

the review

September / October 2022

the official magazine of the  michigan municipal league

A photograph of three people standing in front of a large array of solar panels. On the left is a man in a dark blue polo shirt with a 'Village of L'Anse Fire & Rescue' logo and dark jeans. In the center is a woman in a light pink jacket and pants. On the right is a man in a light blue button-down shirt and khaki pants, leaning on one of the solar panels. They are all smiling. The background shows a body of water and some greenery.

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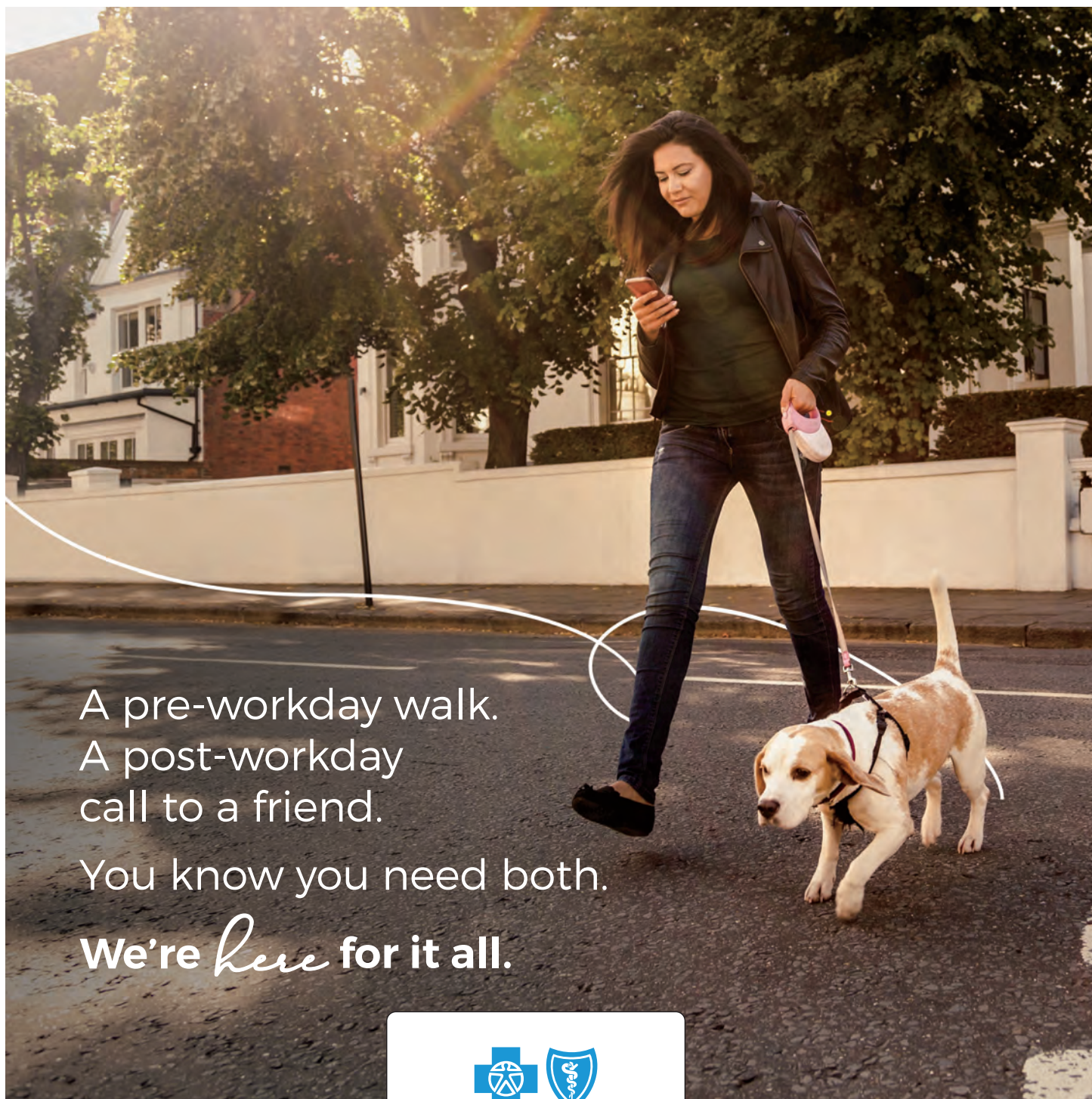
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the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

Volume 95, Number 5

We love where you live.

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.

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We're Better Together

In this issue of *The Review*, we'll be talking about the many ways our local governments are working to make their communities more sustainable. In fact, everybody's talking about sustainability these days, right? But okay, let's be honest. Sustainability, as a term, is at risk of becoming just the latest buzzword, joining the ranks of carbon-neutral, biodegradable, eco-friendly, recyclable, and all the other terms that are so often used and misused they risk becoming meaningless—just a clever marketing ploy to greenwash (yep, there's another one) products, industries, and public practices so that everybody feels good about what they're doing without really doing anything at all.

So, let's pause a moment and consider. Sustainability is about developing processes that allow us to use our environmental, economic, and social resources without depleting those resources for the future.

Sustainability means we plan on sticking around for a long time. Not acting like bad renters who couldn't care less about trashing a house they don't own.

But sustainability also applies to our *human* resources. Our municipal employees aren't an infinite supply that can be easily discarded and replaced like a cheap plastic grocery bag (something we *also* need to reconsider). In particular, our village and city managers are an invaluable asset who, under the auspices of our elected officials, lead our municipalities and are expected to provide quality local services without interruption.

The pandemic has been hard on everyone. The current political climate makes things even more difficult. But it is particularly difficult on public sector managers who often find themselves the target of angry citizens who are looking for anyone who looks like "authority" to bring their grievances—real and imagined.

Leading a municipal staff is a difficult and challenging task even in the best of times, simply by nature of the beast. But it is even tougher in these times when the men and women who staff our public works, police, and fire departments have worked copious amounts of overtime for extended periods. Burnout is a real issue, far beyond what any of us have ever seen. Managers have also had to deal with public health issues like never before, performing a complex juggling act between municipal service needs, staff safety, and conflicting messaging from state and federal leadership on how to monitor and safeguard the general well-being of our communities at large.

And yes, councils and commissions can be difficult and demanding, whether due to pressures from their constituents, political infighting, or personal agendas. Managers can get caught in the middle. And we are also asking more out of our top executives, expecting them to perform miracles with tight budgets and lots of unknowns. What happens to our downtowns post-COVID? Will they come back? How are we going to attract cops and firefighters to fill ever-increasing vacancies as people retire (a *huge* problem)?

Despite all this, they remain dedicated professionals. I hear anecdotes from every corner of the state that speak to their leadership and abilities during challenging times. Lots of regulatory compliance. Lots of leading a weary work force. Lots of keeping nervous citizens informed.

The council-manager form of local government is supposed to reduce conflict and increase cooperation. It's what frees the council to focus on brokering community expectations while their administrator is free to act within the framework of expertise and professionalism, buffered from political pressures. The two sides don't always have to agree, and in fact, they shouldn't. Sometimes when a manager's professional judgement clashes with the demands of the citizenry, the result is a compromise solution and better public policy that benefits everyone. It's a healthy tension.

But too many competent managers have left or been fired because they couldn't meet unreasonable demands, or were the victims of petty infighting, or were offered up as scapegoats to public outcry.

So, councilmembers: give 'em support. Recognize all that is on their plate as chief administrators and make sure you're creating the best environment to tackle the needs of your community together.

For our part at the League, we remain dedicated to sharing best practices, guiding new thought, and advocating to get you the resources you need. Our ServeMlCity program is a great example, where we provide workshops, technical and strategic assistance, and a comprehensive resource library to help our communities thrive, both now and into the future.

Now *that's* sustainability.



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Getting Started with Green Infrastructure

By Jada Tillison-Love Porter

With many municipalities facing surface flooding issues and other increased environmental risks, climate change is starting to feel real in Michigan. The League's Labs team is responding to the growing need for communities to access resources and options to help manage weather impacts and environmental shifts.

In partnership with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program, the League will be releasing this fall a new *Supplemental Green Infrastructure Guide*. This manual was written as an introductory resource for municipalities interested in adopting practices that aim to improve quality of life and help advance sustainability goals in Michigan. The goal? Make it easier for municipalities to incorporate green infrastructure into already planned development, road, or recreation projects.

What is Green Infrastructure?

Green infrastructure can be seen all around us. It is the parks, wetlands, and trees we see every day as well as manmade green roofs, bioswales, and rain gardens. Specifically, green infrastructure refers to ecological systems, both natural and engineered, that help manage stormwater by slowing the movement of water, naturally treating runoff, and mitigating flood issues.

Among green infrastructure's myriad of benefits are improved air quality, better stormwater quality, reduced heat stress, reduced costs for traditional stormwater systems, increased physical and mental health (e.g., increases exposure to natural environment, promotes physical activity, and improves placemaking efforts by helping to create a sense of place and well-being), and a whole host of community social and economic benefits. Studies by The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), ECONorthwest, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and others, have found that green infrastructure can save communities hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars, in net

benefits from reduced gray infrastructure capital costs alone.¹ Green infrastructure can be used to sustain and maintain natural resources in communities and help establish sustainable development processes that can evolve as communities grow and change.

What is the Supplemental Green Infrastructure Guide?

If climate action is important to your municipality and you are ready to identify local solutions to improve your municipality's sustainability, then this guide might be for you. The *Supplemental Green Infrastructure Guide* outlines approaches that you can take to incorporate green infrastructure strategies into local planning and zoning practices. It offers initial steps for you to take to get started on this work and helps municipalities begin incorporating simple green practices into the work of public service.

While the guide focuses on green infrastructure techniques that aid in managing stormwater runoff such as low-impact development, permeable pavement, and open space preservation development, it also touches on renewable energy. To assist municipalities with visualizing how these techniques could fit within its goals, the guide provides examples of how other Michigan municipalities have taken action by adopting related language into their zoning ordinances, and provides additional resources on green infrastructure best practices.

The guide is not meant to be an exhaustive list of methods, examples, and resources, as zoning ordinances are unique and not all strategies will work the same for every municipality. However, it is intended to encourage innovative ways that green infrastructure can best meet the needs and desires of each municipality and to help you identify how to absorb the associated benefits.

¹ Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT). 2020. *Green Values Strategy Guide*. <https://cnt.org/publications/green-values-strategy-guide-linking-green-infrastructure-benefits-to-community>




Leveraging Green Infrastructure Implementation

In addition to the League's partnership with RRC, the League is also a partner in the Michigan Green Communities (MGC) network. The green infrastructure guide can be beneficial to communities who participate in these programs as it was written to support the RRC's Best Practice 2.6 which promotes green infrastructure standards in zoning ordinances, and addresses several MGC Challenge action items that can be used to track and benchmark your sustainability progress. This tool can jump-start your municipality's progress towards RRC Certification and achieving bronze, silver, or gold recognition from the MGC Challenge.

To best utilize the guide, your municipality will want to engage all stakeholders including residents, planning and engineering consultants or staff, and all parties who will have an interest in implementing these techniques in their local context. Any zoning code language adopted locally should undergo a rigorous review to ensure it addresses the municipality's specific desires.

The release of the guide is coming at a pivotal moment where municipalities are still planning how to apply ARP dollars toward meaningful and impactful community investments. The League continues to encourage our members to think carefully about their environmental actions. Implementing strategies to strengthen resiliency and sustainability will benefit all Michiganders.

Using the guide's tips on how to identify where green infrastructure makes sense in your municipality may help spark great project ideas and can provide an opportunity to invest in the long-term health of the community. And in the end, it can also help reduce your stress about where to begin with environmental action and make you feel better about taking steps to adapt to climate change.

To request a copy of the *Supplemental Green Infrastructure Guide*, please email info@mml.org. 

Jada Tillison-Love Porter is a program coordinator for the League. You may contact her at 734.669.6327 or jtlporter@mml.org.

Green infrastructure: ecological systems that are preserved or designed and created to filter and absorb stormwater where it falls.

Gray infrastructure: the system of gutters, pipes, and tunnels that move stormwater away from properties to treatment plants or straight to local water bodies.

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Water Infrastructure ARP and BIL Funds Set to Go Through State Revolving Fund

By Grace A. Carey, PhD


American Rescue Plan (ARP) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding present a once in a generation opportunity for communities to implement projects that will have impacts for years to come. Beyond direct allocations, funding from ARP and BIL is additionally being allocated for designated purposes, not least of which is funding set aside for water infrastructure improvements. These funds have the potential to help communities make a significant step forward toward more sustainable, safe, and efficient water systems. What's more, funds from these Acts present crucial resources for communities working to replace lead pipes or battling PFAS contamination.

How can your community access these designated funds for water infrastructure improvement? In Michigan, ARP and BIL funding designated for water infrastructure through Public Act 53 of 2022 (Senate Bill 565) is being allocated through the State Revolving Fund (SRF). The infusion of federal ARP and BIL funding expands the existing SRF available funding by \$1.9 billion which will be distributed over two application cycles with large pools set aside for emerging contaminants (like PFAS) and lead service line removal. In particular, the infusion of BIL funds supports significant principal forgiveness for both the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Emerging Contaminants and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Lead Service Line Removal pools across the Drinking Water and Clean Water SRFs, as can be seen in the current FY2023 cycle.

For local governments that submitted a SRF Intent to Apply in January 2021, your projects are eligible to be considered for ARP and BIL funds within the SRF process. EGLE recommends reaching out to your assigned EGLE project manager to learn more. For communities that are not currently in the FY2023 application cycle, an Intent to Apply must be submitted by November 1, 2022 to be considered for ARP and BIL SRF funds for FY2024. Once an Intent to Apply is submitted, communities are partnered with an EGLE project manager to help them through the full SRF application process and their application is sent down one of three trajectories: SRF Traditional, SRF BIL, or ARP.

While many communities—especially smaller or disadvantaged communities, and those with small staffs—may have concerns about applying for SRF, filling out an Intent to Apply presents little risk and does not require as much in depth legwork as the full application for SRF. At the very least, submitting an Intent to Apply opens the door toward eligibility

for these federal infrastructure dollars and allows a community to have the choice to move forward with a full application. Because many Michigan communities face capacity challenges, the MML Foundation, along with our partners at EGLE and the Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC), through the MI Water Navigator program are committed to helping disadvantaged communities statewide prepare and submit Intent to Apply forms for FY2024. We know that access to these generational funds is crucial to the public health and community wealth of our municipalities, especially those that are disadvantaged or overburdened.

If you believe your municipality qualifies as disadvantaged and are interested in submitting an Intent to Apply for FY2024 (due November 1, 2022), reach out to the MI Water Navigator Helpdesk today at www.miwaternavigator.org. 

Grace A. Carey, PhD is a program officer for the MML Foundation. You may contact her at 734.669.6331 or gcarey@mml.org.

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Rockford Goes for Green

The news about climate-related disasters seems to be everywhere these days—flooding, wildfires, drought, and even pandemics! Meanwhile, political division seems to have crippled any meaningful action. So, what's a concerned citizen to do? Go local and approach city council about starting a sustainability committee.

Sustainability Committee Created

The City of Rockford liked the idea. By-laws were drawn up, a committee of passionate local citizens was selected, and the Rockford Sustainability Committee (SusCom) had its first meeting in December of 2018. The committee currently has ten board members. One member of the city council is on the committee, and City Manager Thad Beard has been very supportive and regularly attends the SusCom meetings. The committee acts as an advisory group to the city council with the mission of “enhancing the quality of life for our community through environmental, social, and economic stewardship.”

Green Leader Environmental Stewardship Program for Downtown Businesses

The Green Leader program was started by a committee member who had participated in a similar application process for the Michigan Green Schools program at Parkside Elementary School. She modified the application for Rockford downtown businesses—the program recognizes environmental stewardship. To qualify, applicants must perform sustainable activities in four different categories and, depending on the points awarded, receive a gold, silver, or bronze, Green Leader sticker.

Once a business qualifies for one of the designations and is approved by the Rockford SusCom, it is given an official Green Leader logo sticker. The sticker is displayed prominently on the window of businesses and can also be used on marketing materials (menu, website, social media, etc.). SusCom highlights Green Leader businesses on the SusCom Facebook page, website, and in *The Rockford Squire* newspaper.

The first applicant in 2020, Rockford Brewing Company, received the gold status right away for its many sustainable practices, such as locally sourced food, sustainable tableware and packaging for take-out, spent grain given to local farmers, and even solar panels on its storage facility.

Rockford currently has three gold, three silver, and six bronze leaders. The application process provides an opportunity for the SusCom to discuss sustainability initiatives with business leaders and learn about their strengths and challenges.

- Gold Leaders – Ramona's Table (sadly, no longer open), City of Rockford
- Silver Leaders – LBD Exchange, Studio Monroe, Sweetland Chocolates & Coffee
- Bronze Leaders – Aptitude Fitness – Yoga, Herman's Boy, Rockford Cheese Shop, Xscape Salon, In Focus Eyecare, Rockford Chamber of Commerce, and Epilogue Books

The program stalled a bit during the worst of COVID, but a sub-committee now has it going full speed ahead. We are in the process of modifying the application to make it more user friendly and adding different versions for 1) the food service industry, 2) small businesses and nonprofits, and 3) commercial industry. "It's been a great way to start a conversation about sustainability with our area businesses," says SusCom Chair Mindy Miner. "We all learn from each other."

If you shop or dine in Rockford, be sure to thank these local businesses for their efforts in going green. To quote a famous frog, "it isn't easy being green." Their extra efforts will benefit all of us and deserve to be rewarded.

More SusCom Initiatives

• **Live and Learn Community Education Series** – While this began as a separate event, it got shut down due to COVID. The series has resumed following regular SusCom business meetings. Topics covered include:

- Recycling and composting
- Renewable energy
- Green transportation options
- Preventing food waste
- Buying local
- Gardening for nature
- Invasive species

• **Foam and E-Waste Recycling Events** – The SusCom partners with Dart Container, The Junk Luggers, and Extremis to offer quarterly foam and e-waste recycling for free to anyone—a very popular initiative.



- **Recycling** – The SusCom partnered with Kent County DPW to improve signage and increase the number of trash and recycling bins in the downtown area.
- **City of Rockford Proclamation of Carbon Neutrality by 2050** – On a recommendation from the SusCom, city council signed a proclamation supporting the State of Michigan's goals of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. The proclamation requires that an action plan be put in place to meet those goals. The development of a city-wide Sustainability and Climate Action Plan is currently in progress.




Rockford Council Signs Proclamation on Carbon Neutrality

Carbon neutral by 2050



- **Tracking Energy Usage** – An intern from MSU helped enter data into ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager to track the city's energy usage. Since that time, the SusCom has initiated a pilot program with Key Green Solutions (KGS) to make that data easier to access and analyze. KGS downloads data from Consumers Energy, DTE, and the city waste haulers and provide user friendly graphs. They also input fuel and water usage.
- **Solar Open House** – SusCom partnered with MI Solar Users Network to host an annual open house at a local resident's home to talk about alternative energy. This net-zero home has solar panels, geo-thermal heating and cooling, and an induction stove for cooking. This past October the event was expanded from a solar demonstration to include other forms of electrification. Solar installers, HVAC reps, and financing professionals were available on-site for attendees to interact with.
- **Grants** – The SusCom wrote and received the Community Energy Management Grant that is funding the climate action planning. They have also submitted a mini grant proposal to NextCycle to start a composting pilot program.
- **Invasive Removal** – The SusCom partnered with Kent Conservation District to remove Asian bittersweet, an invasive alien vine that is one of the greatest threats to habitats in our area.
- **Media Presence** – The SusCom has a website created by their summer intern. They also have a Facebook page and write regular articles for the local newspaper *The Rockford Squire*.

The SusCom is a volunteer-based committee that acts as an advisory group to the Rockford City Council. Each one of the committee members is a Rockford resident or business owner and is passionate about the Rockford community. 

For more information about the Rockford SusCom, visit www.rockfordsuscom.us, www.facebook.com/rockfordsus, or email Committee Chair Mindy Miner at 3mminer@gmail.com.



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MI NextCities

Driving a Sustainable Future, One Smart City at a Time

By Kate Bell

Focusing on sustainability and resilience could not come at a more auspicious time here in Michigan. With climate-related emergencies increasing annually, the release of the MI Healthy Climate Plan, and an unprecedented amount of federal funding available to address these issues through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the American Rescue Plan, the state is at a juncture where critical need meets critical opportunity. No community is immune to the effects of climate change. And every community, regardless of size, can benefit from a just transition to decarbonization and reaching the state's ambitious energy goals.

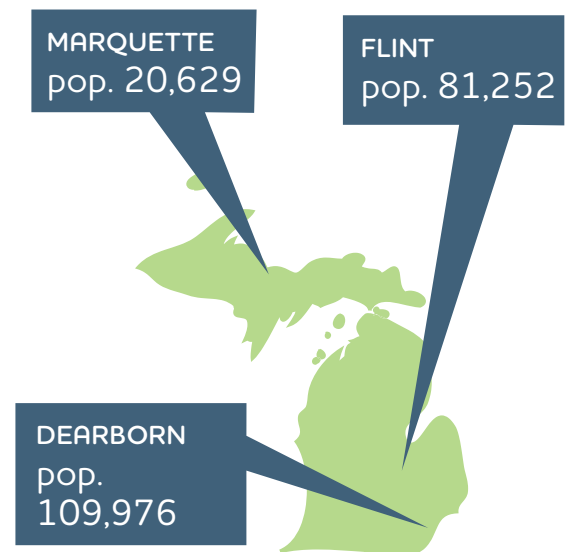
As Michigan moves toward carbon neutrality, forward-looking cities ready to integrate next-generation energy and mobility solutions into their planning and operations will be critical. The MiNextCities program, a new initiative announced by the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), aims to help Michigan cities do just that.

What Is MiNextCities?

Spearheaded by NextEnergy, a Detroit-based leader in demonstrating and piloting clean energy and mobility technologies, and Public Sector Consultants, a Lansing-based public policy consulting firm, MiNextCities is a first-of-its-kind program that seeks to identify and deploy tailored solutions that improve energy efficiency, reliability, sustainability, and quality of life in Michigan municipalities.

Powered by a \$3.5 million state grant, MiNextCities is a central component of EGLE's Catalyst Communities Initiative. The program expands upon EGLE's existing work in providing local public officials with knowledge and resources to prepare for a just transition to decarbonization, albeit with a unique focus: integrating smart city technologies—such as connected LED streetlights, grid-interactive building systems, or advanced energy storage—into community sustainability efforts.

What differentiates MiNextCities from other smart cities initiatives are the program's three core principles, the first of which is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the sustainability problems our municipalities face. Every community is unique in its history, its needs, and the resources it can use to drive impact. That is why MiNextCities does not enter cities with a technology solution already in mind. Rather, the program centers thoughtful engagement and prioritizes working directly with municipalities—local



“MiNextCities works to equitably distribute access to, and benefits from, the technology solutions among residents and regions, particularly those chronically underserved and most at-risk.”



DEARBORN

“The program’s inaugural communities of Dearborn, Flint, and Marquette emerged from this analysis as three cities that represent Michigan’s remarkable diversity of landscapes, residents, and lived experiences.”

officials and residents alike—to identify what their greatest sustainability challenges are and how to address them in ways that make the most sense for their budgets and their futures.

MiNextCities is also guided by the belief that smart cities are equitable cities. Access to smart city technologies can often be restricted to the most affluent and privileged, and communities facing the greatest climate and energy risks are frequently the last to fully realize these technologies’ benefits—sometimes after significant damage has already occurred. From the community engagement stage to the deployment phase, MiNextCities works to equitably distribute access to, and benefits from, the technology solutions among residents and regions, particularly those chronically underserved and most at-risk.

The third guiding principle of MiNextCities is that with the right tools, all Michigan cities—not just major population centers or resource-rich areas—can integrate smart energy and mobility solutions into their sustainability initiatives. The challenge is in demonstrating exactly how communities of varying sizes, regions, and demographics can use their resources to design, access, and deploy next-generation technologies that meet their climate and sustainability planning goals.

With these three principles in mind, the MiNextCities program team is working to develop, design, and drive input for an ultimate smart cities roadmap: a consistent process small to midsize Michigan cities can use to craft successful solutions that meet each municipality’s sustainability goals.

Inaugural Communities

The work begins in Dearborn, Flint, and Marquette. Why these three cities? To develop a comprehensive smart cities roadmap, it is essential that the program’s proving grounds adequately represent the diversity of our state. The program team considered static, location-based variables such as geographic region and utility service areas along with current population-based indicators like racial and ethnic demographics.



FLINT




MARQUETTE

The MiNextCities team was also tasked with incorporating social and environmental justice criteria into the analysis, particularly those aligned with the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council's Justice40 Initiative that aims to have at least 40 percent of energy, environment, and infrastructure investments accrue to communities historically and disproportionately impacted by adverse climate, health, and economic impacts. Resources including U.S. Census data, the Department of Energy's Low-Income Energy Affordability Data set, and the Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping tool enabled the team to consider additional factors like linguistic isolation, household income spent on energy costs, and pollutant exposure.

The program's inaugural communities of Dearborn, Flint, and Marquette emerged from this analysis as three cities that represent Michigan's remarkable diversity of landscapes, residents, and lived experiences. Their participation will sketch out a smart cities roadmap that can provide Michigan cities with best practices for incorporating smart cities technologies into their climate planning activities.

What's to Come

Over the course of the next two years, the MiNextCities team will work with local project groups to identify primary issue areas and implement deployment strategies for the smart city technologies selected by each participating city. The team will collect and analyze deployment data and consistently solicit community input to assess the impacts of each technology in real-time. At the end of the program, the metrics, assessments, and lessons learned from Dearborn, Flint, and Marquette will contribute to a smart city's readiness and deployment guide for cities across the state to utilize when making plans for an equitable and sustainable future.

The moment for building equitable, forward-looking, and sustainable cities is here. And with programs like MiNextCities, Michigan cities can lead the way. 

Kate Bell is a program manager at NextEnergy, where she oversees the MiNextCities program. To learn more, you can reach out to her at kateb@nextenergy.org or visit minextcities.org.



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Why and How to Prepare Your Municipality for Distributed Solar

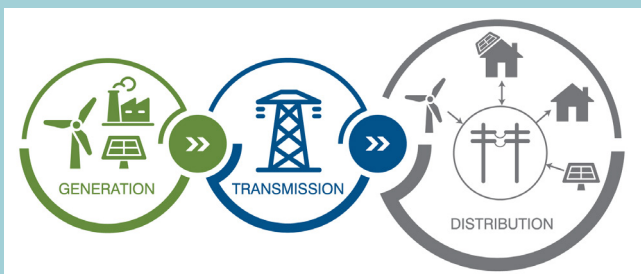
By Eric Geerlings, PE

Photos courtesy of Windemuller.

What is Distributed Solar?

In traditional power generation models, energy is created at large, central power stations and transmitted across long distances via transmission lines. Distributed energy, however, also referred to as local energy, relies on smaller, distributed facilities that generate and/or store power closer to the homes and communities where it's used. In this scenario, municipal entities need to plan for solar (solar photovoltaic) entering the landscape within their jurisdictions.

Whenever solar power generated “behind the meter” exceeds that property owner’s needs, the excess electricity is stored in a battery (if installed) or sold back to the utility operator. Producing power on site reduces electrical bills and provides a return on investment. When professionally installed in an un-shaded location, a solar system will more than pay for itself over its expected 25 to 30-year life.



Distributed Power Generation Model

Why Add Solar Energy Systems to Your Ordinance?

According to Our World in Data, the cost of solar dropped 89 percent between 2010 and 2019, making it one of the lowest cost sources of electricity. Municipal ordinances that do not address this booming energy sector may be restricting property owners from installing solar to save money and move towards greater sustainability. With clear ordinances in place, communities can more quickly and efficiently enable solar projects that result in new development, increased tax revenues, reduced energy burdens, greater economic development, and community resilience.

Fiscal Responsibility and Resilience

Studies indicate that building more distributed solar and energy storage resources in combination with large utility-scale renewable projects is more affordable for society as a whole and makes for a more resilient power grid (*Local Solar for All*, 10/6/21). Local renewables with energy storage (batteries) help offset peak energy demand, particularly on hot summer days when energy demands reach their maximum. This builds resiliency during extreme weather events that stress grid infrastructure.

Improved Health and Safety

Research proves that renewables improve air quality, reduce carbon emissions, and lower noise levels. Solar canopies protect people and/or parked vehicles from harsh elements like sun, rain, and snow. Pairing these canopies with publicly accessible EV, e-Bike, or phone chargers can even encourage recreation when they are installed at public parks and playgrounds.

Improved Aesthetics

Bifacial solar PV panels provide decorative, architectural elements in entranceways, rooftops, and shelter structures. Manufacturers now offer solar panel options with improved aesthetics that incorporate weatherproofing, glass, infinity edges, and even concealed conductors for a more seamless look.

Increasing EV Adoption

Demand is growing for electric vehicles (EV) in part because they cost less to operate and maintain than internal combustion engines (ICE), and they use energy more efficiently. Are you curious how much more efficient? Let's assume you drive a seven-passenger SUV:

- \$10 of gas at \$3.70/gallon in the ICE vehicle is 2.7 gallons. Assuming 21 MPG, you'll go just 57 miles.
- \$10 worth of electricity at 11¢/kWh is 91 kWh of energy. Assuming 69 MPGe*, you'll go 186 miles!

*The US Department of Energy uses the unit of miles per gallon of gasoline equivalent (MPGe) to represent the number of miles a vehicle can travel using a quantity of fuel with the same energy content as a gallon of gasoline. The conversion they use is 33.7 kilowatt-hours of electricity = 1 gallon. The example is based on two real-world 2022 model year luxury SUVs.

Encouraging installation of EV chargers along with solar systems will provide drivers with a larger percentage of renewable energy as their "fuel" for transportation which can help communities meet their clean transportation goals.

Understanding Distributed Solar Applications

Before jumping into planning, zoning, and ordinance development, it's essential to understand the different distributed solar applications so your community can assess their potential "fit" into the local landscape.

Residential Solar

Residential solar projects are the smallest in size, ranging from 6 to 24 panels to generate 2.5–10 kilowatts (kW) of power. The panels are usually mounted on the homeowner's roof or the roof of another structure on the property but can also be mounted in the yard via a "ground-mount array."

Commercial and Industrial (C&I) Solar

C&I refers to ground-mounted, roof-top, or building-integrated solar designed and installed for non-residential customers, including commercial businesses, industrial companies, academic institutions, government entities, hospitals, nonprofits, and public entities.

Community Solar

Developed by utilities, energy-cooperatives, and private/public developers, community solar projects are like small utility-scale projects that serve a specific geographic area with the generated power sold in a unique business model. These projects often use ground-mounted arrays to produce 0.5–20 MW of power.


Agrivoltaics

Co-locating solar arrays with productive farmland, known as agrivoltaics, allows farmers to reap the benefits of renewable energy while repurposing the land under and between the panels for agricultural use. Agrivoltaics projects often suit high-value, hand-picked crops; pollinator plantings; and sheep grazing opportunities.

Utility-Scale Solar

These large "solar farm" projects may cover many hundreds of acres, produce upwards of 300 MW, have their own dedicated substation, and connect to high-voltage transmission lines that serve the whole region.

Ordinance Development

While communities can use "special-use authorizations" to address new development types, this is a less-than-ideal approval process where bias can lead to inconsistent outcomes for residents, business owners, and developers seeking project approval. It is better to define how to approach each unique distributed solar project type by first determining your community's renewable energy goals—improved resiliency, climate action, economic development, and preserved farmland, for example. Communities then need to have planning and zoning in place that aligns community goals, business goals, resident needs, and public safety standards regarding clean energy and resiliency. 

Eric Geerlings, PE is the renewable energy project manager at Metro Consulting Associates. You may contact him at 800.525.6016 or egeerlings@metroca.net.

SOLAR-READY GUIDE

A guide for Michigan local governments to be solar-ready was developed by experts within MSU Extension and the MSU School of Planning, Design and Construction in partnership with faculty at the UM Graham Sustainability Institute. This document illustrates how various scales and configurations of photovoltaic solar energy systems fit into landscape patterns ranging between rural, suburban, and urban.

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/planning-zoning-for-solar-energy-systems-a-guide-for-michigan-local-governments>



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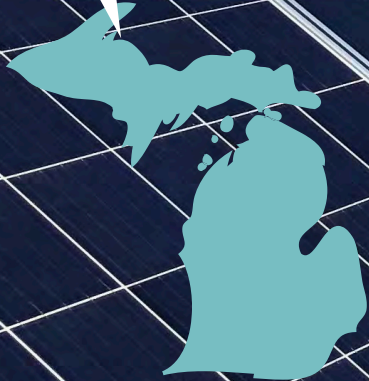
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“The public input helped shape everything from bill financing to price points and size. The result was a grassroots program where residents felt real ownership of the entire process.”

Village of L'Anse: Making Solar Accessible to ALL

By Liz Foley

L'ANSE
pop. 1,874





One small village's very bright idea is lighting up the shores of Lake Superior's Keweenaw Bay.

The L'Anse community solar project is a shining example of how even a small municipality can achieve huge results by leveraging the power of local partnerships and community engagement.

The 340-panel, 110.5-kilowatt solar array sits at the village's Lambert Road Industrial Park just west of town, providing a green energy resource for its 1,874 residents. It is the first community in the western U.P. to do so, and the third in the entire Upper Peninsula, following the far larger communities of Escanaba and Marquette. The idea is to make renewable energy accessible to everyone, regardless of income.

"This is for everybody. This is the thing that made it survive: that everyone was able to be a part of this," said Village President Pro Tem Leann Davis. "This is how things work when you collaborate and get people involved."

L'Anse is also one of only about 2,000 communities nationwide with its own municipal electric utility, WPPPI Energy.

"Community-owned public power utilities are not-for-profit and have local control, which ultimately means that the utility is there for the good of the community, and is not driven by delivering profits for investors," said Brett Niemi, WPPPI's Energy Services representative and project manager. "If a public power community wants to bring in more renewable energy into their portfolio, they have the opportunity to work through their local staff and local elected officials to accomplish that goal."

WPPPI is owned by L'Anse and 50 neighboring communities to answer local needs for reliable, affordable energy.

"By ourselves we might be relatively small, but by banding together, we can achieve economies of scale that allow us to act like a much larger entity," said Village Manager Bob La Fave, who is also a PhD candidate in environmental and energy policy at Michigan Technological University.

First Steps to Solar

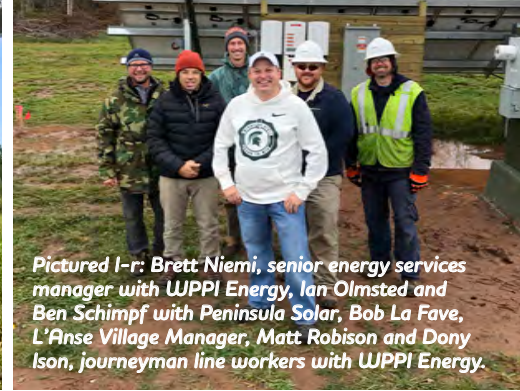
With his dissertation focused on clean/renewable energy transition, it was only natural that La Fave suggested village leaders consider adding a renewable energy component to their system. The first step was a small 110.4-kilowatt array at the water treatment plant. The village worked with WPPPI to receive a grant for the array as a demonstration project in 2016.

"Research shows that municipal buildings are some of the largest consumers of electricity, and our water plant was a great way to impact our local energy consumption while passing the benefits of the array on to everyone in our community," said La Fave. "Everyone gets a water bill, so savings through renewable energy deployment at the facility will help the village hold down rates—benefiting everyone. Our water comes from the Keweenaw Bay on Lake Superior, so it also makes one piece of pure Michigan a little more so."

The demonstration project had a powerful ripple effect.

"This installation created buzz about solar in our community and led to the discussions which ultimately drove the partnerships that led to our community solar project," said La Fave. "Having that proof of concept was really important...because even though Michigan Tech had a lot of data to show solar would work in the U.P., we had a local pilot that provided a proof of concept."

The village's 340-panel, 110.5 kilowatt (kW) community solar array, located in its industrial park.



Pictured l-r: Brett Niemi, senior energy services manager with WPPi Energy, Ian Olmsted and Ben Schimpf with Peninsula Solar, Bob La Fave, L'Anse Village Manager, Matt Robison and Dony Ison, journeyman line workers with WPPi Energy.

Bringing in Michigan Tech University

The village partnered with Michigan Tech University faculty and students on the technical and social feasibility of the project.

"This was a grassroots project. We're a small rural village in the Western Upper Peninsula, so certainly we could not have done this alone. I was not afraid to reach out to potential partners to see if we had a fit," said La Fave. "I would encourage other communities to reach out to colleges and universities in their areas—they may be able to do the same."

The school's Alternative Energy Enterprise students produced a report on potential costs and return on investment, and the suitability of the site itself. Then students in the social sciences department assessed whether there was sufficient interest in the community, and if so, how to design a program that they would participate in.

"So rather than coming into these meetings with a fully formed project that we were presenting to members of the community, we were really there to listen and to receive input," said Associate Professor of Sociology Dr. Chelsea Schelly, in a video interview produced by the university. "We also do a survey of ratepayers here in the community, some of the survey data was collected by going door to door, which meant that there were students out in the community collecting these surveys, but also getting to hear from people right at their door about their different ideas or concerns. And that meant that we got a wider array of inputs and ideas than we would have if we had just had a meeting where we presented results and then asked for feedback on that."

The public input helped shape everything from bill financing to price points and size. The result was a grassroots program where residents felt real ownership of the entire process.

"Get to know the needs and wants of the community before you build a solar PV array and design a program," advised Niemi. "Through our outreach efforts we were able to determine where and how big to build the solar PV array and craft a financial model for a viable program that brought value to both the customers and the utility."

How it Works

Organizations and individuals purchased shares in panels to receive credits from WPPi Energy for the power produced for the next 25 years. Of the 340 panels, 250 panels were

set aside for income-qualified subscribers, with grant funding through the Michigan Solar Communities—Low to Moderate Income Access program (LMI) through the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). Each LMI subscriber is allotted 10 panels at a cost of \$0.90 per month per panel. In return they're credited an average of \$2.80–\$3.30 per panel each month off their electric bill.

"Overall, each LMI customer will receive an estimated net of \$643 of credit per panel over the 25-year term," said Niemi. "All other customers pay an upfront, onetime fee of \$385 per panel and receive an average of \$2.80–\$3.30 of credit per panel per month (or \$34–\$39 of credit per year per panel). Overall, each customer will receive an estimated net of \$528 of credit per panel over the 25-year term."


The LMI program has had a real economic impact on the 25 participating local families, said Davis.

"There isn't a lot of wealth in this community. What industries do we really have up here? How much tourism can you depend on? We just don't have the jobs," said Davis. "It made it possible for those who really could not afford it, not just those who had the money to buy a panel."

All 340 panels are now spoken for amongst 48 households and organizations, including LMI subscribers, churches, schools, and individuals. Davis was one of the first to buy panels for herself and her adult daughter. Everyone on the village council owns at least one, she said. She hopes with continued public messaging, even more residents will want to participate. When that happens, they'll be ready: the space was designed to double the size of the arrays if the need presents itself.

All said similar ideas are possible anywhere.

"I guess the big take-away is not to be afraid to have conversations," said La Fave. "We didn't know if this would work in the beginning, but as we moved along through the process, we learned that it would, and what it needed to look like."

"I think taking this approach to other areas of municipal governance projects can have the same effect. We're not afraid of engagement in our community. That's how this happened." 

Liz Foley is a freelance writer. You may contact her at 810.287.8549 or lizfoley2@gmail.com.

Other Municipal Solar Installations...

City of East Lansing

A total of 144 Board of Water & Light (BWL) residential and commercial electric customers, including the City of East Lansing and Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA), signed a 25-year lease and paid \$399 per panel to receive an annual credit of around \$26 per panel on their BWL electric utility bill for the solar power produced. The project was built on a retired landfill site at East Lansing's Burcham Park. "We are excited to join other members of our community in supporting this local, environmentally friendly project. Our investment in 300 solar panels at the park brings us one step closer to our goal of 100 percent clean energy, as outlined in East Lansing City Council's Strategic Priorities, and it also aligns with the City of East Lansing's Climate Sustainability Plan," said East Lansing City Manager George Lahanas. "We would like to thank the BWL, Community Energy Options and Pivot Energy for the work they have done to make this exciting project a reality."

EAST LANSING
pop. 47,741

HARRISON
pop. 2,150

YPSILANTI
pop. 20,648



City of Harrison

A total of 1,884 solar panels (659.4 KW) have been installed at the City of Harrison's city hall, fire hall, water tower, pump house, and wastewater treatment facility. These locations were selected because these are the Harrison city buildings which are the largest consumers of power. This ground-breaking initiative is expected to save the town nearly \$162,000 in energy costs each year over 30 years and positions this mid-Michigan city as a leader in renewable energy. "The City of Harrison spends over \$130,000 annually from the budget just in these locations," City Manager Tracey Connelly said. "Solar power is one of the most popular sources of renewable energy. The monetary savings plus the eco-friendly advantages of solar power is why the City of Harrison decided to move towards this clean energy production." The panels will generate nearly 800,000 kWh of energy annually and offset approximately 97 percent of the electricity costs of the facilities.

City of Ypsilanti

Ypsilanti, at 4.4 square miles, has over 71 solar installations on public and private property. All the city's municipal buildings have solar, as well as several school buildings, commercial buildings, and a free-standing 2,500 panel installation. SolarYpsi was developed in 2005, and in 2017, the city celebrated installing solar power on its fire department and newly renovated event space, the Freighthouse. With these two installations, the city was able to claim solar at each of its municipally owned buildings. Not only was the solar installed, but all the labor for these last installations was volunteer. The City of Ypsilanti is responsible for 58 percent of all solar production in the State of Michigan by using public-private partnership, having volunteer resources, providing free-technical advice to the community, and creative financing. Ypsilanti took the necessary steps to reduce barriers associated with solar technology to achieve its goals of long-term sustainability.



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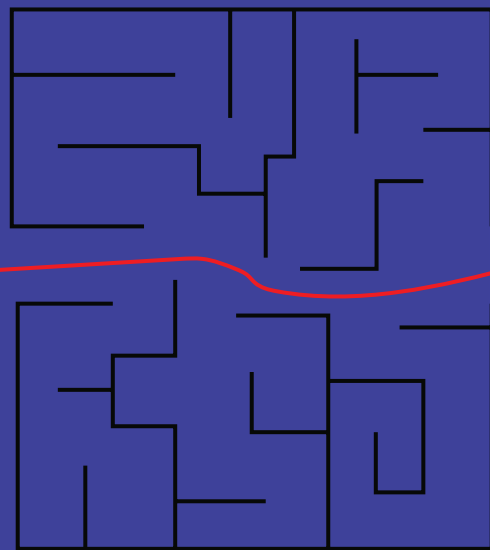
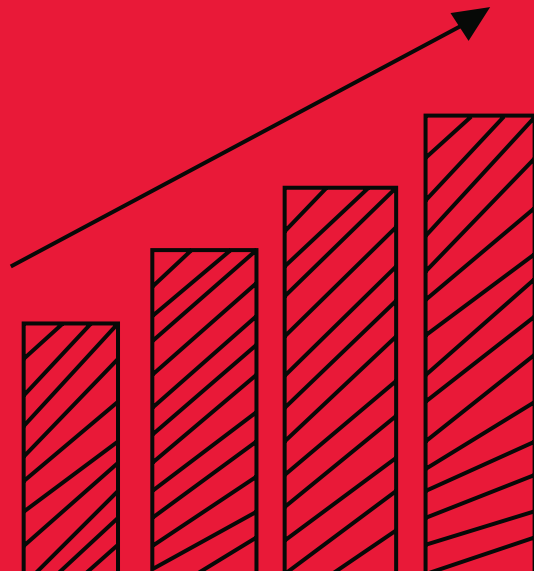
Investments



Environmental
Resources

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Experience the beauty and innovation of Muskegon: Tour the city's art museum, including a special exhibit with artists from around the state. Learn about restoration projects at Muskegon Lake and its surrounding habitats. Witness the city's transformative investments with help from local businesses.



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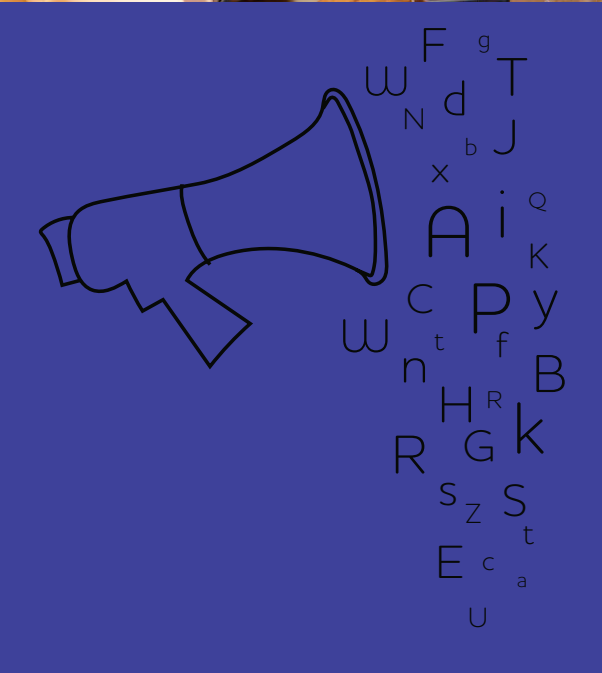
CAST YOUR VOTE FOR THE 2022 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARD (CEA) AT THIS YEAR’S CONVENTION

The top four finalists are competing at Convention where they will present their projects on the main stage and market their projects at designated CEA finalist booths. Convention attendees will vote for their favorite project, with the project winning the most votes awarded the official Community Excellence Award during the closing general session.

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- **Cassopolis** – Imagine Cass Project Village of Cassopolis: Small, Rural, and Exceptional
- **Farmington Hills** – City of Farmington Hills Community Center – The Hawk
- **Royal Oak** – Centennial Commons: Reimagining a Parking Lot into a Green Gathering Space
- **Traverse City** – Traverse City Boardman Lake Loop Trail

LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS YEAR’S PROJECTS AT [CEA.MML.ORG](https://cea.mml.org)



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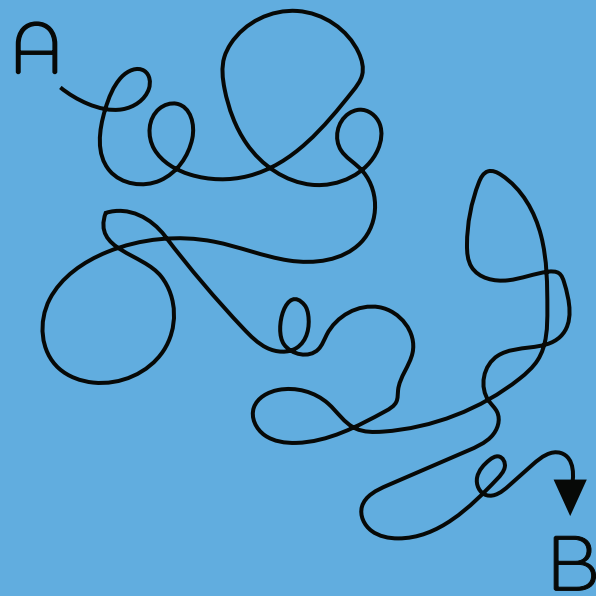
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League educational events provide up-to-date information on major issues and concerns relating to local government.

Check out upcoming events below which can also be found on the League's event calendar mml.org/events

NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS OFFERINGS

- **Lansing**—Wednesday, November 30, 2022
- **Virtual**—Thursday, December 8, 2022
- **Virtual**—Thursday, December 15, 2022
- **Ann Arbor**—Thursday, January 12, 2023
- **Virtual**—Saturday, January 21, 2023

ELECTED OFFICIALS ACADEMY CORE & ADVANCED WEEKENDERS

- **Virtual**—Friday & Saturday, February 10-11, 2023
- **Bay City**—Friday & Saturday, May 19-20, 2023

Upcoming 2022-23 League Trainings—Save the Dates!

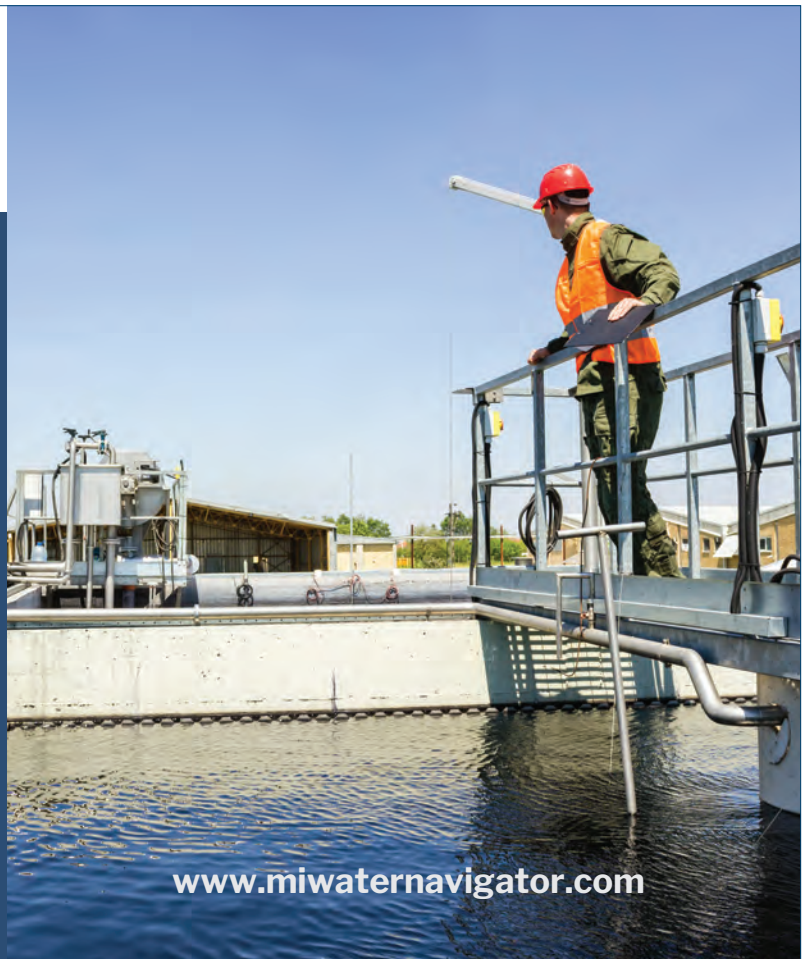


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www.miwaternavigator.com

Sue Jeffers is a legal consultant to the League. You may contact her at sjeffers1@me.com.

U.S. Supreme Court upholds Austin's sign regulation

Background:

Reagan National Advertising Company, an outdoor advertising company, applied to Austin, Texas, for permits to convert some of its existing off-premises billboards to digital displays. Austin denied the permits on the basis that its sign ordinance prohibited new off-premises signs and also digitization of existing signs. Under the ordinance, grandfathered off-premises signs could remain in their existing location but could not be altered in ways that increased their nonconformity. On-premises signs were not similarly restricted.

Municipalities have regulated outdoor advertising for years. Like many municipalities across the country, Austin regulates signs using an on-/off-premises distinction. The distinction proliferated following the enactment of the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 which directed states receiving federal highway funds to regulate outdoor signs in proximity to federal highways in part by limiting off-premises signs, i.e., signs that advertise things not located on the same premises as the signs, as well as signs that direct people to offsite locations.

Municipal sign ordinances are frequently challenged on the basis that the ordinance violates the free speech clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution. If an ordinance is found to be content based, i.e., that it “applies to particular speech because of the topic discussed or the idea or message expressed,” courts have generally applied the so-called “strict scrutiny” test to determine the ordinance’s constitutionality. The application of the “strict scrutiny” test, the highest form of judicial review, routinely results in an ordinance being found to be unconstitutional. Content-neutral ordinances, however, need survive only “intermediate scrutiny,” a less stringent standard of review.

Reagan’s Claim:

Reagan sued, asserting that the city’s prohibition against digitizing off-premise signs, but not on-premise signs, violated the free speech clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

The federal district court upheld the challenged sign code provisions on the basis that the provisions were content neutral and applied intermediate scrutiny following the Supreme Court decision *Reed v Town of Gilbert*. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals (also citing *Reed v Town of Gilbert*) reversed on the basis that since the ordinance’s on-/off-premises distinction required a government official to read a sign’s message to determine its purpose, the ordinance was content-based and subject to strict scrutiny.

United States Supreme Court:

The Supreme Court found that Austin’s on-/off premises distinction was facially content neutral and reversed the Court of Appeals’ decision, noting that the Court of Appeals’ decision was “too extreme an interpretation” of the *Reed* decision. The Court rejected the view that any examination of speech or expression triggers heightened First Amendment concern. In Austin’s case, examination of speech is required only to determine whether the sign is located on- or off-premises. The Court stated that “absent a content-based purpose or justification, the city’s distinction is content neutral and does not warrant the application of strict scrutiny.”

The Court, nonetheless, held that finding the ordinance to be facially content neutral did not end the First Amendment inquiry. The Court noted that if there is evidence that an impermissible purpose underpins a facially content-neutral restriction, that restriction may, in fact, be content based. In addition, in order to survive intermediate scrutiny, a restriction must be “narrowly tailored to serve a significant governmental purpose.” Since the Court of Appeals did not address those issues, the case was remanded for further proceedings.

City of Austin v Reagan National Advertising, No. 20-1029, April 21, 2022.

This column highlights a recent judicial decision or Michigan Municipal League Legal Defense Fund case that impacts municipalities. The information in this column should not be considered a legal opinion or to constitute legal advice.

Attracting and Retaining Municipal Employees

By Rick Haglund



Attracting and retaining talent isn't just an issue in the private sector. Local governments are also struggling to find and keep employees, as COVID, rising inflation, and what many call the Great Resignation have hit their ranks hard. In many cases, municipalities are facing tough competition for talent from worker-hungry businesses. And there appears to be no end to the dilemma in sight.

Many Michigan cities, from upscale Birmingham to working-class Lincoln Park, are boosting wages, implementing flexible work schedules, and taking other measures to attract and retain workers. Lincoln Park, for instance, recently bumped starting pay for police officers by 14 percent, to \$51,757. The downriver Detroit community also hiked the top wage for officers 9 percent to \$67,800. Birmingham boosted its cost-of-living pay adjustment this year from 2.5 percent to 4.5 percent to help offset rising inflation hitting its workers. Holland doubled its annual COLA adjustment to 4.5 percent, in part by using federal American Rescue Plan funds, for its union and nonunion workers. "We thought it was the right thing to do," said Keith Van Beek, Holland's city manager. In 2019, Ferndale adopted a minimum wage of \$15 an hour for full-time city workers.

But local government payrolls are continuing to shrink, even as private-sector job growth has climbed. Michigan local governments employed 167,600 workers last year, down 4.7 percent from 175,900 in 2011. Private-sector employment jumped 8.4 percent in the same period. Nationally, public-sector hiring has fallen to an "unprecedented low," according to a July report from the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, dropping 7.1 percent below pre-pandemic levels. Conversely, private sector hiring jumped 5.4 percent since the start of the COVID pandemic. The Upjohn study included education workers. And the gap in wage growth between higher-paying private sector jobs and government jobs over the past year was the widest on record, according to an analysis by The Pew Charitable Trust.

"There's huge competition" among municipalities for firefighters and other workers, said James Krizan, Lincoln Park's city manager. "It's been building for 10 years." Lincoln Park was once "one of the best-paying cities around," he said, but was hit hard by the Great Recession. The city was run by a state-appointed emergency manager for about 18 months in 2014 and 2015. It's struggling to compete for and keep talent against better-paying neighbors, even though many of its workers have received wage increases of between 7 percent and 11 percent in recent years, Krizan said. "The tables have completely flipped," he said. "We're consistently one of the lowest paying cities around. Other area cities are topping out at \$80,000 for patrol officers. We can't compete with that."

Recent raises for patrol officers were "a huge gain, but not enough," Krizan said. Lincoln Park is supplementing those raises with signing and recruiting bonuses, and is paying police academy costs for new officers. Finding firefighters to replace those who recently retired is particularly difficult. "We're all fighting for the same diminutive pool of candidates," Krizan said. "We're short five firefighters. It's one of the hardest areas for us to recruit."


"We've definitely been hit by the Great Resignation. COVID is tied into that," said Joseph Lambert, Birmingham's human resources manager. In a two-year period between January 2020 and January 2022, the city lost 20 percent of its administrative management team. Most of the loss was due to long-time employees accelerating their retirements because of the pandemic, Lambert said. Other employees left because of the city's COVID policies. "Some people just weren't comfortable wearing masks all day in the office," he said. Most of those positions have been refilled—Birmingham offers highly competitive wages and benefits—but the experience level in top positions has dropped since the pandemic. "Six out of our 14 departments have a director or manager with less than two years in their current roles," he said. And the city faces competition for top talent with local businesses. "We had a great accountant we lost to the private sector" four months after the city hired the person, Lambert said.

“Lincoln Park...recently bumped starting pay for police officers by 14 percent. [The city] is supplementing those raises with signing and recruiting bonuses, and is paying police academy costs for new officers.”

Birmingham had little choice but to boost COLA pay as a way of retaining workers because of escalating inflation hitting their paychecks. Lambert said the consumer price index for the metropolitan Detroit area has jumped 7.5 percent this year. “It really blew off the scale for us.” But the city is also looking at non-monetary ways of retaining workers. A pilot program in the treasury department allows employees to voluntarily work four 10-hour days. The means one less day of commuting to the office for workers, who are grappling with higher gasoline prices. “It’s working out really well,” Lambert said.

Holland hasn’t experienced the pandemic-related loss of workers many others are seeing, Van Beek said. He attributes that to the city’s investments in creating a positive workforce culture. For example, department heads take new employees on a half-day field trip around the city, showing them the various things city workers do to keep Holland vibrant. “We really try to instill a culture that we’re a larger team,” he said. Van Beek said he communicates weekly with the city’s 200 employees and another 200 who work for Holland’s municipal utility. Plus, he and other department heads have an open-door policy. “We have what I call a flat organization,” Van Beek said. “Our people represent the city every day. They need to know they can reach out and have a conversation with the city manager, the assistant city manager, the finance director, the human resources director.”

Holland’s biggest workforce challenge is finding enough people for its parks and recreation department. Home to the annual Tulip Time festival, Holland city workers plant hundreds of thousands of tulips each year and replace them with other flowers as the seasons change. It’s a point of pride for the city, but requires a big workforce. “That’s a more challenging area for us,” Van Beek said. “We rely on summer help, but it’s really difficult to compete” with other employers.

Some municipal officials believe they will be dealing with talent issues wrought by COVID and Michigan’s aging workforce far into the future. Getting back to ‘normal’ seems unlikely. “I’ve been in human resources seven or eight years, including five in Birmingham. I’m not sure what normal is,” Lambert said. Others fear the Federal Reserve’s efforts to tamp down inflation will trigger a recession, at the same time payroll costs are rising. Many either haven’t fully recovered or have only recently restored their finances from the damage caused by the Great Recession of the early 2000s. “We have a balanced budget now, but if the bottom drops out, we’re in trouble,” Lincoln Park’s Krizan said. 

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Community Restoration with Honor

By Morgan Schwanky

Honor
pop. 337

When a community decides to come together over a common love or goal, the impact can be immeasurable. The people of Honor, Michigan have done exactly that, and they are just getting started. The Village of Honor formed the Honor Area Restoration Project (HARP) to aid in the revitalization of the greater Honor area. The citizen-led nonprofit hopes to make the village a destination, rather than a stop along the way to nearby Beulah or Frankfort. While their efforts will create more tourism opportunities, it will also benefit the natural habitats of the area.

HARP is largely focusing its efforts on the Platte River. The group's robust fund development team has sought out various grants, as well as coordinated donations from local organizations and individuals. Phase one of the restoration plan has already been completed, which marked the purchase of 52 acres of land. This purchase was made possible by a grant from the Michigan Land Trust Fund. This land includes almost a third of a mile of Platte River frontage. This space of diverse habitats is now the Platte River Park, with a public access point to the river from the village, which did not exist before.

The pristine waters of the Platte River flow out to Lake Michigan, making it a popular tubing destination. This portion of the river is designated as blue ribbon—a distinction given to water that has been determined to have the proper qualifications in both quality and quantity to be given fishery status. Additionally, the park will provide both residents and visitors with a variety of recreational opportunities, including fishing, boating, and picnicking, to name a few.

The park is conveniently located within a quarter mile walking or biking distance from the village which will allow for more economic opportunities as well, making a great return on investment for the community. Visitors who will come to enjoy the space will also need to buy gas, would perhaps want to get food for a picnic, buy ice cream—the possibilities are endless.

The village downtown area has already seen new developments including an eight-unit apartment building set to complete construction in November of 2022 and a revamped bar, now under new ownership, named “Sweets.”

The funding for phase two of the restoration plan is now underway. This next phase will be developing the west entrance of the park. The groundbreaking for this project took place in May of 2022. It also included a water ceremony performed by a representative from the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. The area where the park is now located was once a summer encampment of the Anishinaabek tribe.


This phase has brought together not only the Village of Honor, but also Homestead Township, as well as others. They have united to create a long-term plan for the development of the park. New additions from this second phase will include restroom facilities, a canoe/kayak launch, a parking lot, and more. The Homestead Township Board unanimously decided that they would allocate \$50,000 from their American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to the Platte River Park. These funds will be used to pave the previously mentioned parking lot, in addition to a driveway, and sidewalk areas. In HARP's case, it takes a village—but it also takes a township (along with many others). Their efforts, which have already been over a decade in the making, will have an amazing impact on the multiple communities involved for generations to come.

HARP's restoration efforts are a great example of community wealth building on multiple counts. The investments in their community will benefit not only themselves, but also their environment and those that they will be welcoming into their community as visitors. The organization has already created a space that will provide ample opportunities for learning and play, giving residents and visitors access to nature that they can enjoy in a variety of ways.

The Platte River Park will continue to serve the public health of those who utilize it, as well as the health of the various ecosystems that coincide within the park.



The restoration and preservation of these vital ecosystems will positively affect sustainability efforts. HARP made a conscious effort to properly survey the area so as not to disturb the many natural habitats that exist within the property. The groundbreaking for Phase Two was temporarily put on hold to make sure their plans did not disturb the eastern massasauga rattlesnake, one of the many species that call the new park home.

But HARP's work is not done yet. The League looks forward to the organization's implementation of their ten-plus year master plan. 

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MICHIGAN MUNICIPAL LEAGUE HANDBOOKS

These handbooks are essential reading material for both new and veteran elected and appointed officials in cities, general law, and home rule villages.

Topics covered include:

- Structure and Function of Local Government in Michigan
- Roles and Responsibilities of Municipal Officials
- How to Select and Work with Consultants
- Running Meetings
- Personnel and Human Resources Issues
- Special Assessments and User Charges
- Planning and Zoning Basics

Numerous appendices include:

- Open Meetings Act
- Freedom of Information Act
- Sample Council Rules of Procedure
- A Glossary
- Frequently Asked Questions
- A Sample Budget Ordinance



Q. Can we send mailings to our residents asking them to vote “yes” on an upcoming road millage?

A. Don't use city or village funds, municipal-owned office space, or other property to expressly advocate a vote for or against a candidate or ballot question. “Expressly advocate” means to state support for the passage or defeat of a ballot question or the election or defeat of a candidate—in other words, to say “vote yes for” (or no) or “support” (or defeat) a candidate or ballot question.

Generally, public officials can issue communications to voters using public dollars if the communications contain factual information regarding the election, the proposal, and what impact either its passage or defeat will have on the public body. Moreover, the prohibition on using public monies to support or defeat a ballot proposal does not prevent certain high-level officers and employees from expressing their opinions. For example, nothing prevents a municipal official from standing up at a public meeting and telling the gathering that, in his or her opinion, the municipality needs to ask for a millage increase, and the voters need to support it.

The League has a Fact Sheet on Campaigning Dos and Don'ts by Public Officials. You can download it www.mml.org or email info@mml.org to request a copy.

Q. Our clerk administers the oath of office to the mayor, commission members, and appointed officials. Who swears in the clerk?

A. The county clerk or any notary public can administer the oath of office to a newly elected or appointed clerk. In addition, the oath can be sworn before a justice, judge, or clerk of a court.

Q. At our council meetings, every vote is currently taken by roll call. Are we required to do this?

A. There are certain council actions that require a roll call vote, such as calling a closed session. Also, items requiring a 2/3 vote are easier to determine when a roll call vote is taken; but other than that, voice vote would work. Whether or not to take roll call votes on every item before council is typically something that would be in your council rules of procedure. If your council wants to revisit this custom, councilmembers should review council rules and change them if they desire.

Q. A maternity and/or paternity leave benefit has never been addressed in our personnel policy. Although this has not been an issue for our village, it may be at some point. Do you have any resources describing what other small municipalities in Michigan are offering?

A. We have sample parental leave policies in our files from a handful of municipalities. Please send an email to info@mml.org to request them.

The League's Information Service provides member officials with answers to questions on a vast array of municipal topics. Call 800.653.2483 or email info@mml.org.



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THE LAB REPORT

Ideas, initiatives, and activities from the League's Policy Research Labs

MICHIGAN
GREEN
COMMUNITIES

League Members Taking Climate Action

By Danielle Beard

The State released the MI Healthy Climate Plan in April 2022. This ambitious plan outlines a roadmap for Michigan to become carbon neutral by 2050 while creating good paying jobs, protecting our natural resources and wildlife, and creating more resilient and prosperous communities. Michigan's prospects for remaining a comfortable place to live as Earth continues to warm are better than most. Even still, it will require simultaneous planning and action at the state and local level to ensure that Michigan remains livable for current and future residents

League members have been leading the way by acting now. For example, this year the City of Royal Oak passed its Sustainability and Climate Action Plan. And the City of Ypsilanti offered residents \$2,000 rebates for installing solar on their homes. Michigan Green Communities (MGC) has been supporting League members in their sustainability efforts. MGC is a collaborative program among several organizations and state agencies and is administered by the League. The MGC Challenge includes action items related to environmental justice, climate adaptation and resilience, energy, community engagement, public health, mobility, water, materials management, and economic development. It is a network of local government staff and officials that is designed to:


- Promote and facilitate peer learning and sharing to support innovative solutions for community sustainability and livability.
- Recognize communities for their sustainability accomplishments.
- Promote Michigan's leadership role in environmental stewardship and green economic development.
- Enhance Michigan's economic competitiveness in the 21st century global green economy.
- Develop and share world-class models that will reduce costs and increase business activity in our communities and stimulate world-class research, development and commercialization of breakthrough green technologies, products, and processes.

The Michigan Green Communities program is open to all local governments in Michigan, regardless of affiliation with a membership organization and at no cost. MGC is a sustainability networking, benchmarking, and technical assistance program. It guides and supports communities in adapting to a changing climate, protecting infrastructure, improving the quality of life for residents, and creating a more environmentally and economically sustainable future for the state of Michigan.

This year, MGC is recognizing 45 counties, cities, townships, and villages that took part in the MGC Challenge. These communities completed actions in 2021 related to environmental justice, climate adaptation and resilience, clean energy, energy efficiency, community engagement, public health, mobility, water protection, resource conservation, materials management, and economic development. Ten communities achieved bronze certification, twelve achieved silver certification, and twenty-three achieved gold certification.

In addition to the annual benchmarking challenge, MGC just launched a virtual forum for all communities in Michigan to use as a space for peer networking, learning, and collaboration. This online space is only open to staff and elected/appointed officials from municipalities and counties in Michigan. Vendors and consultants are not part of the forum so communities can connect without solicitation.

Interested in becoming part of Michigan Green Communities? Sign up now at www.migreencommunities.com/register.

Michigan Green Communities is supported by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy; the Michigan Department of Natural Resources; the Michigan Department of Transportation; the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services; the Michigan Economic Development Corporation; the Michigan Association of Counties; the Michigan Municipal League; and the Michigan Townships Association. 

Danielle Beard is the Michigan Green Communities Coordinator for the League. You may contact her at 517.908.0308 or dbeard@mml.org.



MICHIGAN GREEN COMMUNITIES CHALLENGE

GOLD

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For information on how the **ServeMlCity** program can help you, email servemicity@mml.org or call Shanna Draheim at 517.908.0307