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Local Officials Are Off to Washington

Scores of local officials from across Michigan will join the League staff in Washington, D.C. the week of March 9 for the National League of Cities Annual Congressional City Conference. While they are attending the meeting, the League will coordinate dozens of meetings with members of Congress and staff to advocate on behalf of local priorities. I am pleased to report that the LNC’s increased efforts in the advocacy arena appear to be paying dividends in the areas of transportation funding and homeland security, which is great news for our communities. So it is of critical importance that we in Michigan make our voices heard.

Dedication of the League’s Capital Office Building

All of the League’s members are invited to join the Board of Trustees in a ribbon cutting ceremony and dedication of the League’s new Capital Office in Lansing on Wednesday, April 2. The event will take place as part of our Annual Capital Conference (for registration information go to http://mml.org/events/conference/index.html).

The Capital Office will provide the League and its members with first-class conference and reception facilities located directly across from the State Capitol building. In addition to staff offices, we have created a number of unique spaces for meetings and events of many sizes. I invite League members to check out the facility on April 2 and think of it as their building too. Our hope is that member communities will use the space while they have business in Lansing, whether for a business meeting or maybe just for a spot to rest weary legs and check messages while you are away from your communities.

A Busy Spring for Communities in Michigan

As a means to enhance our traditional media communications in the same way, we recently retained Martin-Waymire Advocacy Communications (MWAC) of Lansing to spearhead our strategic communications efforts. Our role in the policy development process in the state has never been more critical, and our relationship with MWAC is already paying dividends.

In an age when information overload is as common as snow in the U.P., it takes an expert touch to craft a message that can cut through the endless noise. The MWAC team has proven through the years that they can do it. Their aggressive strategies for gaining positive media and public support have paid dividends. In an age when information overload is as common as snow in the U.P., it takes an expert touch to craft a message that can cut through the endless noise. The MWAC team has proven through the years that they can do it. Their aggressive strategies for gaining positive media and public support have paid dividends.
Trivia Questionnaire

Where is the Wi-Fi?

- Where is the first city in the US to implement 911?
  - A. Addison, TX       B. Essex, CT       C. Salem, MA       D. Haleyville, AL

- What was the first city in the US to be completely lit by electric lights?

- What was the first city in the nation to install a telephone exchange?
  - A. Salt Lake City, UT  B. San Jose, CA    C. New Haven, CT    D. Madison, WI

- What was the first city in the US to deploy city-wide Wi-Fi Internet connectivity?
  - A. Grand Haven, MI    B. Spokane, WA     C. Jacksonville, FL  D. Cerritos, CA

**Cities in the process of acquiring Wi-Fi**
- Westland
- Grand Rapids
- Traverse City
- Springfield

**Where is the Wi-Fi?**
- Coldwater, Bronson, Quincy, and Tekonsha (all operated by the Coldwater Board of Public Utilities)
- Grand Haven
- Ferrysburg
- Spring Lake
- Scottville
- Gladstone

**Cities in the process of acquiring Wi-Fi**
- Muskegon
- Grand Rapids
- Traverse City
- Springfield

**Municipal Marketplace**

**What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You**

By Jeanette Westhead

Globalization, information and connectivity have changed the rules of business and government in the 21st Century. The knowledge-based economy, driven by knowledge-based jobs, is replacing the failing manufacturing-based economy. Goods and services are being developed, bought, sold and delivered over electronic networks. Officials who participated in the 2007 Annual Convention saw the League’s version of the widely distributed “Did You Know” video. This video brings home the exponential rate at which technology is changing and shrinking the world in which we live.

Communities that stay up-to-date on current technology and maintain vibrant cores will have an edge in attracting and retaining knowledge-based workers and the companies who are seeking them. Information and knowledge are replacing capital and energy as the primary wealth-creating assets. With increased mobility of information and the global work force, knowledge and expertise are the assets that companies are looking for to fuel innovation. Knowledge-based businesses locate in places that attract and retain talented workers. Two-thirds of college educated people ages 25-34 (millennials) choose first where they want to live and then look for a job.

What does this mean for Michigan?

To attract talented millennial workers, communities will have to provide both the physical and technical infrastructure that appeals to them. Young talent is drawn to areas that promote and value learning, entrepreneurial spirit and diversity. Physical infrastructure:
- a mix of residential and commercial uses
- mass transit
- Technical infrastructure:
  - Wi-Fi, advanced Internet connections
  - video conferencing, virtual meetings and access to distance learning
  - collaborative development environments

How do we promote a knowledge-based Michigan?

When Michigan communities use online media to broadcast the new urban message about the positive and exciting aspects of our cities, they can directly influence people who want to work, build a business, relocate, or visit Michigan.

The idea that complex stories can best be told through images still holds true. To fully appreciate the impact of technology’s role in all our futures I encourage you to view the League’s version of the “Did You Know” video at www.mml.org.

**Did You Know...**

- More than 50% of today’s 21 year olds have created content on the web
- 70% of 4 year olds have used a computer

**Years it took to reach a market audience of 50 million:**

- Radio...30
- TV...13
- Computer...4

**The amount of technical information is doubling every few years**

**Something to ponder...**

If knowledge-based workers could choose to live anywhere, why would they choose to live in ____ (your town)?

Jeannette Westhead is the research writer for the League. She may be reached at jwesthead@mml.org or 734-669-6318.
Are You e?

By Brenda Currin

Feature Article

Are You e?


Everyone has a website. It's a twenty-first century version of hanging out your shingle. But be careful not to go to e-government than having a website. It's been only thirty years since the U.S. government went online. In that short time, and often riding on the coattails of commercial applications, governments have learned to use their websites as a tool for administering programs, providing services, and engaging citizens in government and community. Those online capabilities are the "e" in e-government. For many smaller governments, your first website probably was the baby of an innovative employee, willing to take it on as an extra assignment. Now that website has grown, and it represents a significant investment of time and tax dollars. How can you be sure it's working for you? How can you be sure it has value to your staff and your citizens? A simple analysis of your site will give you some clues. It takes no expertise—no surveys, no focus groups, no statistics. Those tools may be helpful later, if you need to make changes. But for starters, use the questions presented in the analysis tool accompanying this article to look at your site and estimate for yourself how well it achieves six key goals of e-government:

- Focus on people
- Focus on service
- Usability
- Accessibility
- Effective content management
- Costs and benefits

Government websites do many things: help administer programs, deliver services, and engage citizens.

In the Blink of an Eye, Historically Speaking

"e" is everywhere, but it's still a newcomer. Big users of the Internet can easily forget just how recently it swept in and changed everything. Think back twenty years, to 1987: chances are you hadn't even heard of it. Lots of Apple IIe's and 86s were around, but nothing was networked. Four years later—1991—the Internet was the newest thing, but it was all text. It allowed limited access to university and government resources from a distance. Then www—the World Wide Web—hit like a tidal wave. Suddenly, individuals, schools, and small businesses could access and publish information through graphic websites on the Internet. If you were in the corporate world, you may have gone online a little earlier, but for most people, the Internet entered the mainstream of American life only 10-15 years ago. Look at a comparable technology revolution: The automobile first entered the mainstream of American life in 1913 when Ford introduced the moving assembly line to mass-produce cars. The next fifteen years were filled with innovations that Americans take today as naturally given—stop signs, traffic lights, four-wheel brakes, car heaters, safety glass, numbered highways. Over the last fifteen years, the Internet has gone through comparable developments in speed, capabilities, and the role it plays in people's lives. When anything changes that fast, it's no surprise that some individuals and organizations are running a few years behind the curve. But with the Internet, a few years behind is a big gap. Closing that gap requires leadership and a commitment of human and financial resources. At the same time, it offers an interesting opportunity to benefit from the experiences, successes, and failures of others. You also can refer to your own experiences using Web resources to help define what works, what is important, and where to focus your investment.

What Makes Government "e"?

The Internet broke out of its government/Defense Department/university incubator after the World Wide Web and graphic websites hit the scene. Corporations and businesses have led the way in developing new online capabilities: buying and selling, teaching and learning, creating spectacular visual impact, providing all kinds of services. In a short time, e-commerce has completely changed how people do business, locally, nationally, and internationally. e-government uses the tools of e-commerce to enhance delivery of government information and services to government employees, citizens, and government's business partners. e-government has been slower to develop than e-commerce but is now a strong presence at national, state, and local levels. The U.S. government went online in 1993. Now people can file taxes, apply for jobs, and access information and services from all government agencies online. By 2004, 96% of cities surveyed across the United States had some kind of website, and 77% had websites that allowed the public to conduct online transactions and receive online services. When local governments first start, your services often are not much more than online brochures of static information. They tell who you are, introduce your departments, give phone numbers, and often present travel information or histories of your community. The next step in developing the website is to add some information about the services each department offers—hours, employees to call, e-mail contact information. Not really "e" yet. When you start adding forms and applications for people to download, when you start organizing information by user groups (contractors, homeowners, businesses, seniors, etc.) rather than by departments, when you start providing outside links to help people solve problems that go beyond the services you offer directly—these steps take you into the realm of "e." When you enable people to make payments for services or taxes online, when you make it possible for people to submit completed forms and applications online, when you reduce the cost of providing services and improve the level of services by offering them online—then you are deep in "e." Congratulations!

Where Are You?

So where are you on the continuum from a website about your local government to e-government? You can use the observations and questions provided in the accompanying analysis tool to evaluate your website on six of the key goals of e-government—and therefore of website design. Doing the analysis should take you only an hour or two at your computer. (A few outreach questions involve talking to your staff to get additional insight, if you have the time.) If the examples offered don't apply to your community, try to think of something similar that does.

You won't answer yes to all the questions, you wouldn't want to. Some of the options overlap or wouldn't work well together. Consider the questions as an a la carte menu of basic "e" capabilities and functions. If you're not satisfied with your progress, the final section of this article offers suggestions and guidelines for moving your community further toward e-government.

1—Focus on People

Who will use your website, and what do they want from you?

The current emphasis in e-government is to provide services, information, and transactions that citizens want and need. Savvy web designers base design decisions on the needs of the target clientele, so they help you carefully identify your clientele—citizens, employees, business partners—and provide services in the site-development process. Input
Not every planning and zoning decision will end up in front of a judge. In fact, most won't. But considering the potential for damages resulting from a lawsuit, taking careful measures to ensure proper decision-making is the responsible thing to do. There are many risks a community may face in zoning litigation that go beyond just having the zoning decision overturned.

Research has revealed the many benefits of training and education for planning officials. There is a direct correlation between training and communities facing fewer lawsuits and smaller judgments against the municipality.

Access to training for planning commissions and zoning board of appeals has never been easier. Citizen Planner offers training options to meet every community's need. Classroom and online training opportunities are available.

For more information visit www.citizenplanner.msu.edu
are they using, and how fast is their Internet connection? A U.S. Department of Education study of adult literacy indicates that half of all Americans read at the eighth-grade level or lower. Unfortunately, the average readability of U.S. government websites in 2008 was the eleventh-grade level.1 Highly educated people who write content for websites may require special training to learn to write at an appropriate level for their target audience. “Plain-language writing” now is a requirement for federal government documents and websites (though sometimes you wouldn’t know that). It uses words and sentence structures that are appropriate to the targeted audience. Jargon and acronyms appear only if the target audience for that piece of information will be familiar with them. Designing for usability also requires some understanding of how people access and use information. Your menus and links need to make sense and be easy to navigate. Organizing websites by department or agency has minimal use for citizens. They don’t know which department is responsible for a given service. Instead, you should organize information by topic, interest group, keyword, or some other category that makes sense to the users of the site. Finally, your site needs to be aesthetically pleasing. This doesn’t mean it needs to have lots of “Wow!” and “Cool.” In fact, too much can distract from the users’ focus on their mission with your website (and you). The site tells people something about the character of your community. It makes an impression, and you want it to be a good one. Pages should be uncluttered so that people can find what they want. Pages should include graphic elements to focus attention on important information. And they should definitely use colors and fonts that are easy to see and read. Assess your site on this dimension.

4—Accessibility

Is your website accessible to people with a wide variety of disabilities and special needs?

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that governments receiving federal funding comply with certain standards for making websites accessible to people with visual and other impairments.2 The World Wide Web Consortium has developed a similar set of Priority Level 1 guidelines for ensuring accessibility.3 These standards are not required of local governments, but they do set an ideal for service to all members of the community. Philip Young covered the topic of standards thoroughly in the Winter 2005 issue of Popular Government.4 The website analysis accompanying this article provides two

Part 3—Usability

What to Look For

Yes No
Does the look of your home page give a good first impression of your city or county? What does it tell people about your community?

Yes No
Is the home page cluttered? Does it take more than a moment to see how the front page is organized and what the options are?

Yes No
Can people look at the menu options on the home page and decide easily which menu to click if they need to talk to the city or county manager? Get a printout of a new web page. Rewrite it back at the library?

Yes No
Does your website have a site-wide search tool?

Yes No
Do your websites have an index?

Yes No
Does the website load quickly?

Yes No
Do all the links work correctly?

Yes No
Print several pages from your website. Do they print correctly, without cutting off the words on the right margin?

Yes No
Is general information for the public written in short, easy-to-read sentences and paragraphs? Does the website use bulleted lists to make information even easier to understand?

The common thread in successful municipal websites is the transition from an informational portal to an interactive portal. For example, in the past it was common to publish recreational offerings on municipal websites. Now, not only can residents view recreational classes online, but they can also register for them.5

–Robert Petty, President, Michigan Government Management Information Sciences

Sterling Heights Novi Midland Livonia Wyoming Kalamazoo

Role Models

These municipal websites are examples of exemplary Michigan local government websites. The Michigan Government Management Information Sciences group gives out a yearly “Best Website” award; the city of Kalamazoo was honored with this award in 2007. The other cities’ websites are previous winners and runners-up.
simple questions you can use to check whether your website design addresses some basic Section 508 accessibility standards. Assess your site on this dimension (see “Website Analysis,” Part 4, on this page).

5—Effective Content Management
Is your site updated frequently, and is the information accurate?

How useful is a website that was “last updated on January 23, 2003”? You might as well not have a website if you don’t have a system for managing the content—for maintaining the site effectively and keeping information accurate and up-to-date. Whether you use contractors or have an in-house website manager, content management will always have a strong tie back to your departments. They drive the updates. If your system requires that all website changes go through the director of finance or the sheriff’s administrative assistant (because ten years ago he or she took it on as an extra assignment), it may be hard to get timely information posted. Even if you have a designated staff member or department to maintain the website, there may be a bottleneck in getting new information posted. One option for reducing the bottleneck is use of specialized software for content management.

6—Costs and Benefits
Do your Web-based services have economic benefits, both for your agencies and for the people in your community?

If your citizens don’t have to drive to your office, if you don’t have to mail the forms, if your people can get the information they need today, if you don’t have to spend time on the phone explaining procedures—”all save money for you or someone in your community.” Secretaries, receptionists, and other employees can answer the same basic questions hundreds of times a month by phone. If half of the callers could find the information they need on your website, it would free your staff for other work. They could provide more service to people who do need to call or come in for personal attention. Likewise, posting forms online to download saves you the time and cost of mailing materials, and people and businesses the time and cost of coming to your office. Even better, if people can fill out forms online, that saves the community. They could provide more service to people who do need to call or come in for personal attention. Likewise, posting forms online to download saves you the time and cost of mailing materials, and people and businesses the time and cost of coming to your office. Even better, if people can fill out forms online, that saves the community.

“Content management” refers to maintaining a website—adding information and keeping content up-to-date. It is one of the biggest challenges of successful e-government. Specialized software for content management makes it possible to assign individual passwords for each page on the website. These passwords give one person in each department or agency access to that page’s content on the website. The interface is very simple, assign individual passwords for each page on the website. These passwords give one person in each department or agency access to that page’s content on the website. The interface is very simple, allowing a secretary the time it would take to enter information from a written application into a database or another computer format. And if people can make payments online, they’ll save postage or travel time, and you’ll save the cost of personnel to accept payments in person. It’s easy to monitor these benefits by recording “hits”: how many people access the website, how many people look at each individual page, and how many times each file is downloaded from the website. You can even collect information on whether the hits are from new or repeat visitors. Using this information, it isn’t hard to estimate a cost savings of up to $5 per transaction due to faster turnaround of information requests and faster access to documents and forms. In the Australian study, more than 90 percent of citizens surveyed indicated an overall improvement in service delivery as a result of using e-government.

Part 4—Accessibility
What to Look For

Yes No
--- ---
If you hold your mouse pointer over a photograph or an illustration, does it have a descriptive label come up?

Yes No
--- ---
If you go in Internet Explorer to View/Text/Size/Largest, or in Netscape Navigator to View/Text/Zoom/200%, does most of the text on the website get bigger? Does the page still work?

Content Development versus Content Management
Content development and content management are two distinctly different processes. Both are critical in developing a successful, user-focused, service oriented website.

"Content development" involves deciding what to include in the site. Many communities make the mistake of gathering whatever information is easily available and turning that into the content of the site. A more effective approach is market driven. It focuses on finding out from your community what they want and finding out from your employees what services they can offer. Content development should be a major consideration in your budget. The website, no matter how beautiful, is only as effective as the content you develop for it.

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Part 6—Costs and Benefits
What to Look For

Yes No
--- ---
Can users download a job application form? An application for a building permit? Applications for social services?

Yes No
--- ---
Requests for proposals (RFPs) for government purchases or contracts?

Yes No
--- ---
Can users fill in and submit any of the following forms online?

Outreach Questions

Yes No
--- ---
Ask a receptionist for the three most frequent questions from callers. Are the answers to these questions posted and easy to find on your website?

Yes No
--- ---
Ask your webmaster whether your website employs a monitoring tool to count how many users access the website and to keep track of which parts of the website they are using. Do your department heads use this information to plan navigators or expansions of online services?

Yes No
--- ---
Do you promote your website so that people know to look first? Is the address posted on your tax mailings? On utility or water bills? On brochures and fliers you distribute? In your offices? Do receptionists know to encourage people to use the website?

Note

If you decide to build your "e" capabilities, you can focus on four main challenges.

**According to the author**

### Ongoing Support
- Commit staff or resources to content management so that the website will be updated regularly.
- Establish realistic evaluation measures so that you can monitor cost benefits and other benefits to the community.
- Whether you work with staff or with contractors, make sure your plans address each of these elements.

Many web design companies will focus on design only, requiring you to provide all the content. That’s okay if you know it in advance and have the capabilities (or an independent communications consultant) to do market research, develop content, and provide ongoing support. It’s easy to pay a lot for a website design that looks great but doesn’t focus on people or service, isn’t easy to use, is difficult or expensive to update, and doesn’t offer any cost savings or service benefits to your community. But if you go into the process prepared, you can negotiate or coordinate to develop a dynamic cost-effective website that is user focused and service oriented. And finally you can declare, “We are ‘e’!”

**Notes**
3. The tool is divided into six parts, which are presented separately in this article. An integrated version of the tool is available online at www.sog.unc.edu/poppwq/.
Hundreds of Michigan municipal officials visited www.mml.org last week...


Why wait?
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The League website: your 24/7 resource

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Advocacy/Public Policy
Issue Advisory, Executive Budget Calls for 4-Percent Increase in Statutory Revenue Sharing!
Latest Legislative Link e-Newsletter
Mi/Fiscal Responsibility Project
Bill-Tracking, League Positions
Community Design & Education Center
Federal Issues & Updates

The Buzz
State’s low rate of college degrees tied to job loss
Ann Arbor News, 2/11/08

Corridor authority proposed to help struggling business district
Bay City Times, 2/10/08

States know it’s time to cooperate
Detroit Free Press, 2/10/08

Forum: Focus on all of state’s resources
T. C. Newell Eagle, 2/9/08

Weekly Guest Blogger
We’ve adopted another exciting method of promoting our message, a weekly League Guest Blog! Each Blogger will be showcased Monday through Friday for one week.

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Tech 101 Glossary
Modern Internet Buzzwords and their Definitions

Blog - (weblog or weblog) a journal that is available on the web. Updating a blog is known as “blogging” and someone who keeps a blog is a “blogger.”

Downloading - the process of transferring information from a remote computer to yours.

Home page - the introductory page on a Web site that usually contains a table of contents for the site and “hot links” to other pages.

Internet - a world-wide network of computer networks through which people can exchange data and communications.

Internet Explorer - the most widely used World Wide Web browser. It comes with the Microsoft Windows operating system and can also be downloaded from Microsoft’s web site.

JPEG - (Joint Photographic Experts Group) a format for image files.

Listserv ® - A group of e-mail addresses used to carry on discussions. A member of the listserv can send a message and everyone on the list gets a copy of the e-mail. A recipient of the e-mail can then reply and everyone in the listserv gets the reply.

PDF - (Portable Document Format) a format that keeps the formatting in a document regardless of the operating system used.

Podcasting - a method of distributing audio files (such as “talk radio”) over the Internet for playback on mobile devices and personal computers, so users can listen to the file at their convenience.

RSS - (Real Simple Syndication) a format for sharing and distributing Web content, such as news headlines. Using an RSS reader, you can view data feeds from various news sources, such as CNN.com, including headlines, summaries, and links to full stories.

Streaming Video - “moving images” that are sent in compressed form over the Internet and displayed by the viewer as they arrive. A user does not have to wait to download a large file — instead, the media is sent in a continuous stream and is played as it arrives.

Webinar - a seminar offered over the internet.

Wiki - a website that visitors can edit, comment on and interact with using their browser.

Wi-Fi - (Wireless Fidelity) A popular term for a form of wireless data communication. It is commonly used for wireless internet access.

You Tube - A popular free video sharing website where users can view other users videos or upload their own.

Zip Drive - a small, portable disk drive used primarily for backing up and archiving personal computer files.

Modern Internet Buzzwords and their Definitions

- (Portable Document Format) a format that keeps the formatting in a document regardless of the operating system used.
- (Web LOG) a journal that is available on the web. Updating a blog is known as “blogging” and someone who keeps a blog is a “blogger.”
- A group of e-mail addresses used to carry on discussions. A member of the listserv can send a message and everyone on the list gets a copy of the e-mail. A recipient of the e-mail can then reply and everyone in the listserv gets the reply.
- A popular free video sharing website where users can view other users videos or upload their own.
- A popular, free video sharing website where users can view other users videos or upload their own.
- A small, portable disk drive used primarily for backing up and archiving personal computer files.

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IT'S THE PEOPLE

By: Paul Klimas

You’ve heard the term, maybe you’ve met the IT/GIS team, and you’ve seen the brochures. But what is a GIS? Basically, a Geographic Information System (GIS) is a framework of technology that supports the integration of other capabilities. You won’t be using a GIS by itself because it doesn’t do more than visualize information and produce mapping products. But when you integrate a GIS with other capabilities—information management, e-government technologies, and model simulation/data analysis—that’s when you see the real potential behind the framework of a GIS.

GIS data is meant to be shared—customer service people need it, engineers need it, decision-makers need it, and, ultimately, the public needs it. And, as with most toolsets, there are different levels of capability with GIS tools—different ways to deploy, or implement, a GIS and to share GIS data. Here are a few of the GIS tools you can use and some ways you might use them:

Maps-AnFarm

(For external access: IMS.ci.grand-rapids.mi.us) A basic-level tool supported by ESRI ArcIMS (internet mapping services) that allows users to view many kinds of information and share that information with others. For instance, the Planning Department can use this tool to create mailing labels for all the residents in Grand Rapids. City staff can also create simple maps and conduct limited analyses through this tool, which requires very little training. If you know how to use Windows, you can use this tool very easily.

Internet Mapping Service

Another basic-level tool available on the Internet to both internal and external users that allows users to share information as they view sets of data relative to a particular entity. An entity (for instance, the City of Grand Rapids or the state of Michigan) places information on a service online; as users need that information, they visit the service and view the pertinent data there. For example, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) is looking at the crumbling infrastructure of the United States, and they are trying to determine how federal grant monies can best be served. The U.S. DOT staff would visit the site of Michigan’s infrastructure data online at the Michigan DOT service to view all the data about our infrastructure. That information would help them decide where the federal grant monies would be allocated.

ArcMap

A medium-level tool that allows users to do complete spatial analysis. For instance, if the Fire Department wants to locate all the industrial properties that have hazardous material storage within a quarter mile of a school, they would use ArcMap to analyze those spatial locations and create a map with that information. Or, if Neighborhood Improvement has an Access database, they can join it with tables (in a different file format) using an ArcMap tool and print all that information together for other purposes. This tool requires more advanced training.

Geocoding

A more advanced tool that allows users to estimate the location of a point on a line and then place that point on a map. For instance, if Traffic Safety wants to map all the traffic signs they maintain, they can mass geocode them using all the addresses for those signs. The traffic signs might not be in the exact spatial location, but they will be pretty close. This tool requires extensive training.

Extension Products

Higher-level tools offered by ESRI (such as ArcGIS Spatial Analyst and ArcGIS Geostatistical Analyst) that allow users to perform complex spatial modeling and analysis. For example, using Geostatistical Analyst, the Environmental Protection Department can assess the environmental risk of spills to ground water and surface water flows into streams and the Grand River. With Spatial Analyst, the Planning Department can determine which areas in Grand Rapids are zoned for commercial development and have a high water table on a steep slope (greater than 15 percent). While there have only been a few occasions for City IT/GIS staff to use these tools, the potential for planning and analysis using extension products is tremendous. These tools require extensive training.
If you think those tools are worth a try, get ready for the next level as you model reality. GIS, in its most powerful form, allows you to strategically plan for the future based on the reality you model today. The true purpose of a GIS is to model real-life events ("what-if" analysis) before they actually physically take place.

Deploy a GIS, and suddenly you’re looking into the future. Using a powerful, high-level tool called a spatial data engine (SDE) geodatabase, users can analyze relationships spatially and model reality through a more intelligent visual representation. You’re seeing not only where things are and how they interconnect, but also how they will behave over time, so that you have a true snapshot of your project before it’s even constructed! Check out these real-life examples of a GIS at work:

**Reality Check #1: Road Closures**

Planning for road closures before any construction or repair work begins can save many people—taxpayers, City staff from many different departments, commissioners—a lot of headaches and grief. Through traffic modeling (SDE geodatabase), City staff can work together to create a map that shows all the attributes of every street needing repair or replacement—this street is a one-way street with two speed bumps, while this street has a four-way stop sign and two cul-de-sacs. Then staff can determine the best detour route based on the roads available, while at the same time ensuring that if other streets in the vicinity need to be closed for other repair work, there is still a viable detour route for all drivers. Once this map is created, City staff and even the public can have access to it, so citizens can know ahead of time what roads are closed.

**Reality Check #2: Housing Nuisance Incidents**

The City is ready to tackle the problem of housing nuisance incidents (trash in the alleyways, overgrown lots, graffiti, undermaintained properties, etc.). There are separate records of all the nuisance calls to the City in the past five years, but City staff need to be able to see where those incidents are the most common so that they can phase the work to be done and then apply grant monies to the different phases. Through GIS extension tools, City IT/GIS staff can join the housing nuisance complaints to the parcels, geocode them, and then give each point on the map a weighted factor, which creates different densities on the map. Using this map, City staff can proactively plan which neighborhoods to concentrate maintenance/rehabilitation efforts on first (according to the densities on the map), as well as determine phasing and funding priorities.

**Reality Check #3: Stormwater Modeling**

How about projecting the behavior of the stormwater system in a new subdivision or commercial development before the system is installed? Through GIS and stormwater modeling software, City staff can model reality by making it rain and having the stormwater run off both pervious and impervious surfaces to see how the structures in the system will behave. They can see where the water will flow and at what points it will speed up or slow down. Then they can model plant growth and changes in the environment to see how all these factors will affect the water quality. Assigning these kinds of intelligence to the parts of the system shows them how the system will “behave” over time, and they can plan now for things that might not happen for months or even years in the future. The result is an incredibly viable stormwater system that will serve the new development well for many years.

Paul Klimas, GIS Manager  pklimas@ci.grand-rapids.mi.us
The 1, 2, 3 on DTV

TV used to be easy. Remember the days when a new 25” console television was about the size of four breadboxes? It came complete with an attractive wood console and two knobs—one for “very high frequency,” and the other for “ultra high frequency.” Very high-tech sounding, indeed.

Things are different now. There are DTV, HDTV, 720p, 1080i, “full high definition,” plasma, LCD screens, and many more three-letter acronyms. We even have remotes.

These changes, however, often bring a good deal of confusion. Of particular note is the country’s highly touted transition to digital television, or “DTV.” Unfortunately, many reports are dead wrong about the digital transition and what it means for those who get glued to the tube. Here’s the 1, 2, 3 on DTV, offered to clear up the picture.

1. Your TV Isn’t About to Die and Go to TV Land®. Many who report on this issue get it wrong. You won’t need to send your current TV to the landfill any time soon.

Here’s the real scoop. Over the course of the last several years, the nation’s over-the-air broadcasters have been in transition. They are moving away from the delivery of their programming in an analog format, and to the delivery of signals in a digital format. Why the move to digital? That technology provides a crisper picture, and uses less “space” in the airwaves at the same time.

HELP! Are DTV and HDTV the Same Thing? While it looks like there should be a difference of only one letter, there’s really a two-letter change in these acronyms. DTV stands for Digital TV, and HDTV stands for High Definition TV.

In an effort to make my former law professor proud, please note that DTV is necessary for HDTV, but not sufficient. Put differently, the longer definition swallows up the smaller. All HDTV is sent in a digital format, and is, therefore, DTV. But not all DTV is HDTV. Instead, Digital TV can either be standard definition or high definition. Standard definition is akin to the picture quality between any of the tiers. High definition signals, however, contain more digital information about the picture being delivered. As a consequence, high-def pictures are usually better still than standard-def digital signals.

“But hold on,” you say, “shouldn’t all high def digital pictures look better than all standard def digital pictures?” That’s a good question—but the answer isn’t as easy as it should be. There is no industry standard for the method of delivering a high-def picture. Because both standard-definition and high-definition signals are digital, the relative picture quality often depends on how much compression is occurring before the signal is delivered by the provider. The more compression in a signal, the worse the picture can become. But we’ll leave that topic for another article…

According to some, the “day after,” i.e., February 18, 2009, will be like Y2K all over again—but we know better. Since this digital transition only affects a broadcaster’s over-the-air signals, the only viewers that need to worry about the transition are those who still receive their four or five network television stations through tin foil stuck to the back of the TV. Everyone else—including those who either have a digital TV or those who subscribe to cable or direct-to-home satellite services like Dish Network® or DirecTV®, are covered. That means no worries for you.

What’s the PEG Controversy about? If you live in a Comcast service area and haven’t been on an extended vacation, you’ve probably heard a good deal of scuttlebutt over that company’s plans to “digitize” all public, educational, and government (“PEG”) access channels and then migrate those channels into the 900 range of the company’s lineup.

For decades now, PEG channels have been a green space preserved on a cable operator’s lineup so that public officials can reach out to their residents, so school boards can create distance learning opportunities, and so that all others can easily access the last mass medium that is available for the public’s use.

PEG channels have always been placed on the least-expensive tier of a cable operator’s lineup and delivered to all cable customers. Comcast’s plan to digitize and move these channels, however, will mean that only those with “digital converters” will still be able to view PEG channels as a consequence of more than 400,000 Comcast customers could lose access to their PEG channels overnight if the plan proceeds.

The MML, Mi-NATOA, and other government organizations believe that PEG channels should remain on the least-expensive tier of service, and that cable operators should deliver PEG channels to all cable customers.

An Update From the League At a critical juncture, just days before PEG channels were to be moved, Meridian Township and the city of Dearborn filed suit in Federal District Court and obtained a temporary restraining order (TRO) and preliminary injunction. Not only did this prevent the move, it afforded the entire local community the opportunity to become more active. Dearborn continues to underscore the local government point of view—Mayor O’Reilly is working with Congressman John Dingell, chair of the Commerce Committee, on the issue. Mayor O’Reilly testified before the Commerce subcommittee investigating the proposed move of PEG channels on January 29. His leadership and that of Meridian Township bode well for achieving a more favorable outcome for local governments in Michigan.

—Bill Mathewson, General Counsel Michigan Municipal League

Jon D. Kreucher is a shareholder with the law firm of Howard & Howard, P.C.

A decade of his seventeen-year legal career was spent inside cable companies—but he now represents local governments on telecommunications matters. You may contact Jon at 248-723-0426 or jkreucher@howardandhoward.com.

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A given one consider plasma technology. The truth is, LCD and plasma are both nice TVs, and if you were contrast, and color with no motion artifacts on a large screen, you may want to seriously inches. If your viewing pleasure is in watching movies or sports and commands detail, LCD also provides the customer with more range in sizes, from fifteen inches to fifty-eight and less reflective on the screen in rooms that have a lot of windows and direct sunlight.

Those whose hands are more accustomed to cradling books than remotes will have to give this DTV transition some thought. If you’re in that group, you have two choices. First, you can begin to subscribe to cable or satellite service. But there’s probably a reason why you’ve resisted that in the past. Alternatively, you can buy a digital-to-analog converter. The latter solution will mean one more piece of equipment, but you’ll still be able to receive your over-the-air channels.

AQ

In response to The Review asking a local expert how he views the pending analog-to-digital conversion, and what the top three questions he is asked by customers, Ralph Acosta, of Big George’s Audio Video in Ann Arbor observed...

Q Will anything happen to my TV (I have analog) when the switch is made from analog to digital broadcasting? What if I have a digital TV?

A

If you have an old analog 20-year-old tube TV, your cable box or satellite box WILL act as your digital-to-analog converter, and you will continue to get your TV signals. Whether or not that situation remains is anybody’s guess, but it’s true for now. Cable companies (all of them, as far as I can tell) are being very silent on EXACTLY what they are going to do. If you have digital, there will not be a change.

Q If I’m thinking about upgrading my TV, what’s better, plasma or LCD?

A Room conditions and size may be a determining factor. LCD tends to be a brighter picture and less reflective on the screen in rooms that have a lot of windows and direct sunlight. LCD also provides the customer with more range in sizes, from fifteen inches to fifty-eight inches. If your viewing pleasure is in watching movies or sports and commands detail, contrast, and color with no motion artifacts on a large screen, you may want to seriously consider plasma technology. The truth is, LCD and plasma are both nice TVs, and if you were given one gratis you would love either one.

Q How long do these TVs last?

A Both TVs have a “half-life” of at least 60,000 hours, so they are on a par there.
There are a lot of acronyms that teens use now. Here are just a few...

lol  laugh out loud  
ex:  my brotherfell then I lol

brb  be right back  
ex: mom’s calling, brb

omg  oh my god/gosh  
ex: omg, Kayla broke her arm

jk  joking  
ex: I can’t stand her, jk

nw  no way  
ex: You just got a puppy! nw!

g2g  got to go  
ex: DINNER TIME! G2G!

rus?  are you serious?  
ex: you need it? rus?

l8r  later  
ex: sleepy. l8r

ttlty  totally  
ex: I’lly want to go 2 the mall

pos  parent over shoulder  
ex: no swearing, pos

plz  please  
ex: plzzzz ask your mom

sn  screen name  
ex: omg, what’s her sn?

tfn  ta-ta for now  
ex: she’s here, tbtn

btw  by the way  
ex: btw, you still owe me $2

atm  at the moment  
ex: not atm

bg  big grin  
ex: hehehe, now I have a bg

rent  a parent  
ex: the rents are bothering again

fkn  bye 4 now  
ex: omg Degrassi is on fkn!

hand  have a nice day  
ex: bye Tori, hand!

cu  see you  
ex: I’ll cu then

ez  easy  
ex: that’s ez

eg  evil grin  
ex: hehe, now I have a eg

h8  hate  
ex: I h8 him

w/e  whatever  
ex: she’s so w/e

sac  sleep at computer  
ex: sa… late… I’m sac

lbr, gfr  later gator  
ex: dad wants me lbr gfr

* *  before & after a sentence=action  
ex: omg I have a devil computer*shakes fist by the way

* after a word=it was spell* wrong the first time  
ex: spel* spelled*

ugh  grunt  
ex: my mom wants me ugh

Carson Cekola is a 7th grader at Tappan Middle School in Ann Arbor.

Teen txt Acronyms: the Language of AIM

By Carson Cekola
If your municipality doesn’t have a brick ordinance, maybe you should read what the University of Michigan just said.

Researchers at the University of Michigan have just completed a 20,000 home study comparing communities that have mandatory masonry ordinances with similar communities that don’t. The results, using 25 years of data, surprised even us.

Ordinance-protected communities have property values more than twice as high, three to five times the population growth over a quarter century, much higher median incomes, a stronger tax base, lower general taxes and more.

If you’d like a copy of the study, complimentary planning assistance or an on-site workshop call Amy Nelson at (773) 857-6784 or email her at anelson@bia.org.

The study confirms it – if there’s a lot of new home construction in your area and you want to leave a legacy of economic stability 25 years from now, insist on minimum standards for the use of brick.

GIS in Michigan

GIS is a computer system used for the storage, retrieval, analysis, and display of geographic information. This information includes things or places within the city that have a location/geographic component such as addresses, buildings, parcels, roads, or natural features like wetlands or woodlands. Ongoing data collection has developed GIS into a very useful tool, enabling city staff to quickly view and analyze data, and create output products such as maps and charts.

Troy GIS

The city’s GIS was developed to allow citizens and employees to make informed decisions with timely, spatially accurate information. The GIS serves as a data warehouse for much of the city’s infrastructure and allows city departments to analyze the physical features that currently exist prior to making decisions to facilities, services, and infrastructure. Recent GIS projects include GPS Utility Infrastructure, Spatial Database Engine Conversion and Pavement Management.

Novi GIS

Applications are being developed in the areas of Water Distribution, the Sanitary Sewer System, Tornado Siren Coverage, and a Public Hearing Notification System. The city is also involved in the federally funded “Rouge River Wet Weather Demonstration Project.” The goal of this project is to identify a number of water quality issues facing the Rouge River watershed, and develop strategies to reduce the amount of pollution entering the river.

Southfield Utility GPS Data Collection

The city is using GPS technology to locate water, sanitary sewer and storm water features (manholes, catch basins, gate valves, and hydrants). Real-Time Kinematic (RTK) GPS located features with an accuracy range of one centimeter. Approximately 30,000 structures were located with this high accuracy approach to data collection. Each structure was opened and visually inspected to note its general condition and assigned a number to be referenced within the GIS.

South Haven City-Wide GIS

Over the past four years, Wade Trim has designed and implemented a GIS system for the city, including data creation, software installation and training, and application development. A key GIS As-Built Archive application was developed to bar-code and scan all the city’s system maps and as-builts.

Farmington Hills GIS

The city uses GIS to analyze spatial information for land use and infrastructure planning, delivery of services such as police and fire protection, and community development. GIS use reduces the time spent on map revisions and reprints, and in addition, it improves the city’s ability to respond quickly to emergency situations where geographic information is important.

Garden City Sanitary Sewer TV Inspection

Wade Trim developed a GIS sanitary sewer collection utility network for the city. The system was mapped using GPS technology to locate manholes and existing system maps were used to create pipe connectivity and document structure attributes. The city conducts televised inspections of their sanitary sewer system and documents tap locations and problem areas.

Southfield Utility GPS Data Collection

GIS in Michigan
Implementing the Municipal Civil Infraction Legislation

By George B. Davis

The following is a summary of an article prepared by George B. Davis regarding the implementation of the municipal civil infraction legislation. A full copy of the article can be found at www.mml.org/members/resources/information/municipalcivilinfractions

A municipality wishing to use the civil infraction approach must designate which violations of its ordinances (or code) are municipal civil infractions, which are not, and identify the local officials authorized to issue citations. The amount of the civil fines must be established, with minimums and possibly maximums. Other optional provisions such as increased fines for repeat offenses may also be adopted.

If a municipality wants to establish a municipal ordinance violations bureau, it must also provide details as to how that will be accomplished, including matters such as the bureau’s staffing, location, and rules and regulations. A schedule of fines must be adopted to establish the fines for each violation for which admissions of responsibility will be accepted at the bureau.

Although there are statutory requirements, a municipal civil infraction authority can be implemented in a variety of ways, and there is no single required approach or “magic” language that must be used. The important thing is to tailor whatever approach is used to the needs, desires, and regulatory framework of your municipality. All applicable state and local laws, including local charters, must be referred to and complied with, and if legal advice or other expert assistance is required, seek the services of a qualified professional.

The key terms and concepts of the municipal civil infraction approach should be defined in the local ordinances, including, for example, “municipal civil infraction,” “authorized [city, village, township, etc.] official,” “municipal civil infraction citation,” and “municipal civil infraction action.” The definitions used should be based on the views in the municipal civil infraction statute.

If a local government decides to use a municipal ordinance violations bureau, additional definitions will be necessary, including “municipal civil infraction violation notice” (to distinguish a notice from a municipal civil infraction citation).

To designate a violation as a municipal civil infraction, the particular ordinance must provide that any person who violates the ordinance is responsible for payment of specified minimum fines, plus costs and sanctions, for each infraction.

Except as limited by the statute, local governments may designate any violation of any local ordinance as a municipal civil infraction. The types of violations that are most commonly designated as municipal civil infractions involve ordinances that regulate activities that are not usually perceived as “criminal” in nature: e.g., zoning, animals, noxious weeds, noise, junk cars, amusement parlors, building codes, etc. Local environmental regulations may also be “decriminalized” (e.g., erosion and sedimentation, sewer use, mineral mining, etc.) at least to the extent state law does not make the activity in question a crime punishable by imprisonment for more than 90 days.

Setting the Amount of the Fines

Unlike misdemeanors, fines for a municipality are not limited to a maximum of $500. It is typical for violations that are perceived to be more serious to be subject to higher minimum fines.

Specifying the Municipal Civil Infraction Citations

The statutorily required procedures that must be followed by the local government administering its municipal civil infraction program should be clearly set forth. The types of matters addressed should include:

- Commencing municipal civil infractions actions including the issuance of municipal civil infractions citations to appear in court; and, if applicable, the issuance of municipal civil infraction violation notices to appear at a bureau.
- Issuing and Serving Municipal Civil Infraction Citations
- The contents of municipal civil infraction citations forms, including who, when, where, etc., of a bureau; and what the alleged violator must do to respond to a citation (admit, admit with explanation, deny, etc.).

George B. Davis is a partner at Davis & Davis PLC in Grand Rapids. You may contact George at 616-459-6129 or georgebd@legislex.com.

Establishing a Municipal Ordinance Violations Bureau

If a local government intends to establish a municipal ordinance violations bureau, it must do so by ordinance.

The ordinance should include statements regarding its purpose; regulations of the bureau; procedures regarding the issuance of notices, appearance, fines; consequences of failure to appear and limitation of authority.

Adopting a Schedule of Fines

If a bureau will be used to accept admissions, a schedule of fines must be established by ordinance.

Adopting Citation and Notice Forms

The State Court Administrative Office has developed several generic citation and notice forms which are available online.
Q & A on the Michigan State Legislature Website
Reported by Andrea Messinger

Q. What is the Michigan Legislature website?
A. http://www.legislature.mi.gov

Q. What search areas does the website include?
A. Browse the major categories—legislative, law and more—to find information on:
   - Bills
   - Chapter Index
   - Committee Bill Records
   - Committee Meetings
   - Constitution Search
   - Executive Orders
   - Historical Documents

Q. What can I find out about bills online?
A. In addition to introduced, engrossed and enrolled bills, Michigan Legislature includes the Michigan Compiled Laws (MCL), a database of Michigan laws arranged without alteration, under appropriate headings and titles. The MCL includes public acts enacted by the Michigan Legislature, the Michigan Constitution of 1963, as amended; and Executive Reorganization Orders issued by the governor when considered necessary for efficient administration.

Q. How will I know the current legislation of interest?
A. If you register as a user, you can sign up for email alerts when items of your choice change or are added to the website.
   - An RSS on the Bills page allows for syndication of bill updates. For more on RSS, see our Tech 101 Glossary on page 18.
   - Look for hyperlinks to hot legislative issues in League communications such as the Legislative Link e-Newsletter. Visit www.mml.org to subscribe!

Q. How do I find a public act on the site?
A. Public acts exist in two different forms on the website:
   - They can be bill documents approved by the Legislature, signed into law by the governor, filed with the secretary of state, and assigned a public act number. This version is as it was originally passed and is considered a legislative document. Use the Public Acts (signed bills) page to find legislative public act documents back to 1997. To obtain versions of a PA as it was passed prior to 1997, please contact the law library at 517-7-060.
   - Public acts also become part of the MCL. This version is as it exists today and contains the changes that have been made to it by way of legislation. This version is available if it was not an appropriations public act and as long as it has not been repealed by other legislation. Use the Public Act MCL Search page, www.legislature.mi.gov to find public acts within the MCL.

Q. How is the MCL organized?
A. Conceptually, the MCL may be divided into a hierarchy consisting of three levels: (1) Chapters, (2) Acts, and (3) Sections. Some MCL chapters have been further subdivided into portions called Divisions. A public act that amends and/or repeals sections of the MCL is incorporated into the MCL database. If a public act is not scheduled to take effect until a future date, the MCL database will include both the current version of the affected section(s) (known as provisionals) as well as the version of the affected section(s) that will take effect on the future date (known as prospectives), with appropriate cross-reference header notes to guide the user.

Welcome Keynote Speaker: Comedy Central’s Rob Riggle

www.mml.org
How a Bill Becomes Law

This is a general and very brief description of the major steps of the legislative process a bill must go through before it is enacted into law.

Bills may be introduced in either house of the Legislature. Senate bills are filed with the Secretary of the Senate and House bills with the Clerk of the House. Upon introduction, bills are assigned a number. At the beginning of each biennial session, House bills are numbered consecutively starting with House Bill No. 4001 and Senate bills are numbered starting with Senate Bill No. 1. In both houses, joint resolutions are assigned a letter.

Title Reading

Under the State Constitution, every bill must be read three times before it may be passed. The courts have held, however, that this requirement can be satisfied by reading the bill’s title. Upon introduction, the bill’s title is read a first and second time in the Senate and once in the House. The bill is then ordered to be printed. A bill cannot be passed or become law until it has been printed or reproduced and in the possession of each house for at least five days.

Referral to Committee

Upon introduction, a bill is also referred to a standing committee in the Senate by the Majority Leader and in the House of Representatives by the Speaker of the House. All bills involving an appropriation must be referred either directly to the appropriations committee or to an appropriate standing committee and then to the appropriations committee.

Committee Review

Committee members consider a bill by discussing and debating the bill. The committee may also hold public hearings on the bill.

Committee Action

A standing committee may act on a bill in various ways. The committee may:
- Report the bill with favorable recommendation.
- Report the bill with amendments with favorable recommendation.
- Report the bill with the recommendation that a substitute be adopted.
- Report the bill without recommendation.
- Report the bill with amendments but without recommendation.
- Report the bill with the recommendation that it be referred to another committee.
- Take no action on a bill.
- Vote to not report the bill out of committee.

Andrea Messinger is the legislative/communications coordinator for the League. You may reach Andrea at: 517-908-0302 or amessinger@mml.org.
The Review

Downtown Assistance: Coming Soon to your Community (continued)

So what does this downtown assistance package of bills do? It creates new options for DDAs, Neighborhood Enterprise Zones, and other important areas in downtowns.

SB 970 – Allow DDAs to operate retail business incubators

SB 971 – Create retail renaissance zones for development of rundown downtowns

SB 972 – Allow for DDAs to issue low-interest loans to building owners

SB 973 – Allow historic tax credit use for condo development and make it fully transferable

SB 974 – Create tax abatements for knowledge-based businesses in cities and villages

SB 975 – Allow for Neighborhood Enterprise Zones by parcel in downtowns

SB 976 – Allow NEZs to renovate or build hotels and mixed-use buildings

SB 977 – Allow businesses to pay increased fees for expedited liquor license processing

SB 978 – Create trail funding priority for “urban recreation trails” that intersect downtowns

SB 979 – Prevent property tax pop-up until after residential properties are sold instead of after additions or improvements are made

SB 980 – allow local unit to exempt personal property for distressed parcels

Commerce Centers – Legislation that is intended to target state resources to full-service communities in order to maximize revitalization and diminish urban sprawl.

Corridor Improvement Authorities – Authorities that capture tax increment financing dollars for revitalization of community corridors.

Neighborhood Enterprise Zones – A locally initiated program that provides tax incentives for housing development and improvement. NEZs can have extended property tax abatements for residential construction and rehabilitation.

Renaissance Zones – A local option targeted-zone program that waives all business and resident site-specific state and local taxes for a term of up to 15 years.

Smart Zones (Certified Technology Parks) – High-tech development enclaves that are eligible for expanded tax increment financing and specialized state funding.

Full-Service Communities – The League considers full-service communities to be communities that offer a full range of services to their citizens. This could include any of a number of municipal services, such as police protection, fire protection, garbage pick-up, recycling, planning and zoning, parks and recreation, jails, etc. These are usually cities, villages, and urban townships.

When will this legislation be considered?

The Michigan Senate is working on this now. As we speak (or, as you read), they will have hearings and mark up these bills throughout the first few months of 2008. And, don’t count out the Michigan House either. Rep. Mark Meadows, a Democrat and former Mayor from East Lansing, is working on legislation creating commerce centers, which would give priority consideration to full-service communities for economic development tools. This legislation is expected to be considered in the early months of 2008 as well.

The state budget will continue to dominate the legislative agenda as the economy fails to improve and revenues can’t support projected state spending.

The Great Lakes Water Compact, which could get caught up in wrangling between the House, Senate, and Governor.

Energy-related issues, which also may be waylaid by partisan controversy.

In addition to Larry Lee’s business-related responsibilities, he covers the governor and various political issues. Gongwer’s daily Michigan Report provides detailed coverage of every bill in the Legislature and closely tracks the activities of the Executive and Judicial branches. Visit www.gongwer.com

Bill Ballenger is editor and publisher of the “Inside Michigan Politics” newsletter. In addition, Ballenger appears frequently on radio and television nationally and throughout Michigan. Visit www.insidemichiganpolitics.com

The League asked Michigan’s chief political pundits for their top three legislative issues of 2008...

John T. Reurink
Publisher, Michigan Information & Research Service Inc.

On the energy side, lawmakers need to address energy efficiency and a renewable energy portfolio (percentage of energy sold in-state that is produced from renewable sources).

Reurink is publisher and co-owner of Michigan Information & Research Service Inc. (MIRS), which provides comprehensive news and analysis of state government delivered in written reports detailing the activities of the House, Senate, Judicial and Executive branches of Michigan state government. Visit www.mirsnews.com

Bill Ballenger
Inside Michigan Politics, Editor/Publisher

The 2008-09 budget is facing a potential imbalance, which will revive the debate over keeping more lower-risk criminals out of prison or other means to reduce prison costs. Health care will be key, both to insure more people and to control costs, especially for Medicaid, public workers, and retirees.

Energy policy: Lawmakers will consider a renewable portfolio standard and possible changes to the customer choice provisions in the electric market.

Michigan Business Tax: Expect continued attempts at changes, particularly to the 22 percent surcharge imposed to replace the service tax.

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Larry Lee
Gongwer News Service, Vice President

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Municipal clients across Michigan say they appreciate Plunkett Cooney’s fearless determination to achieve the right result whether in council chambers or the courtroom.

Since 1913, Plunkett Cooney has been recognized as a leader in municipal law with distinctive expertise in appeals, civil rights, collective bargaining, employment law, elected officials’ liability, election law, litigation, Open Meetings Act and FOIA, and zoning/land use.

There’s no difficulty in assessing Rep. Lorence Wenke’s (R-Richland Twp.) commitment to protecting local governments from unfunded mandates and new costs passed on from the state. Recognizing the unnecessary increased costs associated with the recent cancer presumption bill, Wenke led the charge in questioning and opposing HB 4401 and fought beside the League to garner support for amendments to improve it.

Wenke was elected to the Michigan House to represent residents of the 63rd District, Calhoun and Kalamazoo counties, in 2002, 2004 and 2006. He currently serves as minority vice chair of the House Labor and Retiree Health Care Reform committees, and is a member of the Ethics and Elections and Tax Policy committees.

Prior to joining the House, Wenke served eight years as a Kalamazoo county commissioner and was chairman for three years. He also worked on the family celery and flower farm, as a manager at Westinghouse Electric Corp., a licensed realtor, and a nurse assistant before owning Wenke Greenhouses in 1971. In addition to his greenhouse, in 1980 he became a partner in the Michigan Grower Products, and in 1982 became the owner of SunBelt Greenhouses in Douglas, GA.

Rep. Wenke’s Legislative Priorities:
- Control the cost of government by controlling salary and benefit packages for public sector employees
- Support and encourage more efficient management of State government
- Support equality for our gay family members
- Action that will provide Michigan businesses with a competitive edge

Sen. Thomas’ Legislative Priorities:
- Ensure the Revenue Sharing Act rewrite is fair and equitable
- Work with the MML to fix the Uniform Video Franchise Agreement of 2006
- Work on legislation to fight the theft of copper wiring
- Airline Passenger Bill of Rights

Called one of Michigan’s five “Key Technology Leaders” by the Detroit Free Press, and recognized as “One of Four Up-And-Coming Leaders” by Savoy, a national magazine spotlighting young, dynamic African Americans, Sen. Buzz Thomas (D-Detroit) is known not only as a political force, but also as a dynamic legislative leader.

A proven advocate of economic development incentives for full-service communities, Thomas spearheaded the effort to combine state and local resources to create major retail in Detroit. He also fights to ensure communities can utilize economic development tools effectively, and plans to introduce legislation preventing vetoes of Commercial Rehabilitation Act districts by outside entities.

Thomas is an established figure in the fields of energy and technology, health policy, and urban development. He is also an avid supporter of the arts and culture community.

Thomas has a diverse background in business, working as a homebuilder in metro Detroit, where he was construction manager for Parkside Building Company and Avis Tech Park partners, managing both commercial renovations and single-family, residential construction.
St. Joseph—Winner of the 2007 Community Excellence Award!

2008 Regional Education Seminars

You won’t want to miss yours!

Regional Education Seminars are your opportunity to network and problem solve with your colleagues, and ask your Lansing representatives hard-hitting questions.

Consider entering “The Race for the Cup” in 2008?

These steps may help you decide:

- Evaluate your local success story (a program or project):
  - Is it innovative?
  - Does it have application to other municipalities?
  - What is its relative impact on the community?
  - What is its relative impact on the region?

- Enter the Community Excellence Awards

- Attend your Regional Seminar and make your presentation

- Each Region chooses its own winner—seminar attendees vote

- Each Regional winner moves on to compete against the winners of the six other Regions at the Convention

- Attendees at the Convention will vote for one of the seven entries after a live competition

- The winner will be announced during the last event of the Convention

To assist with conceptualizing, organizing, and presenting your entry, you may want to use the traditional Achievement Award instructions as a guide:

**The Challenge:** What was the problem or concern that prompted the development of this program/project?

**The Solution:** Describe the steps taken to address the problem—such as the program’s goals and objectives, and how they were met.

**The Results:** How did the program affect the community? What if any, were the cost or resource savings?

You can enter the competition by marking the box on your Regional Education Seminar Registration Form. You will have 5 minutes to orally present your local success story entry to your peers at your Regional Seminar.

Interested in becoming a regional officer?

Visit www.mml.org/events/regional/index.html for the roles and responsibilities and to submit your nomination.

2008 MML Regional Education Seminars: Dates & Locations

Region 1: April 18, Wixom
Region 2: April 25, Stevensville
Region 3: May 2, Kentwood
Region 4: May 9, Au Gres
Region 5: May 16, Algonac
Region 6: May 30, Manistee
Region 7: June 4-6, Baraga

Day’s Agenda:

10:30 am – Registration
11:10 am – Educational Programming
12:00 pm – Lunch/Business Meeting/Community Excellence Awards competition
2:00 pm – Legislative Panel Discussion
3:00 pm – Prize Drawings and Adjourn
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- GIS

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Michigan Municipal Review readership is over 30,000. For less than $70 per issue tell our readers who you are by placing your ad here!
We are currently in the process of upgrading our computer technology and plan to move to digital storage of all minutes, ordinances, etc. It is not our intent to maintain any paper copies. Can we use a digital signature on the permanent copy of our minutes?

The short answer is probably not. However, this raises a much bigger issue. The State of Michigan has established guidelines for electronic storage of public records. You can find those rules on their website (http://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal_mhc_rms_st_for_digitizing_1255317-7.pdf).

One more note. In order to protect the integrity of the records, it is important to scan minutes and any other public record to a PDF file rather than using the keyed document as the permanent record. It is possible for documents created by a word processing software program to be altered. A scanned version of the minutes and signature also avoids the question regarding digital signature.

Q: How do our residents have to pay their utility bills by credit card? Can local units of government accept credit card payments?

280. MCL 129.221 et seq. allows a local unit (i.e. city, village, township, county, including country road commission, and school boards of local school districts and ISDs) to accept credit card payments. Local units may also accept online payments under this act.

We do need to adopt a resolution prior to accepting such payments. There are samples on our website at http://www.mml.org/members/resources/sample_docs/policies,evaluations/creditpayment_policies.htm. And, as always, you will want your municipal attorney to work with you on this and, in this case, probably your auditor also.

Q: We are in the process of “spring house cleaning.” The most recent copy of the Records Retention Handbook is dated 1998. Is it still current?

Yes, for the most part. The Michigan Records Management Services is working on updates section by section. The new schedule for election records went up on our website in January (http://www.mml.org/members/pdfs/Elections%20Schedule%202007.pd). We will post the others as they are completed.

Q: Can you tell me about the “listservs” I see on the MML website? What is a listserv anyway?

Listservs are a group of people with similar interests who have agreed to participate in online discussions about topics of interest to all or at least most of them. We currently have listservs available for mayors, managers, and attorneys. In addition, we have a listserv available for villages—either general law or home rule.

Many of our members have found them to be a valuable resource. By sending one email, they can post the others as they are completed. We are putting together additional information on this. In the meantime, the state has an excellent Q&A page at http://www.michigan.gov/dieg/0,1607,7-154-10555_1648-189920---00.html.

Q: Our residents are asked to pay their utility bills by credit card. Can local units of government accept credit card payments?

Yes–effective October 1, 2007, PA 106 applied to all public employers. MCL 243.73 defines a public employer as “any city, village, township, county, or other political subdivision of this state...” We are wondering if there is a way to accept online payments under this act. Is it still current?

Q: Is the new schedule for election records going up on the MML website?

Yes–you can download them from our website at http://www.mml.org/members/resources/sample_docs/policies_evaluations/policies.htm.

We would appreciate receiving:

• Municipal Donation/Gift Programs.
• Municipal Q&A
• Municipal Accountability
• Municipal Education
• Municipal Donation/Gift Programs.

Mary Charles is a research analyst for the Michigan Municipal League. You may contact Mary at 734-669-6322 or mcharles@mml.org.
The unique, quiet little Village of Port Austin sits directly at the “Tip of Michigan’s Thumb.” From this vantage point, residents and tourists alike may view sunrise and sunset over the beautiful shores of Lake Huron. Port Austin is approximately two hours north of the Detroit area; it makes a perfect weekend getaway for city dwellers.

The one square mile village transforms during the summer months to a very popular tourist destination. The village is alive with the hustle and bustle of many wonderful specialty shops, a playhouse, charter fishing, kayaking, canoeing, horseback riding, go-carting, golfing, sunset cruises, miniature golf, public beaches, fine restaurants, lodging and many various events including a 4th of July parade and fireworks. A highlight of our community is its summer Saturday morning Farmers Market with a wide variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, homemade jellies, jams and breads, and an array of arts and crafts. This is a family event with activities for all. A horse drawn wagon tour is a very popular event.

The Port Austin DNR Harbor along with Veterans Waterfront Park, are scheduled to be re-designed and updated in 2008/2009. This project will greatly enhance the shoreline and encourage water enthusiasts to take advantage of all it has to offer. A spectacular Veterans Memorial, honoring all American Veterans, is being planned for a portion of the park.

To encourage commercial development opportunity, the village has purchased 22,000 sq. ft. of prime commercial space and is contacting developers. This will significantly increase our tax revenue.

Port Austin boasts about its wonderful, highly active ball field at Gallup Park, which is home to many children’s games and tournaments, and may soon be home for a local “Old Timers League.”

The village drinking water has won many awards; it’s so good that a local company bottles and distributes it. A new regional water system was recently created, transporting lake water 17 miles south to a neighboring community.

Port Austin is a great place to live or visit. If you visit once, it’s a sure bet you’ll be back.

Better Communities.
Better Michigan.