy research and development investment.

Increasing Tech Adoption Rates
We’re adopting new technologies at an increasing rate. While it took 46 years for electricity use to penetrate 25 percent of the population, television reached that level in 26 years. The web? Only seven years. And smartphone use in the U.S. jumped from 20.2 percent of the population in 2010 to 64.05 percent by 2016.

Social Shift: Peak Driving
Widespread car ownership in the first half of the 20th century changed the landscape of the U.S. and the mobility of Americans. Rather than being bound to the 15-mile feasible wagon trip, you had the freedom to live and work where you chose.

Fast forward to 2016 and attitudes around car ownership and driving have shifted. According to a study conducted by the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute, the percentage of people with a driver’s license decreased between 2011 and 2014, across all age groups. In 2014, less than a quarter of all 16-year olds had a driver’s license. But it’s not just young people. We’ve all been driving less.

Big Names, Big Money
From technology companies to traditional automotive manufacturers, companies and organizations are investing heavily to develop autonomous vehicle technology and bring it to market.

Here in Michigan, we have Ann Arbor’s MCity, a $10 million, 32-acre simulation of city streets, suburban roadways, and more, designed by a group of researchers, government agencies, and car companies. It’s a partnership with the University of Michigan and investments from Nissan, Toyota, Ford, GM, Honda, State Farm, Verizon, and Xerox.

Kettering University in Flint recently unveiled the new GM Mobility Research Center, funded by the GM Foundation, to test autonomous and connected car technologies. There’s also an $80 million driverless car testing site proposed in Ypsilanti—the American Center for Mobility.

The Future Is Now
“The change is coming, much faster than most people understand. We need to get ahead of this,” advises Robbins. He describes two examples:

- Uber is testing autonomous vehicles in Pittsburgh (using a human in the driver’s seat.) The company has 25 cars on the road in 2016, with plans for 100 in the next year.

- Columbus, Ohio’s $40 million Smart City grant will fund truck platooning, as well as other advanced transportation initiatives. Truck platooning involves a number of trucks equipped with state-of-the-art driving support systems—
one closely following the other. It promises to improve safety, decrease congestion, and reduce fuel consumption.

This will be a global change, says Sudy. Greece is already using a quasi-public transportation model, while Dubai is on track for 25 percent autonomous transportation by 2025.

Benefits Of Autonomous Cars
Part of what makes Sudy, Robbins, and Stein confident that autonomous driving will eventually replace human-driven vehicles are the powerful economic and social benefits.

• Safety - According to the Eno Center for Transportation, the US is on track to reach 40,000 fatal crashes this year. A whopping 93% of all crashes are attributed to human error. The economic cost of automobile crashes is more than $300 billion, or 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) going to auto accidents and property damage.

As Robbins points out, “If this technology can reduce that, that’s huge impact. It’s much safer than our current driving situation.”

• Congestion reduction - What else can we expect from driverless vehicles? Fuel economy savings and CO2 reductions, due to a reduction of auto accidents, smoother traffic flows, and increased lane capacity with platooning. According to the Eno research, autonomous cars are expected to increase fuel economy by 31% due to smoother traffic flows and approximately 89% increase in lane capacity.

How Autonomous Vehicles Will Affect Our Communities
To fully gauge the impact of autonomous vehicles on communities, Robbins says, we first have to understand how cities were developed. Throughout the history of civilization, cities developed slowly and incrementally.

Post-World War II, the car changed how cities grew. The U.S. evolved to accommodate mass use of the private automobile. Auto-centric development gave rise to suburbs and shopping malls. And get this, studies show that the average car is idle 95 percent of the day.

Stein explains typical development rules of thumb, “Today, if you want to develop 1,000 square feet of retail space that’s producing taxable value, adding to a sense of place, you need an additional 1,740 square feet of land for car storage.” Municipalities also have to provide supporting infrastructure, like roadways and water lines to the parking space. “Our entire development pattern is skewed to provide for parking.”

Given one acre of land with typical development patterns, how much retail can be developed? About 10,000 square feet. According to Stein, it’s clear that with current standards, parking is the number one constraint for development in almost any context.

Using a 109-acre suburban site with typical suburban retailers—a Meijer store, a Walmart, and a Home Depot—
outside a Midwestern city to illustrate, Stein shows that 15 percent of the site is the building area, while 44 acres, or 40 percent, of the site is devoted to parking. Converting the parking space to retail would add nearly one million square feet of additional space.

What could happen if we no longer need to devote 40 percent of development sites to parking? It could lead to an enormous increase in available land. Urban areas can become denser. We could have more parks and community gathering places.

What Can Municipal Leaders and Planners Do Now?
The rise of autonomous vehicles has the opportunity to deliver one of the most significant infrastructure shifts we have ever undertaken as a nation. Sudy argues for an expansive mindset. “Think big. This is going to be one of the defining features of our generation. To the extent that cars made today’s world; autonomous cars will flip it on its head.”

The impacts for planners and municipal leaders include site design, corridor and neighborhood design, community-wide comprehensive planning, land use, zoning codes and guidelines, transportation systems, and active transportation impacts of pedestrians and bicyclists. Vast areas of urban land currently occupied by parking lots and roads could be reinvented for a whole new spectrum of social functions like parks, housing, and public spaces.

Sudy advocates a three-pronged action plan to prepare for changes created by autonomous vehicles:
1. Mainstream the discussion of autonomous vehicles in planning, policy, and design communities.
2. Set policy objectives for planning and design professionals. We need to start planning differently based upon this new technology.
3. Update our views on site design, roadway design, land use, neighborhood planning, regional systems, and prioritize public investment.

Heed the words of U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary, Anthony Foxx: “Self-driving is coming to everything.”

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City of Jackson

By Luke Forrest

Positive transformations are complex and time-consuming, so change did not happen overnight in each city that participated in the PlacePlans program. But almost five years after launching the program, we are seeing the fruits of our collective labor. This issue marks the launch of a new series for 2017: PlacePlans: Where Are They Now? We will examine the progress in the PlacePlans cities, with a particular eye on the lessons learned that can apply to communities everywhere.

PlacePlans was a demonstration and technical assistance program developed in 2012 under the auspices of the statewide MiPlace Partnership, with lead sponsorship from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The program was focused on assisting cities, selected through a competitive process, with the development of visionary yet realistic strategies to redevelop a key walkable, mixed-use area of their community. The League, along with faculty and students from Michigan State University School of Planning, Design and Construction and MSU Extension, worked with community leaders, residents, anchor institutions, and expert consultants to bring the best practices in placemaking and civic engagement to bear in a customized way for each of the 22 participating cities.

The program partners developed PlacePlans with multiple goals:
- Help individual communities achieve greater economic success through placemaking projects
- Test some of the placemaking innovations and different approaches that were cropping up around the nation and the world
- Identify key themes and lessons that lead to success or failure in communities big and small

Jackson: Downtown Alleyway PlacePlan

We begin with a focus on downtown Jackson, where a project that started with a single underappreciated alley has grown into a district-wide ball of momentum. Staff from the City of Jackson approached the PlacePlans team in late 2013 looking for assistance with redesigning an alley cutting through downtown. The alley was under the radar for many of those who frequented downtown, but the city identified it as a priority due to its potential to better connect several key sites: the public transit center, Michigan Avenue businesses, the farmers market, the Grand River, and Grand River Brewery, a new business that was quickly becoming a magnet for activity.

The MSU faculty and student team took the lead on engaging the community through a design charrette process to identify creative options for the alley in early 2014. This engagement process revealed that the community had its eye on a much broader transformation to attract new businesses and residents to the entire downtown. The city, led by City Manager Patrick Burtch, decided it needed to invest more significantly in downtown public space and infrastructure, so it engaged Beckett & Raeder, Inc. (BRI) to develop a comprehensive streetscape plan for Michigan Avenue and adjacent side streets. The entire process was ultimately branded “Dig Jackson.” The city council set aside $3.5 million to fund the infrastructure improvements, and the construction phase of Dig Jackson began in late summer 2014.

Soon thereafter, a number of major businesses and other institutions in Jackson launched the Jackson Anchor Initiative to organize and coordinate their investments in downtown, as well as to attract additional investment. In the vision...
"... a project that started with a single underappreciated alley has grown into a district-wide ball of momentum."

shared by the Anchor Initiative leaders and city officials, Dig Jackson was not the end, but the beginning. The ultimate goals were redevelopment of vacant historic buildings and blighted parcels, creating an environment for more downtown residents and businesses. Beginning in 2015, that vision has come together more quickly than many expected as evidenced by:

- Five new restaurants have followed Grand River Brewery’s lead and opened in downtown, including Dirty Bird, which opens onto the revitalized downtown alley as envisioned in the PlacePlan
- Home Renewal Systems announced plans to renovate the historic Hayes Hotel, vacant since 2003, to house a mixture of hotel, residential, office and commercial uses
- Three other development teams have announced mixed-use housing developments, including Lofts on Louis, which will fill in a vacant block on Louis Glick Highway
- Glick Highway will be converted into a more pedestrian-friendly two-way street
- The Jackson Art Commission coordinated the expansion of Horace Blackman Park and development of a new public space, CP Federal City Square, which was funded by state, federal and philanthropic grants.

Lessons from Jackson

While every city is unique, many core principles of place-based redevelopment port well from one community to the next. Jackson’s experience highlights the following lessons that apply broadly:

1. Prioritize investment areas as a community and stick to that vision

City Manager Patrick Burtch credits the Jackson City Council with coming to a consensus several years ago that investing in downtown, the city’s core, is the top priority. Burtch equates downtown with the “nucleus of the cell” and says that “the cell dies without it.” Investing public dollars always comes with public relations hits, says Burtch, but your elected and appointed officials must “be willing to stay on that path, because you have to spend money to make money.”

2. Public space investments create positive momentum and catalyze large private investments

John Burtka, president of Grand River Brewery and partner in several of the ongoing downtown developments, cites the Dig Jackson investments as the crucial launching pad because it told the world, “Hey, we’re serious!” Burtch and Burtka agree those investments changed the mindset of the private sector about Jackson.

3. Visuals are crucial inspirational tools

Pushed by Burtch, the Beckett & Raeder team developed design renderings for Dig Jackson that went far beyond the bounds of normal streetscape improvements, into master planning and the beginnings of a form-based zoning approach. Burtch says those plans have been invaluable in convincing skeptical community leaders and investors to participate. “3D architectural renderings provide a vision that is not always easily understood by those that are typically acting in differing disciplines,” he says.

4. Engage anchor institutions, even those not located in the priority geographic area

The Jackson Anchor Initiative is an excellent case study on the power of getting important institutions rallied behind, and often leading, the community’s vision. In Jackson’s case, it has led to significant investments in downtown from institutions that are not even located there. According to Dr. Burtch, “the Anchor Initiative provides a significant measure of political coverage for a city council that must make decisions regarding public investment in the urban core that are easily misunderstood.”

5. Communicate through every medium possible

The city engaged the University of Michigan’s Citizen Interaction Design program to develop an excellent set of communication tools about the Dig Jackson project (see examples at digjackson.com), helping community leaders to allay fears about the disruption and costs associated with construction.

Luke Forrest is director of Civic Innovations for the League. You may contact him at 734-669-6323 or lforrest@mml.org.
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Capitol Conference is the source for answers on all the state and federal issues that impact local communities. It’s also the best place to network and make your voice heard on matters of public policy. Don’t lose your place in Lansing. We’re saving you a seat at the League’s 2017 Capital Conference.

TOPICS INCLUDE

- Legislative Update
- Municipal Finance
- Autonomous Vehicles
- Equity & Inclusion
- Housing
- Medical Marijuana
- Hot Topics
- Lobbying
Conference Workshops
The Tuesday workshops are designed to give you the detailed information you need to do a top-notch job for your community. Arrive early and do a deep dive into important municipal topics and earn EOA Elective credits. The workshops are included in your registration, but space is limited so sign up early!

Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys 31st Annual Advanced Institute
Attend an all-day session on Tuesday to stay current on legal issues affecting Michigan local governments. Experts will review recent legislation and court decisions as well as current challenges, strategies, and examples.

Awards Gala
Join us Tuesday evening at Old Town Marquee to celebrate Michigan’s inspirational people and innovative places at our second annual Awards Gala. Space is limited, so please register early to be part of this exciting event.

Meet Your State Representatives
We encourage you to contact your representatives before Capital Conference and arrange to meet and discuss issues of importance to you and your community.

Legislative Breakfast
On Wednesday morning, enjoy breakfast at the Lansing Center as you network with senators, representatives, key legislative staff members, and other top state officials. Hear their perspectives on state issues and share your views on matters that affect your community.

Community Excellence Award
During Wednesday afternoon’s General Session, we’ll hear from the winner of the 2016 Race for the Cup—the Beaverton Activity Center (BAC). They’ll share their experiences since taking home the top prize and help us launch another round of spirited competition.

Networking
Meeting your municipal colleagues in an informal setting and sharing ideas is a valuable part of the Capital Conference experience. We’ve built several hours of networking time into the schedule, and you may find other times that fit your needs as well.
Annual Expo
Looking for an opportunity to connect face-to-face with potential clients from every part of the state? The Annual Expo is the place to be! Stake out a prime spot at one of the most popular events of the entire conference—the Tuesday evening Welcome Reception in the Expo Hall, where vendors and attendees mix and mingle in a fun and informal setting. The Expo Hall is also a favorite hangout for networking between sessions throughout the conference.

Advertising
Advertising in the Capital Conference program is a guaranteed way to get your message in front of your target audience. Our full-color display ads will put your organization in its brightest light!

Event Sponsorship
Looking for visibility and the ultimate in brand recognition? The League represents thousands of individuals in hundreds of communities of all sizes across the state. By becoming a League event sponsor, that vast reach becomes your reach.

For complete details about marketing opportunities at the League’s Capital Conference, visit cc.mml.org or email advertising@mml.org.

“I have been attending the League’s Capital Conference for many years and each time I always return home with new information that benefits my community. Plus, it gives me a chance to network with other communities and meet with my legislators to discuss local issues.”

—Patricia Lockwood, Mayor Pro Tem, Fenton
GUIDO AND SINCLAIR AWARDS

The Guido and Sinclair awards are two of the top honors given to individuals by the Michigan Municipal League. The 2017 deadline to submit nominees for the awards is January 15, 2017 with the winners being recognized during the Michigan Municipal League’s Capital Conference March 21-22, 2017 in Lansing. Award details:

THE MICHAEL A GUIDO LEADERSHIP AND PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS

WHAT: Created in memory of Dearborn Mayor Michael Guido to honor a chief elected official who personifies professionalism and leadership, and is dedicated to the citizens in their community and advocates on their behalf in Lansing and Washington, D.C.

ELIGIBILITY: To be considered, nominee must be a current chief elected official from a Michigan Municipal League member community who has demonstrated excellence in leadership and shown perseverance in making a difference in his/her community for a sustained period of time.

THE JIM SINCLAIR EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE AWARDS

WHAT: Created in memory of Rogers City Councilmember Jim Sinclair to celebrate a person dedicated to public service who has shown a passion and commitment to the League, enthusiastically supporting its mission and promoting its purpose.

ELIGIBILITY: To be considered, nominees must be affiliated with the League in the capacity of a municipal official, municipal staff, a League staff member, or an active participant in the League’s mission; and be active in furthering the cause of educating elected officials so that communities may benefit from the education and experience that their elected officials have gained.

Nominations must be received at League headquarters by JANUARY 15, 2017. To download a nomination form and related materials visit www.mml.org/awards.
Beaverton is seeing red—red volunteer vests, that is. And it’s those brightly-clad volunteers who helped propel the Beaverton Activity Center to victory in the League’s 2016 Race for the Cup!

“There were literally thousands and thousands and thousands of volunteer hours to put this whole project together,” said Scott Govitz, former Beaverton mayor and current president of the Beaverton Activity Center. “So for all of us who were instrumental in putting this project together with a whole lot of other community members, this is a great source of pride. Not only do we have a new center for the community, now we have recognition by winning the Community Excellence Award.”

These days, the Beaverton Activity Center—formerly an old school building— is indeed the hub of activities. From day to night, children and adults enjoy everything from gymnastics and yoga to book club and high school plays. The Alumni Gallery showcases former students, while exhibits and meeting space honor the community’s plastics industry. Friends might even start or end their day with a delicious latte at the center’s Sweet B Café.

In 2011, that wasn’t the case. When Govitz would drive by his old high school, he’d remember all the energetic teens talking and laughing on their way to class or basketball practice. But what he saw through his windshield was a tired old building only partially occupied by a pre-school and an adult education program. He worried that it would soon close and become a vacant eyesore in the middle of town.

“The building has a significant history for our community,” said Govitz. “It was built 80 years ago— almost to the day of our grand opening— by a vote of community members during the Depression. It has such significance to so many people who graced its halls over the years.”
“There were literally thousands and thousands and thousands of volunteer hours to put this whole project together.”

Launching An Action Plan
Govitz didn’t just sit back and let the building’s demise happen. Instead, he jumped into action. He started by connecting with Brian Rowland, who he had worked with on a Beaverton Lions Club fundraising project to remodel the inside of a building. After hearing Govitz’ idea to repurpose the old school, Rowland and his wife, Barbara, got on board. Brian eventually became the first vice president of the BAC, and Barbara was one of the all-important volunteers.

The next step was to call a community forum to get input from residents. “We laid out the potential vision for the facility and asked them if it was worth holding meetings and coming up with a plan,” said Govitz. “We got a resounding yes!”

That led to months of community meetings where everyone talked about what the building could be and how to make it self-sustaining. The Mid-Michigan Community Action agency was already leasing space for a pre-school, so Govitz hit on the idea of leasing out some of the space to other compatible tenants. After a number of conversations, the Gladwin County District Library—which had outgrown its current building—signed on. So did MidMichigan Health.

“Everyone is trying to figure out what to do with old schools, but I never saw anything like this where you bring in anchor tenants to pay the rent and keep it running.”

Funding the Action Plan
They began holding fundraisers, which brought in more than $10,000. That enabled them to develop a good strategic plan for the formation and funding of the center. Then they shared their plan with key business people and manufacturers and raised $150,000. Their success gave them the confidence to approach the Charles J. Strosacker Foundation, based in
nearby Midland, to help them reach the $1.3 million total they would need for construction.

“I was impressed with the homework they had done, the time they had taken to organize themselves, and the financial possibilities,” said Bobbie Arnold, the foundation’s president and CEO. “And they had a plan that would allow them to be sustainable.”

Arnold was impressed enough to share Beaverton’s plans with two other foundations—the HH and GA Dow Foundation and the Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation. The three of them agreed that if the Beaverton community could raise $200,000, then the foundations would contribute $200,000 each.

To meet the foundations’ challenge, Govitz and his team put together the Step Up campaign, which included a custom built set of 8-foot high steps in front of the school building. Each step represented a financial milestone on the way to the $200,000 goal. Then they reached out to every corner of the community, including past graduates across the country and every organization that had an interest in the facility.

Within 60 days, they surpassed their goal, raising a whopping $300,000! Not only did they receive $600,000 from the three foundations, but they were able to complete phases 1 and 2 of construction. To top it off, the BAC group had been very involved in helping the school district pass a $15 million bond issue to improve all the district’s school buildings—which paid for a new roof on the old high school.

The Dream Becomes Reality

On Oct. 17, 2015, all the hard work paid off. Almost 600 people showed up for the Beaverton Activity Center grand opening, anxious to see the transformation. Under the direction of Sally Hicks, the first president of the BAC Volunteer Board, many volunteers were on hand. In their easily-identifiable red vests—Hicks’ brain child—they conducted tours of the fitness center, library, café, gym, meeting rooms, and all the other amenities the building has to offer.

“They thought we would just meet and greet and be ambassadors, but we became the hub,” said Hicks, a retired bookkeeper for the Beaverton school district. She believes in the personal touch of recruiting volunteers face-to-face.

Today, a large cadre of red-vested volunteers are at the heart of the center. They do everything from scheduling, building repairs, and gardening to greeting guests and making popcorn for special events.

“Under Sally’s leadership, each volunteer has been able to find their niche in the organization. Everyone has been able to take their strengths, what they enjoy doing, and contribute to the success of the BAC,” said Joan Cashin, current president of the BAC Volunteer Board and retired Beaverton school superintendent.

The success of the BAC isn’t isolated to the complete transformation of one building. Govitz said one of the hopes for the center was that its synergy would help other areas of the community improve and thrive, and indeed that seems to be happening. The Beaverton Gem Theater is being restored to its 1940s grandeur by a community member. The city plans to move its offices into the space vacated by the library. And a significant employer has plans to double their footprint and add 200 employees.

“One piece of great news can build into another piece of tremendous news,” said Govitz. “There’s just a new bounce in the step of people here.”

Lisa Donovan is the communications specialist and editor for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6318 or ldonovan@mml.org.
We take our mission statement seriously here at the League. In case you don’t have it committed to memory—it’s in a lovely text box within this article. It can be summed up in our tag line, *We Love Where You Live*, but it goes much deeper than that for those of us who try to create and support the programs, services, and opportunities that help all of our members get to the next level in both your personal growth and community accomplishments.

We know it’s our responsibility to push the envelope with innovative programming, cutting edge research, and top notch services. As your association, it is up to us to provide you with the training, resources, and opportunities that will inspire and encourage you throughout your public service.

We’re in the process of rolling out increased leadership and educational opportunities to do just that. Over the next year, you’ll be seeing more information coming from us regarding new ways in which you can get involved with, learn from, and utilize the League. We are also enhancing our member experiences and aiming to provide greater benefits to active members.

**Expanding Our Offerings**

We know your job is hard and time consuming. But being a successful local leader requires a commitment to acquiring the best training available. We know our expert training is second to none, but we are improving ways for members to access that information. In addition to our existing programs within the Elected Officials Academy, Capital Conference, and Convention, we are developing additional educational tools that can be accessed on-demand and electronically.

We have also begun a new effort to bring League training programs into your communities by hosting regional “You Need to Know” events. These two-hour sessions will be held throughout the year on various pressing topics for local communities and will feature an hour of programming followed by an hour of networking with other officials in your region. We know that interacting with others who share common concerns often leads to transformational lightbulb moments.

**Affiliate Activities**

Our affiliate organizations are also excellent ways for local leaders to connect, learn, and grow. We are investing additional resources into helping promote the leaders of our most visible affiliate organizations and provide greater opportunities for them within League events. After all, they have invested time and energy into helping promote their passion, and we should be maximizing their energy and experience.

As part of this, we will be hosting the presidents of some of these organizations at the National League of Cities Congressional Cities Conference in Washington DC next March, and in meetings with our congressional delegation. In addition to the leadership exposure, we are also developing a scholarship program for professional development within these affiliates through a program of the Michigan Municipal League Foundation. Details will be made available soon! The affiliates in this program will be the ones supported by League staffing services: Michigan Municipal Executives, Michigan Association of Mayors, Michigan Municipal League Foundation.

**OUR MISSION:** The Michigan Municipal League is dedicated to making Michigan’s communities better by thoughtfully innovating programs, energetically connecting ideas and people, actively serving members with resources and services, and passionately inspiring positive change for Michigan’s greatest centers of potential: its communities.
within the Elected Officials Academy, Capital Conference, and Convention, we are developing additional educational tools that can be accessed on-demand and electronically.

We have also begun a new effort to bring League training programs into your communities by hosting regional "You Need to Know" events. These two-hour sessions will be held throughout the year on various pressing topics for local communities and will feature an hour of programming followed by an hour of networking with other officials in your region. We know that interacting with others who share common concerns often leads to transformational lightbulb moments.

Affiliate Activities
Our affiliate organizations are also excellent ways for local leaders to connect, learn, and grow. We are investing additional resources into helping promote the leaders of our most visible affiliate organizations and provide greater opportunities for them within League events. After all, they have invested time and energy into helping promote their passion, and we should be maximizing their energy and experience.

As part of this, we will be hosting the presidents of some of these organizations at the National League of Cities Congressional Cities Conference in Washington DC next March, and in meetings with our congressional delegation. In addition to the leadership exposure, we are also developing a scholarship program for professional development within these affiliates through a program of the Michigan Municipal League Foundation. Details will be made available soon! The affiliates in this program will be the ones supported by League staffing services: Michigan Municipal Executives, Michigan Association of Mayors, Michigan Women in Municipal Government, Michigan Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, and Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys.

Learning From Each Other
Learning from other League members is one of the most valuable assets to being engaged with the League. Whether it’s a creative approach to green energy, a successful millage campaign, or a community-led crowdfunding project, great things are happening among us all the time. And now, we are more dedicated to highlighting those case studies of success and developing additional policy-focused research to assist members with common challenges.

Maybe you’re new to public service and not even sure about all that the League provides. Or you’re a seasoned vet, but are working with new individuals who don’t yet share your passion. We can help. Once our members are involved with the League, they are often surprised at the depth of our involvement in municipal matters, and opportunities of which they can take advantage. So if you’re interested in having someone come speak to your council—let us know! We’ll come and meet informally, or provide a presentation before a council meeting—or both. In addition to helping you understand League benefits, we have also recently created Elected Officials Academy Ambassadors, who are local officials primed to go speak in their regions on the ins and outs of the Elected Officials Academy training program and the advantages it has provided to them. This peer-centric presentation is intended to help encourage continuing education of our local elected officials. Please contact us if you’re interested in having someone visit your community.

Having a strong, active association that achieves its goals requires fostering connected, committed members. And by being more strategic about how we connect with you and share information, we can create more meaningful experiences for individuals and better outcomes for the communities you serve.

Summer Minnick is director of membership engagement. You may contact her at 517-908-0301 or sminnick@mml.org.

Presented by the Michigan Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials

RACE & LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE URBAN COMMUNITY

Saturday, April 8, 2017
9:00 am - 3:00 pm
Lawrence Technological University
College of Architecture & Design Auditorium
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Rail Conference Keeps Michigan on the Right Track

By Pasi Lautala

The Michigan Rail Conference has been organized annually since 2013 as a forum that allows industry stakeholders and the general public to get the latest information about the rail industry in Michigan and nationwide. The latest conference took place at Northern Michigan University in Marquette, Aug. 17-18. This was the first time the conference was held in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and it broke all expectations for participation, with a record 160 participants and support from 14 sponsoring agencies and companies. As at past conferences, the organization was led by the Rail Transportation Program at Michigan Technological University under guidance from a Conference Planning Committee consisting of a versatile group of more than a dozen stakeholders. Since the conference’s inception, indispensable support has also been provided by the Michigan Department of Transportation and the National University Rail Center.

The goal of the conference is to increase the awareness of rail as a viable transportation mode and highlight the importance of rail transportation to everyone in Michigan. One of the main objectives is to provide discussion on a variety of topics with a target audience ranging from rail industry professionals to shippers, elected officials, advocacy groups, and the general public, all with an interest in passenger and freight rail. This year’s conference had over 30 presenters, many of them from outside the State of Michigan. They provided expertise on sessions that ranged from the future of rail in Michigan to rail operations and related development in the Upper Peninsula, and to passenger rail in the age of lean public investment. Two exciting keynote speeches were provided, one on economic development in the Upper Peninsula, the other on the plans for the Great Lakes Basin Railroad, a proposed new rail line around Chicago. The conference also had a full day of field visits to various rail industry facilities in the Upper Peninsula.

Rail Transportation Challenges

While the conference topics change from year to year, some common themes remain. Rail as a valuable part of economic development and the challenges related to rail transportation have always been important. Michigan is a large state and the challenges often differ from region to region. The real challenges for most rural areas are in preserving the rail network and keeping the rail option available for freight shippers at locations where freight volumes provide limited justification for service. For more metropolitan areas, the main challenge may lie in getting the most out of the limited capacity and figuring out how to integrate rail transportation with other competing—or collaborating—modes, such as intermodal (containerized) transportation. There is also a tradeoff between minimizing the capital required to maintain rail assets versus improving the performance/condition of the system to provide faster, more reliable service.

Innovations In Passenger Rail

While much of our rail transportation discussion tends to concentrate on a freight system that is the envy of the world, Michigan also has a lot at stake in passenger rail
"Rail doesn’t just work by itself, but rather should be an integrated part of the transportation system."

Rail transportation. The core for intercity passenger rail is the Michigan’s Accelerated Rail Program, which is focused on improving the federally designated Chicago Hub (Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac) High Speed Rail Corridor. Unlike most intercity passenger corridors that run on tracks owned by the private freight railroads, Michigan purchased a significant portion of the corridor and has been diligently working on improvements to allow the higher speeds necessary for successful passenger rail.

On a local level, the QLINE in Detroit is an unprecedented public-private partnership and the first major transit project being led and funded by both private businesses and philanthropic organizations, in partnership with local government, the State of Michigan, and U.S. Department of Transportation. We know that our younger generations pay more attention to public transportation. While it’s extremely difficult to predict the outcomes of new systems, such as QLINE, both of these projects are first of their kind in the nation and their outcomes and effects on adjacent development will be watched closely, both within Michigan and by other states interested in similar opportunities.

Rail’s Place In The Transportation Landscape
A frequent topic of conversation is the challenge of turning “rail transportation skeptics” into believers. It seems that the best way is through examples of success. There’s always a risk in developing something new—such as QLINE—but an even bigger risk is to stop trying and stop inventing new ways to move things forward, whether the subject is passenger or freight transportation. When passenger and freight trains move reliably, competitively, and regularly, people and freight migrate toward such alternatives. It is doubtful that trains will ever be a “challenge” to car and truck domination. Instead, they should be considered as supporting or relieving entities to the highway transportation system. Rail doesn’t just work by itself, but rather should be an integrated part of the transportation system. Trucking companies are already some of the largest clients of freight railroads through intermodal transportation. On the passenger side, an example of collaboration is the ongoing trial between Uber and Amtrak that harnesses Uber to take care of the first and last miles of a passenger train trip. Another example is multimodal passenger stations that provide connections between bus and rail service. In the end, the ultimate goal for the state and the nation should be a balanced passenger and freight transportation system where rail transportation can certainly play a large role.

The conversation on these topics and others, will continue at the next conference in Kalamazoo in August 2017. The word on the success of the Michigan Rail Conference has spread, so other MidWest states have expressed their interest in joining the conversation. As a result, the 2017 conference is expected to take shape as the first ever Midwest Rail Conference with participation from several Midwestern states that are part of our region’s rail system. We hope to see all our Michigan stakeholders again at the conference.

Pasi Lautala, Ph.D., P.E., is assistant professor of Civil & Environmental Engineering, director, Michigan Tech Transportation Institute, and director, Rail Transportation Program at Michigan Tech University. You may contact him at 906-487-3547 or ptlautal@mtu.edu.
Hundreds of cities across the state increasingly face an unenviable choice: provide quality services for their residents or live up to the financially burdensome pension and retiree health care promises they’ve made to employees.

In 2014, cities, villages, and townships had unfunded pension liabilities totaling $2.5 billion, and another $7 billion in unfunded other postemployment benefits, mostly retiree health care, and commonly known as OPEB. Those figures come from a recent update of a landmark 2013 Michigan State University Extension study.

“We have a lot of communities that made retirement promises to their employees. If those promises are to be kept, they won’t be able to provide services,” said Eric Lupher, president of the Citizens Research Council of Michigan. “It’s hard to see how this is a sustainable model.”

Of the 1,773 local units of government in Michigan, 311 provided some level of OPEB in 2013, according to the MSU Extension study. But those 311 communities contain 67 percent of the state’s population. Many are larger communities, including Flint, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo.

On the pension side, the Municipal Employees’ Retirement System manages 713 municipal defined benefit pension funds in which retirees receive a monthly check from the municipality for life. Of those, 251 are funded at below 70 percent of their obligation to retirees, according to MERS. Some experts say a healthy pension system should be at least 70 percent funded.

Liabilities Forced Into The Open

While the problem of underfunded pensions and OPEB obligations isn’t new, it’s starting to get more attention. Some say state government, which has cut billions of dollars in revenue sharing money to communities and limited other ways for municipalities to raise revenues as taxable property values fell in recent years, must play a role in helping them restore their pension and OPEB systems.

Howard Shifman, a Birmingham employment attorney who is an expert on retirement benefits, cites the example of one Downriver Detroit community that, before the Great recession, was one of the better-funded in the state, with a pension obligation of 88 percent funded.

By Rick Haglund
“We have a lot of communities that made retirement promises to their employees. If those promises are to be kept, they won’t be able to provide services.”

Recession, had an annual general fund budget of $25 million, with $5 million of that going to fund pensions and retiree health care.

Today, that community has a general fund budget of $20 million, primarily as a result of falling property tax revenues, while retiree legacy costs have risen to $12 million. In other words, the cash it has available to pay employees and fund services has fallen from $20 million to $8 million.

“That’s the crisis so many communities face today,” Shifman said. “The state’s municipal financing system doesn’t allow a mechanism to help. How do you get out of the problem? You first have to acknowledge it. You can’t put your head in the sand.”

For years, Shifman said local governments kept the problem of unfunded OPEB “in the shadows” by not having to report it on financial statements. That’s about to change. Starting next year, an accounting rule known as GASB 75 will require local governments to report their entire OPEB commitment as a liability on their balance sheets, which will make for some eye-popping reading. “It’s got to be on the balance sheet and not in the footnotes. That’s a huge change,” Shifman said.

Advocating for Change

Meanwhile, a group of prominent West Michigan business leaders has taken notice of the local government pension-underfunding problem. At its recent biennial conference in September, the West Michigan Policy Forum said its top priority over the next two years will be advocating for all public employees to be switched from traditional defined-benefit pensions to 401(k) style plans, which are known as defined-contribution plans.

The vote to make pension reform the Policy Forum’s top priority came after former U.S. Comptroller General David Walker told the group that underfunded pension and OPEB plans are a fiscal and competitive threat to the state and its communities.

Walker is now a consultant with the accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, which conducted a study of pension and OPEB obligations of six Michigan cities: Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lincoln Park, Port Huron and Saginaw, plus Grand Traverse County.

The study found that these seven jurisdictions have total reported unfunded pension liabilities of $321 million and $855 million in unfunded OPEB obligations. But Walker said the real unfunded pension and OPEB liabilities in those locales could be more than three times the reported figures if more realistic investment rate of return assumptions are used.

Some, including Walker, blame much of the problem on city governments and public employee unions that negotiated too-generous benefits for workers.

Others, including Lupher and MERS Chief Executive Officer Chris DeRose, disagree. They say communities were competing for talent with automakers and other companies that also offered pensions and retiree health care, and that benefit packages were mostly seen as reasonable when they were negotiated.

“While there may be a perception that public benefits are on the whole overly generous, the average annual (pension) benefit for our retirees is $20,768,” DeRose said. MERS manages 84 percent of the 869 municipal pension plans in the state.

Lupher said the biggest problem with retiree benefits is the inability of governments to accurately predict the future cost of retiree health care. “No one saw escalation of health care costs” when many retiree health care benefits were enacted, he said.

Many communities are taking steps to reduce their retiree cost burdens. In the last five years, 73 percent of MERS municipalities have lowered pension costs or contributed more to their plans, DeRose said. And total OPEB funding levels by municipalities have risen from 9.5 percent of liabilities in 2011 to 14 percent in 2014, according to the MSU study.

But many experts agree that it will be difficult for communities to solve the retiree benefit crisis without some kind of state assistance. The ability of municipalities to raise tax revenue is capped by state law and they’ve seen statutory revenue sharing cut by $7.5 billion since 2002.

“The state exacerbated the problem,” Shifman said. “No one wants to provide a hardship on the retirees, but the mission of local government is services. They need assistance.”

Rick Haglund is a freelance writer. You may contact him at 248-761-4594 or haglund.rick@gmail.com.
Cloud Services

A Good Fit for Local Government

By Dene Westbrook

The cloud certainly isn’t a new idea in the technology industry. But some local governments may be wary or unsure of how it could be beneficial. Let’s start at the beginning.

What Is “The Cloud”

A very simple answer is that the cloud is a way to store and access software programs or data over the Internet instead of a local server or your desktop computer. There are many ways and options for taking advantage of the cloud. Models include software as a service (SaaS), infrastructure as a service (IaaS), or platform as a service (PaaS). All of these confusing buzzwords mean one thing—you are utilizing a service provider to supply the software, hardware, and technology staff to store and maintain an application, web service, or data, which is accessible via the Internet. A few examples you may already be using are Microsoft Office 365, Google Apps (now renamed G Suite), Dropbox, GoToMeeting, and Flickr.

Benefits Of The Cloud

Communities are constantly having to do more with less money and resources. Cloud computing can remove the cost of infrastructure (servers, software, backup, networking) and maintenance time, which has the potential to save thousands of dollars. For example, the League considered using Office 365 for cloud email hosting and productivity software in 2012 when the technology first matured. An internal cost analysis was done, estimating software licensing, server/network costs, and staff time for upkeep. It was determined that moving to the cloud service would ultimately pay for itself and create significant savings.

In addition to affecting your bottom line, the cloud makes it easy to expand your current capacity. If you need more storage space for data, or another server for a software application, you can add that to your system with a few clicks as opposed to intensive planning of internal infrastructure in your data center.

Another benefit is that software and hardware upgrades are typically included, so your data is always utilizing the latest technology. This helps free up your IT staff so they are able to concentrate on other endeavors.

Grab The Low Hanging Fruit

There are many different cloud services that may meet the needs of communities. As mentioned previously, if new email servers are in the budget, price out a Google G Suite or Office 365 service move. Or, if data storage is a high priority, whether it’s for disaster recovery or public safety videos, there are many providers that can store your data safely and securely instead of investing in another piece of expensive hardware.
Security And Other Considerations
Not all cloud service providers are the same. Choose one with proven experience in hosting local government applications and data with strong encryption techniques. Ask the provider these pertinent questions:

1. What level of encryption do you use?
2. Do you as a provider have access to my data?
3. How often is data backed up?
4. What is the service level agreement and does it fit with my needs?
5. My data is stored on your servers, but who ultimately owns it?
6. What are the terms of service cancellation?

When determining whether a cloud solution works for your community, something else to consider is your networking bandwidth and Internet speed. For example, if you have many employees in a municipal building and plan to move to a hosted email service, evaluate whether there is sufficient speed and capacity to support such a change. The same considerations would apply for a data backup solution simply because of the sheer volume of data travelling over your Internet connection.

Evaluation And Planning
Meet with your information technology staff or IT consultant to review your existing hardware and software, networking operations, and backup planning and execution technologies. Evaluate whether it makes sense to move a system or keep it in-house as not everything may be suitable for the cloud. When making the decision, keep in mind that a potential move should:

1. Improve processes and make business easier.
2. Be cost effective.
3. Fit into existing goals.

With proper planning and selection of the right service provider, communities can reap huge benefits by choosing to optimize for the cloud.

Dene Westbrook is the IT-Operations Manager for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6314 or dwestbrook@mml.org.
May charitable organizations solicit donations in a public roadway?

FACTS

The Village Council of Sebewaing decided that it would no longer permit a person from a charitable organization, while standing in a public roadway, to solicit contributions from occupants of vehicles in the roadway. The state senator representing the district that included the village requested an opinion from the Attorney General as to whether charitable and civic organizations may solicit contributions from public roadways.

The Michigan Constitution provides that “except as otherwise provided in this constitution,” local units of government shall have reasonable control of their “highways, streets, alleys and public places.” Art 7, section 29. The Constitution further provides that each city and village has the power to adopt resolutions and ordinances relating to municipal concerns. Art 7, section 22. State statutes have been adopted permitting a city, township, or village to adopt by reference the Michigan Vehicle Code (MCL 257.1 to 257.923) and also the Uniform Traffic Code, promulgated by the State Police (MCL 257.951). Sebewaing had adopted both.

QUESTION

May a charitable or civic organization solicit donations in a public roadway?

ANSWER ACCORDING TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL: The Opinion of the Attorney General (OAG) outlined the applicable constitutional, statutory, and regulatory provisions. The OAG answered the question by examining the relevant provisions of the Motor Vehicle Code and also of the Uniform Traffic Code.

MAYBE. The Michigan Vehicle Code, MCL 257.676b(2) prohibits a person from using his or her body in a way that interferes with the normal flow of traffic on a public street unless authorized to engage in the activity. The OAG addressed certain statutory provisions that authorize persons to engage in activity in a street or highway, but disregarded those provisions as not applying to the facts as presented. The OAG stated that “it is reasonable to conclude . . . that the presence of a person in a street requesting contributions from vehicle occupants would ordinarily . . . interfere with the normal flow of traffic . . . .” The OAG continued, however, that “[w]hether this is true will depend upon the particular facts and circumstances.” The OAG also stated that it found no provision that a local unit of government had the authority to issue a permit to an organization to solicit contributions in the roadway.

NO. Rule 28.1713(1) of the Uniform Traffic Code, however, provides that a person “shall not stand in a roadway for the purpose of soliciting a ride, employment, or business from the occupant of any vehicle.” Finding that a person asking for contributions is “soliciting . . . business,” the OAG found that Rule 713 applied if the person was in the improved portion of the roadway.

Attorney General Opinion, 7291, July 29, 2016

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Municipal Q&A

Medical Marijuana Facilities Licensing Act

Based on the Michigan Township Association’s “New Medical Marijuana Laws Q&A,” by Catherine Mullhaupt, MTA Staff Attorney, 10/31/16

Q. Why do you spell marijuana as “marihuana”?

A. The word was originally spelled with an “h” in the Michigan Medical Marihuana Act. In addition, that is how the word is spelled in federal law and the new Medical Marihuana Facilities Licensing Act. The League uses the “h” when referring to medical marihuana.

Q. Has marijuana been legalized?

A. No, marijuana has not been legalized. It is still an illegal drug under federal and state law. The Michigan Medical Marihuana Act (MMMA), Initiated Law 1 of 2008, allows qualified patients and registered caregivers identified with those patients to use marijuana for specified medical conditions. That law did not legalize marijuana, but it prohibits prosecuting or penalizing qualified patients and registered caregivers who use marijuana for medical purposes as long as they comply with the MMMA.

Subsequent court opinions clarified that only those persons who were qualified patients and registered caregivers (and persons who met the requirements of Section 8 of the MMMA, even if not registered with the state) could exchange or use medical marihuana. A third party—a person providing or selling marihuana to a qualified patient who is not that person’s registered caregiver—does not have the protection from prosecution under the MMMA. Any arrangement outside of the patient-caregiver relationship, including “dispensaries,” does not comply with the MMMA and is illegal.

Q. What is legal today?

A. Only a patient-caregiver relationship conducted in compliance with the Michigan Medical Marihuana Act is legal today. Note that the MMMA was recently amended by PA 283 of 2016 to include certain marihuana-infused products, or “edibles,” and to clarify what plants and parts of plants are allowed within the limits imposed by the Act.

Q. If marihuana dispensaries are currently illegal, how come we see them all over?

A. Because the local jurisdiction has chosen not to enforce state or federal laws that make marihuana illegal outside of the patient-caregiver relationship protected by the MMMA. In most cases, the municipality has “decriminalized” certain uses of marihuana and/or chosen to not utilize enforcement resources for small amounts or certain levels of activity. But that is a forbearance, not legalization.

Q. Didn’t Michigan just pass a law making marihuana dispensaries legal?

A. Yes, the Medical Marihuana Facilities Licensing Act (MMFLA), Public Act 281 of 2016, but it does not take effect until Dec. 20, 2016. And, the MMFLA includes an additional delay in implementation of 360 days to enable the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) to establish the licensing system required by the Act.

A person cannot apply to the state for a license of any kind under the MMFLA until Dec. 15, 2017. And no one can apply to the state for a license of any kind under the MMFLA unless the municipality has adopted an ordinance authorizing that type of facility.

So, even after Dec. 15, 2017, any marihuana provisioning center or other activity involving marihuana that does not comply with the Michigan Medical Marihuana Act will still be illegal, unless the municipality has adopted an ordinance that authorizes that type of facility under the Medical Marihuana Facilities Licensing Act. (Note that the word “dispensary” has been commonly used to refer to a variety of medical marihuana activities, but the new laws do not refer to “dispensaries.” Under the MMFLA, “provisioning centers” are what many people would describe as a “dispensary.”)

Q. What if an applicant comes to our council meeting now and demands that we adopt an ordinance to allow a facility?

A. If a municipality is approached by an applicant stating that the council must adopt an ordinance, then that applicant has misunderstood the law. A municipality cannot be required to adopt an ordinance to allow facilities authorized under the MMFLA—now, or at any time. If a municipality is approached by an applicant demanding it consider the application, or stating that the council must authorize the applicant’s facility, note these points:

• Before Dec. 15, 2017, no municipality can be required to consider an application. Even if a city, village, or township adopts an ordinance to allow the facilities authorized by the MMFLA, the state’s licensing system is not in place, and no applications will be considered by LARA until Dec. 15, 2017.

• After Dec. 15, 2017, if a municipality has not adopted an ordinance allowing any of the facilities authorized by the MMFLA, then the municipality is not required to consider any
A. Any time before Dec. 15, 2017, a municipality that wants any of the facilities authorized under the MMFLA?  

Q. What do we need to do if we DO want any of the facilities authorized under the MMFLA in our city, village, or township?  

A. Do nothing. You do not need to adopt an ordinance to allow medical marihuana facilities to operate within its boundaries. They are already prohibited by state and federal law.

You do not have to consider any application for any facilities currently because no application will be considered by the state until Dec. 15, 2017. And even after that date, if your municipality has not adopted an ordinance allowing that type of facility, that application will not be considered by the state.

"Note that, because dispensaries and other marihuana facilities or operations outside of the patient/caregiver relationship are NOT currently lawful (even where marihuana has been decriminalized locally), existing dispensaries or other marihuana facilities or operations are not currently lawful non-conforming uses for zoning ordinance purposes.

Q. What do we need to do if we do NOT want any of the facilities authorized under the MMFLA in our city, village, or township?  

A. Do nothing. You do not need to adopt an ordinance to prohibit the types of facilities authorized under the MMFLA. They are already prohibited by state and federal law.

But a license from the state is still required before a specific facility is authorized to legally operate under the MMFLA. The council’s adoption of the ordinance allowing medical marihuana facilities does not automatically make all facilities lawful. Also note that, because dispensaries and other marihuana facilities or operations outside of the patient/caregiver relationship are NOT currently lawful (even where marihuana has been decriminalized locally), existing dispensaries or other marihuana facilities or operations are not currently lawful non-conforming uses for zoning ordinance purposes.

Q. Why would a municipality consider allowing one or more of the types of facilities authorized under the MMFLA?  

A. Some communities accept medical marihuana use for compassionate reasons, and believe that the new Facilities Licensing Act will better facilitate the spirit and actual practice of the patient/caregiver relationship authorized by the statewide initiative that created the Medical Marihuana Act in 2008. Other communities may be responding to a real demand or broad support locally for providing medical marihuana facilities and business opportunities. And, it may be a revenue source.

• Annual administrative fee: Once a municipality adopts an ordinance allowing one or more of the types of facilities authorized by the Medical Marihuana Facilities Licensing Act, the municipality may, in that ordinance, require “an annual, nonrefundable fee of not more than $5,000 on a licensee to help defray administrative and enforcement costs associated with the operation of a marihuana facility in the municipality.” (“Nonrefundable”—as in, not returned if the license is revoked or not renewed)

• Property tax revenues: These facilities are businesses and may actually be quite profitable. And, in some communities, medical marihuana facilities will utilize commercial properties that are currently vacant or even off the tax roll due to foreclosure.

• State shared revenues, as appropriated: A state tax will be imposed on each provisioning center at the rate of 3 percent of the provisioning center’s gross retail receipts, which will go to the state Medical Marihuana Excise Fund. The money in the fund will be allocated, upon appropriation, to the state, counties, and municipalities in which a marihuana facility is located, with “25 percent to municipalities in which a marihuana facility is located, allocated in proportion to the number of marihuana facilities within the municipality.”

The League’s Information Service provides member officials with answers to questions on a vast array of municipal topics. Email questions to info@mml.org or call 1-800-653-2483.
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• Annual administrative fee: Once a municipality adopts an ordinance allowing one or more of the types of facilities authorized by the Medical Marihuana Facilities Licensing Act, the municipality may, in that ordinance, require “an annual, nonrefundable fee of not more than $5,000 on a licensee to help defray administrative and enforcement costs associated with the operation of a marihuana facility in the municipality.” (“Nonrefundable”—as in, not returned if the license is revoked or not renewed.)

• Property tax revenues: These facilities are businesses and may actually be quite profitable. And, in some communities, medical marihuana facilities will utilize commercial properties that are currently vacant or even off the tax roll due to foreclosure.

• State shared revenues, as appropriated: A state tax will be imposed on each provisioning center at the rate of 3 percent of the provisioning center’s gross retail receipts, which will go to the state Medical Marihuana Excise Fund. The money in the fund will be allocated, upon appropriation, to the state, counties, and municipalities in which a marihuana facility is located, with “25 percent to municipalities in which a marihuana facility is located, allocated in proportion to the number of marihuana facilities within the municipality.”

The League’s Information Service provides member officials with answers to questions on a vast array of municipal topics. Email questions to info@mml.org or call 1-800-653-2483.

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Washtenaw Coordinated Funders

Washtenaw County and the City of Ann Arbor are two of five founding partners of an award-winning public-private human services collaborative funding model called Coordinated Funding. In November of 2010, the five founding partners (Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, United Way of Washtenaw County, Washtenaw County, the City of Ann Arbor, and the Washtenaw Urban County Executive Committee) agreed to adopt shared safety net focus areas and goals within six priority areas: aging, early childhood, housing & homelessness, hunger relief, safety net health & nutrition, and school-aged youth.

Goals include:
1. Understand the full landscape of needs and distribute resources more strategically
2. Model the collaboration the funders espouse to funded agencies
3. Leverage each other’s funding and resources
4. Reduce or eliminate redundancies and streamline processes and procedures
5. Better coordinate grant-making processes so better informed decisions can be jointly made.

In the priority areas, the model promotes common program outcomes, enhanced collaboration among nonprofits, and enhanced nonprofit operational capacity. This effort involves better sharing of information among the funders, closer work with local nonprofits to establish common community goals, and increased cooperation in funding decisions. This ongoing communication allows the funders to identify potential service redundancies and gaps.

This year, the Coordinated Funders awarded $4.5 million to 67 programs at 38 agencies. The funding is for program operations serving the most vulnerable in our community. The Coordinated Funders are currently engaged in evaluation to determine the measurable impact of funding on the common outcomes. Additional funding partners have also joined the initial group: the private family RNR Foundation and the nonprofit hospital system, St. Joseph Mercy Health System. The 7-member partnership has helped build additional grantee capacity building and programming services, and provided analysis of the Coordinated Funding’s effectiveness.

Coordinated Funding also has recently attracted funding from outside the partnerships, as well, with the Michigan Health Endowment Fund contributing $380,000 into the model. The partnership has also successfully preserved public funding for the nonprofit sector. Seeing the significant leverage of safety net service program funding, local elected officials have voted to preserve grant funding to Coordinated Funding even with within an increasingly tight local government budget.