

# the review

the official magazine of the  michigan municipal league

July/August 2010

## Collaboration

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OPERATIONAL REVIEW:  
**SAGINAW** CASE STUDY

**GRATIOT COUNTY** MASTER PLAN:  
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# the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

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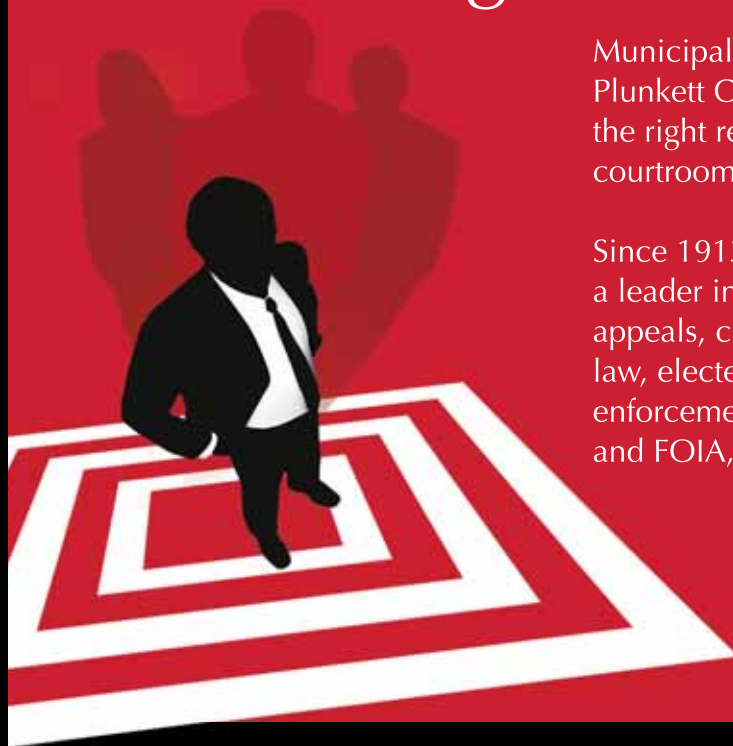




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# the review

The official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League

Volume 83, Number 4

### Better Communities. Better Michigan.

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. Our goals are to aid them in creating desirable and unique places through legislative and judicial advocacy; to provide educational opportunities for elected and appointed officials; and to assist municipal leaders in administering community services. Our mission is that of a non-profit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs to passionately push change for better communities and a better Michigan.

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## Cost Savings, Cooperation & You

The focus of this issue of *The Review* is cooperation, collaboration, and cost savings. In the following pages we give examples of communities coming up with innovative ways to serve their citizens efficiently yet effectively.

During these tough economic times, it is important that communities get as much return as possible from every dollar spent, and that includes your League membership. You should be asking yourself: is my community fully utilizing the vast array of League services? Chances are there are services available to members to lower or control your costs that you are not using.

The League offers a number of programs specifically targeted to lower your community operating costs and deliver services more effectively. Members should take time to familiarize themselves with the services at their disposal by virtue of their League membership.


A new service being offered through the League is telecommunications consulting. The League has partnered with Abilita, a leader in telecommunications consulting, to provide this new cost saving service; the service is provided at absolutely no risk to a member community. Our consultant is only paid by sharing in the savings they can generate for you. In other words, if the community doesn't save money then there is no fee. On average, a typical customer realizes savings of over 25 percent on its telecommunications bill. The consultant works directly with you and any proposed changes are subject to your approval. This service is available to all members.

Another program that members should explore is the U.S. Communities purchasing program. The League offers this program in conjunction with the National League of Cities. The U.S. Communities program has local agencies competitively bidding contracts by a lead local agency that provides the most favorable local agency pricing available. There is no cost to participate, and they offer a broad range of high quality products such as office supplies, office furniture, industrial supplies, electrical and data communication supplies, and computer hardware/software. Communities can realize significant savings due to the aggregated purchasing power of public agencies nationwide, and the program is managed by public purchasing professionals.

The League also maintains an unemployment compensation fund group account. A group account is a system where risk is shared, but not pooled, throughout the group members. Members make payments to the fund on the basis of their claims history once they have been a member of the group account for one year. The group reimbursing account removes some of the immediate risks and uncertainties related to unemployment. It also allows a governmental entity to budget its unemployment expenditures by spreading claims costs over a longer

period of time. This is something that cannot be done as a direct employer. In addition, it provides the services of the Michigan Municipal League and claims management utilizing the expertise of the tax corporation.

Some additional offerings include cost effective insurance solutions through the Michigan Municipal League Workers' Compensation Fund, and the Liability and Property Pool. We also provide health insurance through Blue Cross for member entities that have less than 100 employees, and a CDL testing program.

As always, the League is working to provide the solutions members need to effectively provide services to their citizens. I hope you will take some time to acquaint yourselves with these and other programs offered by the League. For more information, visit [www.mml.org](http://www.mml.org) or call 1-800-653-2483. 

### THE PROSPERITY AGENDA RADIO SHOW

#### Program Promotes League's Mission

The Michigan Municipal League is taking its message to one of the largest radio stations in the Midwest—News/Talk 760 WJR. Throughout this year, League Director & CEO Dan Gilmartin will host the “Michigan Prosperity Agenda” radio show that challenges listeners to help make Michigan a better place to live, work, and play by creating vibrant and prosperous local communities.

The show is sponsored by the League and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) and is scheduled to air at 7 pm on the fourth Wednesday of every month in 2010. We encourage all our members and friends to tune in for each show. For those outside of the WJR listening audience, you can hear segments of the show at [mml.org](http://mml.org) by clicking on the Prosperity Agenda logo you see here.



Daniel P. Gilmartin  
League executive director and CEO  
734-669-6302, [dpg@mml.org](mailto:dpg@mml.org)





# Money \$aving Tips

League's Financial Guru Suggests Ways for Communities to Save

By Anthony Minghine

It is no secret that we are all faced with some of the most challenging economic times in generations. Revenue pressures combined with increasing service demands are making it more and more difficult to effectively deliver services. To make matters worse, many of the problems we are facing are beyond what we can control or influence. Now, more than ever, we need to take a calculated approach to managing those things within our control. While not comprehensive, the following are some areas to review to ensure that you are maximizing your operational efforts.

## Utility Rates

At its core, developing rates is a straightforward process. You determine costs and allocate them to the users of the service. In practice, many factors need to be considered—user classes, fixed and variable components, reading and billing frequency, multiple meters, etc. If your rates are not properly set, then you are most likely subsidizing the cost of these operations with your general fund. In other words, when rates are inadequate, it does not change the cost of the service provided. This simply means the people using the service are not fully paying for the benefit they are receiving. User rates for things like water and sewer should fully cover the cost of their operations. Costs and usage patterns change over time, so rates should be reviewed annually and adjusted to ensure they properly fund the service as they are intended.

## Proper Cost Allocations

In order to set fees, the costs of a program must be understood. Be certain that your community properly allocates costs to the corresponding revenue streams. For example, your water and sewer fund should pay for the administrative costs being provided by general fund employees. If 30 percent of the transactions of the finance department relate to activities of the water and sewer fund, then it is appropriate to charge those costs to that fund and reimburse the general fund accordingly. Be sure to identify related utility costs, maintenance, audit, legal, etc. so that other funds pay the general fund for the services that are being provided.

## Technology Solutions

Much like an ATM machine reduces floor traffic in a bank, web-based transactions can reduce the need for direct customer interaction at the municipal hall. This frees up resources for other purposes, or may allow for staff reductions which will have a year over year positive impact on the cost of service delivery. This change also benefits your citizens because services are available 24/7. The two most likely areas to implement technology-based solutions are transactional and inquiry-based services. Many transactions are straightforward and do not require human intervention to be accomplished. Inquiry services can take significant staff time to respond to, and take time for the customer to travel to the office. Technology-based inquiry requires no staff time and users can explore at their leisure.

## Marketing and Communication

Technology-based marketing and communication are vital to attract and retain people to our communities. What you do will speak volumes about your community. The better your community is positioned on the web, the better chance you have of attracting the attention of businesses and future residents. In addition, take advantage of free tools like social networking sites and blogs to communicate to your citizens. A properly managed web communication strategy can save you money in print and postage. For example, newsletters, program notices, and community information can all be online. Create community fan sites on Facebook and other social media sites and use them to distribute information. Allow citizens to sign up for email communications. All of these tools are free or inexpensive and are better aligned with how people receive information in 2010.

## Outsourcing

Outsourcing is often presented as the cure-all for the delivery of services. While it is far from a panacea, it is important to do an honest evaluation of various service delivery methods to determine which is most advantageous. You must be sure to capture the true cost of service as well as evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing. In performing the review, be certain that you understand and quantify all the duties that will be necessary to complete the task. While an employee will back fill and cover various undefined duties, a contractor will only provide the services they are being paid to provide.


## User Fees/Program Evaluation

What do the various programs offered by your community cost? It is vital that you understand what it costs to provide services down to a programmatic level. This will enable you to make an informed decision about whether or not a particular service should be offered, if it should be subsidized, and how much any subsidy is costing your community. With this information, you can now properly set user fees. User fees are at the heart of any program, especially recreational programs. With the pressure we are experiencing to cut costs, devoting time to establishing appropriate fees is worth the effort. Too often, fees are based on what someone else, perhaps a neighboring community, charges rather than the true cost of service and without an awareness of the level of subsidy being provided.

## Risk Management

Proper risk management is essential to an efficient operation, and mitigating risk can help lower insurance and operational costs. Generally, this involves reviewing operations, identifying potential threats and the likelihood of their occurrence, then taking appropriate actions to address the most likely threats. Faced with today's spiraling operational costs, members must control losses if they are to meet budgetary requirements. Managers must coordinate


activities that relate to safeguarding the organization's investments and continuity of operations with their safety efforts. To be effective, a loss control program should share and assign responsibilities for accident prevention. An effective program should provide a means of making certain those who have responsibility perform adequately. The program should not simply impose safety measures on the organization. Instead, management must build risk management into every process and job, making it an integral part of operations.

Hopefully, this information has given you some new ideas about how to maximize your operational efforts and enhance their associated revenues. Now, more than ever, we must be certain to understand our operations so we can make informed choices and allocate resources properly. 

*Anthony Minghine is chief operating officer and associate executive director for the League. He has 24 years of municipal finance experience, including four years with the League. You may reach him at [aminghine@mml.org](mailto:aminghine@mml.org) or 734-669-6360.*



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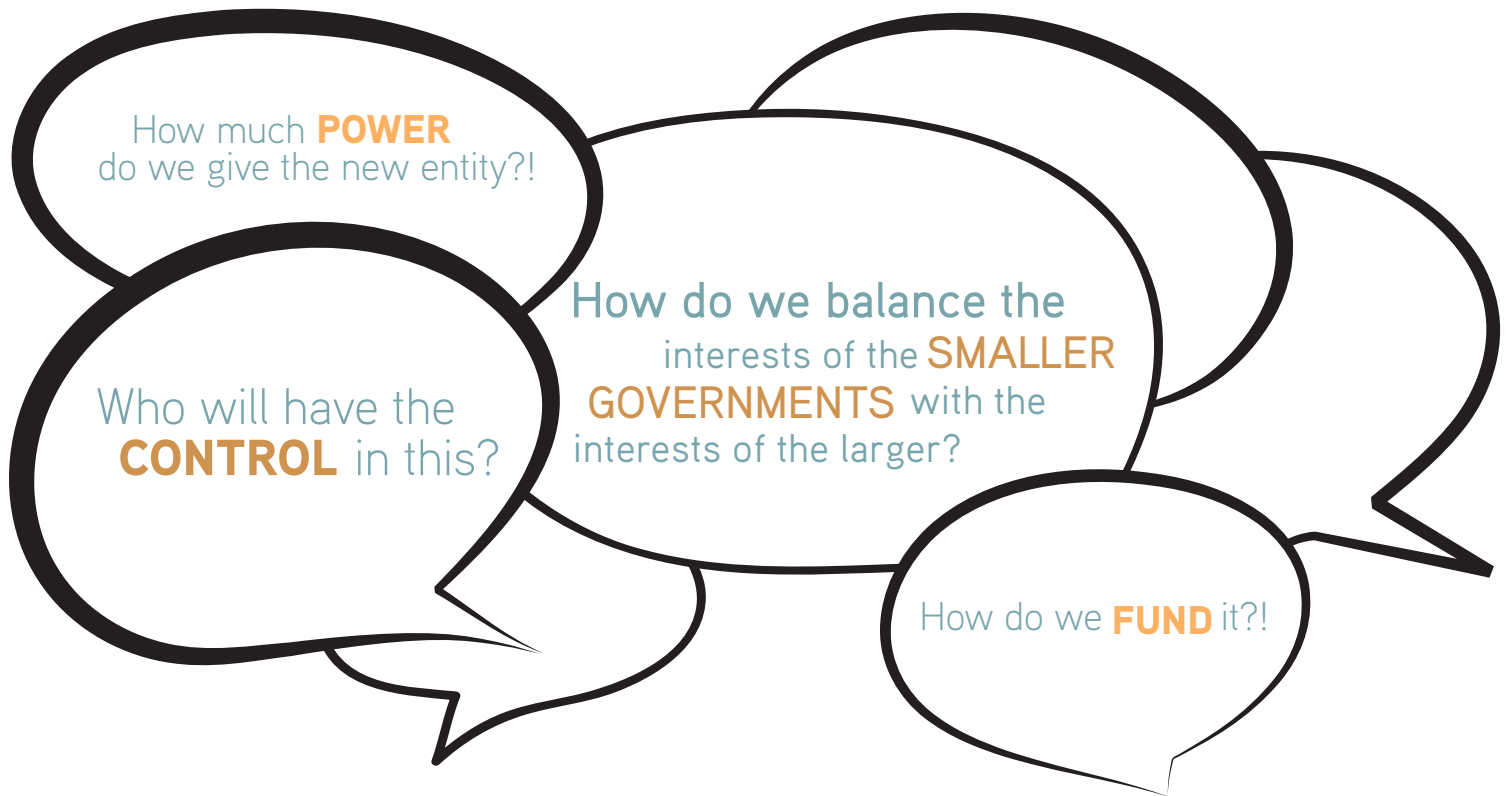
# Intergovernmental COOPERATION

## —*Myths and Realities*

By Michael P. McGee

The weekend had been cloudy. The old negotiator looked out at a Monday dawning clear and cold. It's been a long four months working on the agreement, he thought. How in the world had the different governmental units ever resolved their differences? He recalled the long negotiating sessions over how much power to give the new entity, how to fund it, who would have control, how to balance the interests of the smaller governments with the interests of the larger, and on and on. At times the differences had seemed insurmountable. Yet the negotiating continued and at the last, he thought, we have an agreement. It may have some faults . . . but, all in all, I expect no better and I am not sure that it is not the best.

— Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia*



The date: September 17, 1787. The place: Philadelphia. The negotiator: Dr. Benjamin Franklin. The intergovernmental agreement: The Constitution of the United States.



**Y**ou thought you had it tough trying to reach an agreement with the adjoining township over joint public safety services? Try establishing a new sovereign government. If 13 different governmental units, of varying sizes, locations, politics, and interests can successfully negotiate and sign a contract to create a wholly new general governmental entity, then creating that joint emergency services authority with your neighboring community ought to be easy.

With local government budgets under the most severe pressure in 80 years, opinion leaders of all sorts are crying out for greater intergovernmental cooperation (IGC) as a path to progress, if not outright salvation. The media (oh, the media!) is filled with reports to the general effect that if Michigan local governments *only* would cooperate more, *surely* our governmental fiscal problems would be solved!

Well . . . yes, and no. One hates to say the emperor has no clothes, but let's examine both the myths and realities of IGC.

First the myths. If one made policy decisions based upon media reports, one would quickly reach the following conclusions:

- Michigan has more local units than most states, and far more than it needs.
- Local governments don't cooperate.
- Lots of money can be saved immediately if the locals would play better together.

Nice sound bite—except each of these three conclusions is demonstrably wrong. Sure, Michigan has many local units, but we're a big state; per capita we're a little below the average, according to information from the 2009-10 Michigan Manual. Local governments cooperate all the time; in my law practice, I can think of no public entity that isn't cooperating with someone on something. And as for immediate cost savings, a number of studies pretty clearly demonstrate that greater cooperation can cost *more* money in the short run; the savings come, if at all, a few years out ([www.landpolicy.msu.edu](http://www.landpolicy.msu.edu)). So, if policymakers make policy based upon mythical conclusions . . . what do *you* think will happen? Let's just say "unmet expectations."

If policymakers really want to help, they can start with the major blocks to cooperative efforts by changing the law to: Allow different collective bargaining agreements to be harmonized; authorize more intergovernmental cooperation shared credit; limit recalls grounded upon IGC efforts; harmonize the boundary laws; even (gasp!) put real money incentives into revenue sharing. (The Michigan Municipal League has specific legislative proposals on each of these.) So let's talk about IGC. But let the talking be based on facts-on-the-ground, not on myth.

Now the reality. IGC can work, and it can save real money. It takes effort, and it takes time. As with all things, there is no free lunch. Mainly it takes a lot of listening and a willingness to move out of your comfort zone.

There has never been a discussion about governmental cooperation, from the Constitution on down, that didn't involve four central (and difficult) issues: Control, funding, dispute resolution, and dissolution. Address these issues and you are almost there.

## The Mechanics

What legal tools exist to permit cooperative arrangements? There are three general statutes empowering Michigan municipalities to carry out any common undertaking jointly, or to transfer a common function from one municipality to another:

**Public Act 35 of 1951** broadly authorizes municipal corporations to enter into contracts with other municipal corporations "for the ownership, operation, or performance, jointly, or by any one or more on behalf of all, of any property, facility or service which each would have the power to own, operate or perform separately." Act 35 specifically authorizes a municipality to furnish services outside its corporate limits, a helpful provision. The key condition of Act 35 is the requirement that the subject matter of the contract pertain to a property or service that each municipal party has the power to accomplish separately.

**The Urban Cooperation Act of 1967 (UCA)** is another general statute of considerable flexibility. The UCA requires that the joint exercise of power be by written interlocal agreement. It also specifies certain provisions to be included in the interlocal agreement, including the purpose and term of the agreement, composition of any administrative entity created by the agreement, funding sources and revenue allocation, employment matters, handling of liabilities, fund accountability, dispute resolution and others. Each party to the interlocal agreement is required to appoint a member of that commission, board or council.


**The Intergovernmental Transfer of Functions and Responsibilities Act (ITFRA)** is a companion statute to the Urban Cooperation Act. It is designed to permit municipal corporations to transfer from one organization to the other a function or responsibility most easily carried out by the transferee. The law allows two or more local units of government to contract to transfer functions or responsibilities to one another if all parties agree. A county and a township may agree, for example, that the county will carry out the responsibilities of providing water and sewer service to the township. Or a city may agree to provide police protection to a township. Any such contract may be administered by a joint commission or board.

In addition to agreements which may be crafted for various purposes under Act 35, the UCA and ITFRA, other statutes permit cooperation on specific services, including statutes covering:

- Joint provision of police and fire services
- Emergency services
- Joint township fire protection
- Parks and recreation
- Water, sewer and solid waste disposal
- Libraries

## Avoiding the Pitfalls

What are the obstacles to successful cooperative arrangements? Employment and benefit concerns and the impact on collective bargaining units can be difficult issues. Assuring clear lines of authority and control and allocating revenues and obligations are other major structural points to be overcome. To this traditional list add conflict-of-interest and incompatibility issues which are becoming more common. The adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is especially applicable here. Successful agreements deal with all these points.

Local government leaders are being challenged by current circumstances to “think outside the box.” Cooperative ventures with other governments to provide service more efficiently is one way to do just that. Michigan legal authority to enable cooperative provision of public services is well established, freeing local leaders to be creative. So go forth and establish your own more perfect Union. 

*Michael P. McGee has practiced municipal finance law since 1982. He is a principal in the Detroit office of Miller, Canfield, Paddock and Stone, PLC and is a past Livonia City councilmember. You may reach him at [mcgee@millercanfield.com](mailto:mcgee@millercanfield.com) or 313-496-7599.*

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# LEAGUE FOUNDATION LEADS COOPERATION EFFORT

**'Shared Services Initiative'** To Assist Community Collaborations

By Arnold Weinfeld

It's a question the Michigan Municipal League hears all the time: "How come communities aren't cooperating more to save money?" The answer is simple: They are cooperating on important services all the time, but there is more they can do. As local governments across Michigan continue to face serious budget crises, more and more are looking to collaboration as a cost-savings measure. The League is helping communities get there in several ways, including a program called the "Shared Services Initiative."

Before explaining this initiative, it's important to look at some of the obstacles that prevent many local governments from further collaboration. The key obstacles are political resistance within local governments; lack of technical expertise; and difficulty financing upfront costs needed to obtain longer-term savings. Political resistance exists for several reasons, including perceived loss of control, loss of public sector jobs, and declining service levels (will the new consolidated police/fire department make it to my home in time?). The daunting cuts that local governments are now facing may be sufficient to overcome much of the political resistance to collaboration. But, many local governments do not have the in-house skills or the dollars to pay for technical assistance and planning needed to make a shared service reality.

## State Invites the League In

That's where the League can help. In late 2009, Governor Granholm invited the League to participate in a steering committee to spur cities, villages, townships, counties, schools and intermediate school districts to consolidate and share services. The committee's charge was to develop a shared services initiative that would assist local communities in meeting critical service needs. Participants include other local government organizations such as Michigan Townships Association, Michigan Association of Counties, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, and the Citizens Research Council.

## Shared Services Initiative


The state is asking the League and our Foundation to facilitate what is being called the "Shared Services Initiative." The initiative's aim is to find alternative ways to get the best bang for the taxpayers' dollar. But it's not

just about saving money. Other goals are to provide better service at a reduced cost and in a faster, timelier fashion. Impossible, you say? Actually, it's not; and if done right, it can still allow communities to maintain an individual identity while also forming partnerships between state agencies, municipal governments, school districts, and businesses.

## The Foundation Takes a Lead Role

The League Foundation will assist local governments in developing their business case for collaborating and implementing the plan. We expect that much of this work will be provided by third-party consultants.

The Foundation will help local governments identify what expertise is needed from third parties and will assist in contracting with these groups. While costs will vary depending on the complexity of the project, such as number of groups participating, and the type of service you're looking to share, participating local government units will need to match funding from the Foundation.

For long-term sustainability, the Foundation will request funds from other non-profit and corporate foundations. We are also working with the state on alternative resources, such as a revolving loan fund. These resources could help with startup costs and other joint projects and operations that may sprout up as communities provide services in different ways. Michigan's local governments are facing the most significant budget crises in our lifetime. Cooperative services between local governments is one way to achieve costs savings and help our communities maintain essential services. The Shared Services Initiative fits well with the overall mission of the League Foundation to improve municipal governance through research, education, and training of local officials. 



*Arnold Weinfeld is president of the Michigan Municipal League Foundation. You may reach him at [aweinfeld@mml.org](mailto:aweinfeld@mml.org) or 517-908-0304.*

# Capital Conference Wrap-Up

The Michigan Municipal League's 2010 Capital Conference welcomed more than 400 attendees learning about everything from FOIA to medical marijuana. This year's event was April 13-14 in Lansing and it included special presentations from John Robert Smith of Reconnecting America, national walkability expert Dan Burden, and Tim Skubick of the public TV series "Off the Record." Be sure to check out more photos and articles about the conference at our blog: <http://www.mml.org/events/conference/blog/>. Next up for the League is our annual Convention, Sept. 21-24, 2010. Go to [mml.org](http://mml.org) and look under training and events for the latest Convention information.



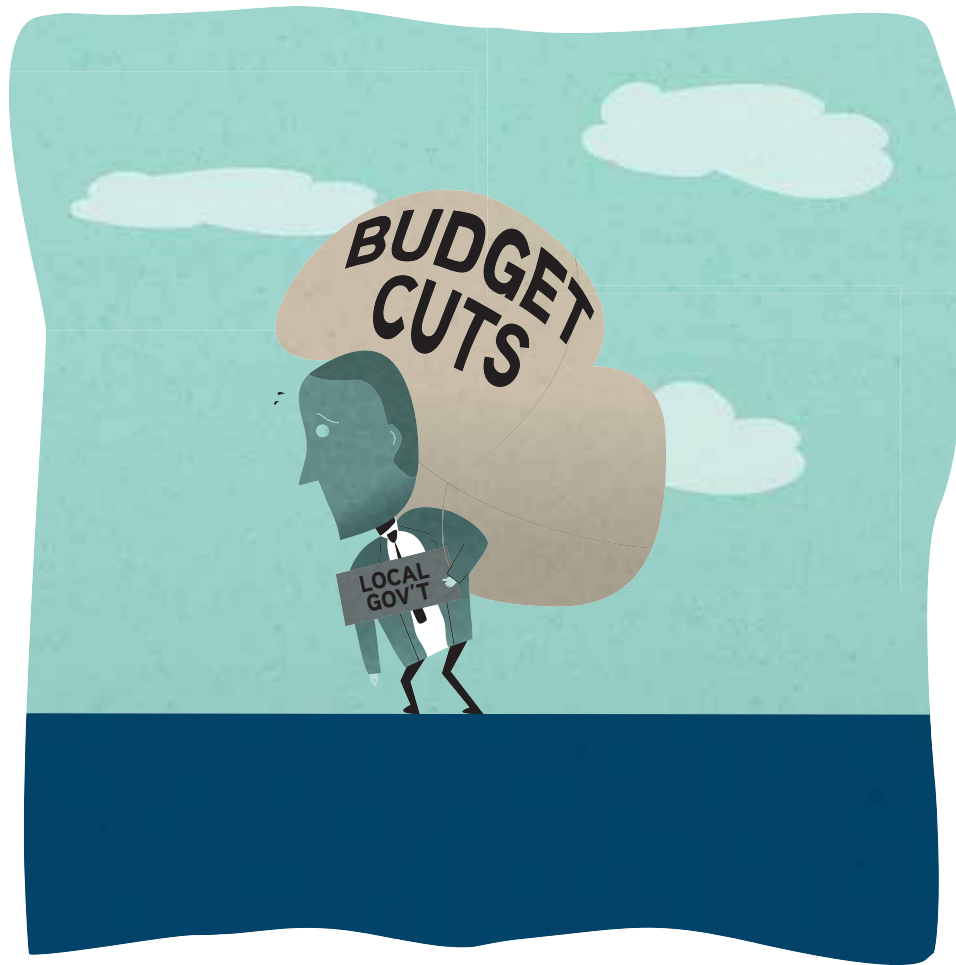




*Clockwise from top left:  
The 2010 Expo Hall; youth tour on the steps of the Capitol;  
walkability expert Dan Burden, Reconnecting America's John  
Robert Smith, and League Executive Director and CEO Dan  
Gilmartin; League General Counsel Bill Mathewson and Senator  
Patty Birkholz; the city of East Lansing was honored with the  
League's local government lobbying hero award; Detroit Council  
President Charles Pugh moderating the League's legislative  
update; Saginaw City Manager Darnell Earley talks to the  
media after the medical marijuana training session.*



*cont'd:  
Huntington Woods Commissioner  
and 2009-2010 League  
President Jeff Jenks; Detroit  
Councilmember Kenneth  
Cockrel, Jr. and Marquette  
Councilmember Fred Stonehouse;  
"Meet the Press" commentator  
Tim Skubick converses with a  
League member.*



# Transforming Government Through **STRATEGIC OPERATIONAL REVIEWS**

| BY CHRISTINE ANDRYSIAK & DAVID ASKER |

**G**iven the current state of the economy, local governments are feeling the pressure of significantly reduced budgets. We've seen cuts as high as 30 percent in the past few years. It's become clear that the current economy can no longer support the existing local governmental infrastructure.

Many communities have concluded that conducting business as usual is not an option, and a fundamental change is needed in order to survive and thrive. These communities are taking a holistic look at their entire organization and streamlining operations to create a leaner governmental structure.

## **Start With a Strategic Operational Review**

This type of review involves strategically analyzing your operating practices to identify opportunity for cost reduction and efficiency gains.

The main objectives are to:

- Review overall department structure, supervisor and staffing levels, department scheduling, and overtime policies;
- Assess the efficiency and effectiveness of operations to eliminate redundancy within and between departments;
- Identify specific areas and operations where cost reductions and/or organizational structure changes are possible; and
- Develop a plan and a corresponding implementation strategy to guide the organization in achieving the outcomes of the assessment.



Methods of data collection often include staff surveys and in-person interviews with department heads and their staff. Where appropriate, benchmarking data is also utilized.

### Hot Button Issues

Operations reviews often reveal opportunities for cost reduction and efficiency gains that can be challenging to implement. While staffing reductions may be a component of operational reviews, it's important to remember these suggestions are strategic reductions rather than across-the-board cuts, and that they sometimes go hand-in-hand with recommendations for technology improvements. For example, a city may determine that it can become more efficient by limiting the number of clerical staff and purchasing an updated enterprise resource planning system instead.

Another hot-button issue is consolidation. If financial challenges are so great that dramatic changes will be necessary in order to continue delivery of key services, a recommendation toward consolidation or shared services may be in order. See the sidebar on dispatch consolidation for examples of communities who have elected to go this route.

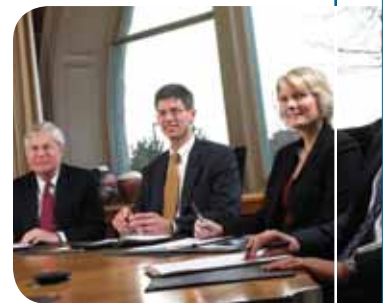


*After conducting a five-year financial forecast, the city of Saginaw was concerned about its financial future. The city commissioned Plante & Moran to undertake a strategic operation review. Coined "The City-Wide Organization Development and Efficiency Study," the city engaged department heads, staff, and even union leaders in the restructuring. Pictured from left to right are reorganization team members Diane Snowden, executive assistant to the city manager; Beth Church, personnel generalist; Tim Morales, assistant city manager for administrative services; Yolanda Jones, budget administrator/assistant to the city manager; and Dennis Jordan, human resources director. Photo courtesy of the city of Saginaw.*

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## City of Saginaw: A Case Study

Recently, the city of Saginaw conducted an assessment of city-wide efficiency and effectiveness, strategic organizational restructuring, and proactive cost-reduction opportunities. The city had just conducted a five-year financial forecast and realized their fiscal position going

forward was concerning. The need to garner objective, outside advice became obvious. According to City Manager Darnell Earley, "As managers look for ways to retool their operations while maintaining consistently effective and efficient service delivery systems, objective and independent organizational reviews can provide a valuable blueprint for retrenching operations. Working with Plante & Moran, we developed such a blueprint for Saginaw, which considered our financial, operational, technical, and facility needs now and in the future."

It's worth noting that many city personnel were involved in the process. Earley initiated the request, obtained approval from city council, and oversaw the process. Department heads and staff were available for interviews and feedback. Even the union leaders got involved; Plante & Moran solicited their confidential input and gave them a number to call to voice their feedback.

Saginaw's operational review provided recommendations in five key areas:

- **Reorganization.** These included centralization of functions like information technology and global information systems, and creating a customer service call center. Recommendations also included expansion of duties for certain staff, the creation of new roles, and decentralizing specific department functions.
- **Staffing efficiency.** Opportunities included head-count reductions coupled with suggestions for increasing efficiency with remaining staff by cross-training personnel to perform multiple duties, combining walk-up service counters, and implementing a lock box for mail-in utility billing and income tax payments.



Team members Diane Snowden, Yolanda Jones, and Tim Morales hard at work. Photo courtesy of the city of Saginaw.



*Saginaw City Hall. As a result of its strategic operation review, the city realized \$3 million in annual recurring cost savings the first year. Photo by Junko Kimura.*

- **Outsourcing analysis.** Opportunities for outsourcing included several public services and technical services such as web development and the technology help desk.
- **Operational recommendations.** These included suggestions such as eliminating health benefits for part-time staff and eliminating mandatory overtime pay.
- **Investments.** Despite the economy, selective, strategic investments need to be made to yield improvements. Specific recommendations included investing in call-center implementation and ERP city-wide reengineering.

The city identified up to \$3 million in annual-recurring cost savings in the initial review, and implemented \$1.2 million in savings in the first year. The resulting return on investment was more than 12 times the cost of the study in year one. This does not take into consideration the recurring savings each year, which would greatly increase the return on investment.

"Through this approach we've avoided budget deficits and having to decimate departments with across-the-board percentage cuts in order to balance our budget. It was an excellent starting point for us. The small investment will pay huge dividends in the long-term as we continue to search for the surest and most cost-effective forms of economic and community service delivery and sustainability."


## Special Note on Police and Fire

Due to the high cost of providing police and fire services, Saginaw is exploring the possibility of combining police and fire into a public safety department. The organization review showed that the two departments acting independently are not sustainable given the high cost of operation and other



issues such as retirement costs. Failing to take action now will only delay the inevitable. The city is starting slowly, doing as much research as possible; their initial step was to create a public safety manager position—someone on staff whose main responsibility is to oversee the exploration of combining the two departments. “We are continuing to downsize our operations in a proactive rather than reactive manner, and recognizing the need for change if these services are to be sustained over the long term” says Earley.

## In Conclusion

Strategic organizational reviews are an effective tool to help organizations transform into leaner local government units that are well positioned for economic growth and prosperity for the 21st century. It’s a visionary, progressive, proactive step, and one of the best ways we’ve found to help organizations respond to today’s new economic reality. 

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## 911 Dispatch Consolidation in Action

Ten years ago, the communities within Livingston County combined to form one central county 911 dispatch. Today the communities are enjoying the benefits of cost savings, faster response time, top-notch dispatchers, and a state-of-the-art facility.

Three local communities are looking to join the pursuit of consolidated dispatch services. Roseville, St. Clair Shores, and Eastpointe are considering a turn-key, central dispatch operation that, if approved, could start in early 2011. They have been proactive in southeast Michigan by embracing the concept of consolidated dispatch operations for increased efficiency and cost effectiveness. They were even awarded a \$1 million grant to implement this progressive concept!


Consolidation can be a highly controversial topic. The fact remains, however, that it can work. Communities can combine their efforts and provide improved service at 20–40 percent less than they were spending while operating alone. Because of these successes, it’s an idea that should, over time, elicit greater adoption in this difficult economy.




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By Vicki Knuckles

**T**ake a guess at how many cities or towns exist in the United States named Allegan. If you want to know, check the latest zip code directory or simply Google “Allegan.”

You may be surprised to find that there is only one city or town named Allegan in all of America. This very fact is theme for an awareness campaign for the city of Allegan, located in southwest Michigan.

“Only One is the **best** thing that has been done for Allegan in decades.”

—Paula Bruinslot, owner of McFarlands Jewelers

After wondering what life would be like living in a different Allegan, city of Allegan Downtown Coordinator Vicki Knuckles decided to find out. But when she could not find another Allegan in the United States, she realized that the town she had so much appreciation for was truly unique. City administration realized it needed to do something to make Allegan and what it has to offer to potential residents stand out. The answer is “Only One Allegan.”

To highlight Allegan, its people and businesses, the Only One Allegan project was developed. For close to a year, Knuckles teamed with community stakeholders to create an effective marketing tool centered on Only One Allegan.

The focus is to attract, retain and inform potential and current residents about why Allegan is a great place to live and work. Additionally, the Only One Allegan campaign is a convenient way for potential visitors to get a sneak peek of what Allegan has to offer to them.

A central aspect of the campaign is the Only One Allegan videos. The videos are intended to attract people looking to move to west Michigan and to encourage people who work in Allegan to move their families here. There are



*There is only one city in the U.S. named Allegan. Capitalizing on its uniqueness, the city of Allegan, Michigan created a marketing campaign to attract and retain residents and businesses.*

eight video segments, or chapters, displaying Allegan's amenities and attractions: an area overview and segments on the downtown, events, area heritage, education, medical services, outdoor life, and public safety. These chapters highlight the history, natural beauty, and resources that make Allegan a great place to live.

A DVD of the video is offered for distribution through human resources offices, at Allegan based businesses, available at real estate offices, and video chapters may be viewed online at the Only One Allegan website, [www.onlyoneallegan.com](http://www.onlyoneallegan.com) and YouTube.

"Allegan is truly unique. Allegan offers opportunities for all in a safe environment rich with nature's bounty," said Rob Hillard, Allegan city manager. "While the economy continues to slip, some businesses in Allegan are actually expanding. The Only One campaign hopes to encourage new employees to choose to also live in Allegan."

Not convinced yet that Allegan is one of a kind? Every aspect of the project is pure Allegan. Local stakeholders came together and developed the concept, collaborated with local organizations (businesses, public schools, medical services, and public safety) with a total hands-on approach. They shaped and formed the project graphic design, scripted video segments, and were involved in production activities such as video capture, editing, post production, video drafts, and revisions. In addition, they were involved in creating the DVD and related website.

Leaning heavily on the local talent that saturates the Allegan area offered a number of benefits. Using high school students to capture footage for the education segment provided a unique perspective. Collaboration with the city airport allowed both an unusual experience for the camera operator—as well as some outstanding shots. Working with local business owners gave the downtown chapter a real taste of Allegan. Connections with the Historical Society & Museum contributed one-of-a-kind video and photography that emphasizes Allegan's roots and the beauty of the community, and its distinctive events and activities are clearly woven throughout each themed sample of the Allegan lifestyle.

The chapter format of Only One allows people to focus on their area of interest and keeping each segment short encourages curiosity. Easy click access to dig deeper for Allegan information is provided on the site. This approach makes it easier to update and revise the videos. Two chapters have already been enhanced since the initial release and plans are to revisit one chapter per year, to keep it fresh.

The success of the effort is undeniable. WZZM Channel 13 news did a spot on the campaign, and it has been featured in regional newspapers. Enthusiasm for the venture is contagious. "Only One is the best thing that has been done

for Allegan in decades," said Paula Bruinslott, owner of McFarlands Jewelers located in the downtown. "It makes me even more proud of my community," stated Cheri Schulz of Schulz Realty. Ongoing success is also measured in website hits and unique visits, the growing popularity of Only One Allegan's social media connections, and distribution of the DVDs which are utilized to recruit professionals and are included in Allegan Area Chamber of Commerce new resident packets.

During these competitive and tough times, how can you afford not to promote your community? The cost for such an undertaking, you say? That is another little perk of "keeping it local."

“ While the economy continues to slip,  
SOME BUSINESSES IN ALLEGAN ARE EXPANDING.  
The Only One campaign hopes to encourage  
new employees to choose to also **live** in Allegan. ”

—City Manager Rob Hillard



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Opposite page:


Allegan is a small city proud of its historical achievements and small town charm. It's a dynamic city with entertainment treasures not typical for a city its size. Attractions include the Regent Theatre, an art deco theatre built in 1919 showing first-run movies; a farmers market open May through October; a historic downtown, many arts and cultural events, and a popular riverfront boardwalk.



Above:

Vicki Knuckles, presenting Allegan's "Only One Allegan" campaign in the Race for the Cup at the 2009 Convention in Kalamazoo. By peer vote, the city of Allegan was honored as the 2009 Region 2 Community Excellence Award winner. Region 2 encompasses Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Eaton, Hillsdale, Ingham, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Lenawee, Saint Joseph, Van Buren.

## THE COST OF THE ONLY ONE ALLEGAN CAMPAIGN?

By keeping it **local**, the costs were small. Video project, including companion website development: \$4,500; 500 DVDs: \$1,200. Results: **priceless!** 

Vicki Knuckles is arts & entertainment director and downtown coordinator for the city of Allegan. You may reach her at 269-673-3456 or [vkuckles@cityofallegan.org](mailto:vkuckles@cityofallegan.org).



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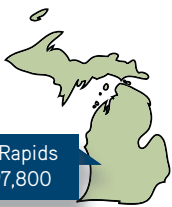
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# to Consolidation of Government Services

By George Heartwell and Sandi Frost Parrish

The present economic environment demands that we look at new ways of delivering government services. A persistent recession has held the state of Michigan in its iron grip for a decade and there is no unit of government—from largest to smallest—that has not felt the impact.



Grand Rapids  
pop. 197,800

Local governments have responded to annually reduced revenues by dramatically cutting expenses before seeking to raise revenues. No one likes a tax increase and no elected official in her/his right mind would look first to the

revenue side for relief. We have become leaner and more efficient in the delivery of services. We have reorganized government, and found new ways to provide services with fewer resources.

In our efforts to become more efficient we have sought—and accomplished—some consolidation of services among area governments. Law enforcement, sewer and water, public transportation and land use planning are only a few of the areas of cooperation that exist and have been successfully implemented. The Michigan Citizens Research Council has cited Kent County as a model for such cooperative ventures, noting in a recent report 150 intergovernmental cooperative initiatives in our county.

It is good to cooperate; it is even better to consolidate services. The question for today is: Might this be the time to consider truly combining forces to provide seamless services to all citizens of Kent County?



*Kent County is a model for cooperative ventures, with over 150 intergovernmental cooperative initiatives in the county. Photo of the Kent County Courthouse by OZinOH.*



What might we gain if we really consolidated services? First, and most obvious, is cost savings. There are 36 units of government in our county. Think of the duplication of services among us. Common sense suggests that if we could combine fire protection, law enforcement, planning, waste management, sewage treatment, and a host of other governmental functions—some mandated by statute, others demanded by citizens—we can enjoy substantial cost savings.

Beyond cost savings, county-wide consolidation of services would result in **MORE EFFICIENT** delivery of government services. Resources would be deployed on a consistent basis in support of a **METROPOLITAN VISION** for growth & development.

If its citizens desired to go to the next step and actually consolidate governments in Kent County, the resulting city would be 23rd largest in the nation, falling between El Paso and Milwaukee in size. Influence in Congress and access to federal grants reserved for larger cities is one advantage. However, even more importantly, a city of more than 600,000 will be appealing to corporations looking for investment opportunities. We will be better positioned to compete for company relocation and expansion.

We have heard expressions of concern over loss of identity. If my city, village, or township consolidates will we lose the uniqueness of our place? Will our name be lost to history? The simple answer is “No.” Place is important. Identification with place is crucial to our self-definition. As we move forward on these efforts we must be careful to retain the identity of the places merging into the new city. That has been done successfully in cities like Indianapolis and in Louisville.

The process of consolidation takes years. Aside from the technical, operational and legislative challenges, consolidation activities must involve a large and open conversation between citizens of the region, businesses and government officials. Our present crisis may be useful in accelerating the dialogue, but consolidation of services can best be achieved through careful, thoughtful deliberation, intentional and strategic action, periodic decision-points for public votes, and a recognition of and respect for the many individual interests involved.

Consolidation of services isn't easy. The experiences of communities which have gone through this process confirm how tough it can be. But consolidation of services and the potential consolidation of governments will position Kent County to lead Michigan back to economic prominence.

We propose the creation of a multi-sector, multi-government task force to begin moving this initiative forward. Let's tap the experience of the business community, the knowledge of higher education, the passion of citizens countywide, and the interests of local governments to begin leading us toward a better and stronger future together.

Now is the time.

*This article first appeared as a guest commentary on Mlive.com on March 6, 2010.*



*Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell and Kent County Commissioner Sandi Frost Parrish ask the question: “Might this be the time to consider truly combining forces to provide seamless services to all citizens of Kent County?”*  
*Photos provided by the city of Grand Rapids.*



*George Heartwell is mayor of the city of Grand Rapids. Now serving in his second term Mayor Heartwell took office on January 1, 2004. The mayor has overseen a period of rapid economic development in Grand Rapids, even during an extended downturn in the Michigan economy. Photo provided by the city of Grand Rapids.*



*Sandi Frost Parrish is the chair of the Kent County board of commissioners. She is a graduate of Leadership Grand Rapids and was a 2007 fellow in the Michigan Political Leadership program at Michigan State University. Sandi was named one of the 50 Most Influential Women in West Michigan in 2008 by the Grand Rapids Business Journal. Photo provided by Sandi Frost Parrish.*






COVER STORY

# DISCOVER TIMEBANKING

By Tylor Skory and Monique LaBenne





BY POPULAR VOTE, THE CITY OF LATHRUP VILLAGE WON THE 2009 COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE AWARD FOR THE LATHRUP VILLAGE TIMEBANK, A PAY-IT-FORWARD CONCEPT OF NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS.





Kim Hodge lived in Lathrup Village for 15 years and only knew a handful of her neighbors. When she read about TimeBanks, she knew she wanted to start one. She kicked off the concept at a 2008 Homeowners Association Pancake Breakfast, and it's grown to 117 members.

"We've got something cool in Lathrup Village, but we need others to do it," Hodge said.

At its most basic level, TimeBanking is about spending an hour doing something for somebody in your community. That hour goes into the TimeBank as a "time dollar." Then you have a time dollar to spend. It's a simple idea, but it has powerful ripple effects in building community connections.

"In the economic times we're dealing with now, I think it's a great thing that people can help people," City Administrator Jeff Mueller said. Since its inception, Lathrup Village TimeBank members have logged 3,229 hours of service exchanges.

"This tool speaks really well to these economically challenging times we're in," Hodge said. "It's an exchange system that is similar to a barter. We don't have the money to pay for things right now. There are so many people who are unemployed or haven't gotten a raise or don't know what



*Window washing TimeBank project.*

around with so much talent and skills and interest that they can share with others. We really need to rely on each other more right now."

Richard Reeves, along with Hodge, coordinates Lathrup Village's TimeBank. "Now is a better time than any to have a TimeBank in a community," he said.

**" I THOUGHT THE TIMEBANK WAS A GOOD DEAL.** I got yard work done that I'm not able to do and I'm **willing** to do something in return. The tree in my yard that fell down this winter was cut down within just three days of my **joining the TimeBank!** "

—Genevieve Tracey

the future holds. They need to do something, feel valued, be out and about and meet people in their community, get stuff done and be productive . . . it's not like we don't have the talent just because we don't have the jobs. People are sitting



*TimeBank member of the year Nancy Hatcher and granddaughters.*

"Just the economic value of it—people can save money and get things done that they need to have done. But what's really more important is that it's a project that really helps to build community. In times like this, something that helps bring the community together helps people realize that we're all in the same boat, and it kind of makes us stronger."

With TimeBanking, sharing gifts means building trust.

Each TimeBank connects to an internet database where you list what you would like to do for other members. You look up TimeBank services online or call a community coordinator to do it for you. You earn time dollars after each service you perform and then you get to spend it on whatever you want from the listings. With TimeBanking, you will be working with a small group of committed individuals who are joined together for a common good. It connects you to the best in people because it creates a system that connects unmet needs with untapped resources. To see what happens each week when you are part of TimeBank is deeply fulfilling, especially if you are helping to make it run.

## TimeBanks Promote Five Core Values

### 1) Assets

We are all assets. Every human being has something to contribute.

### 2) Redefining Work

Some work is beyond price. Work has to be redefined to value whatever it takes to raise healthy children, build strong families, revitalize neighborhoods, make democracy work, advance social justice, make the planet sustainable. That kind of work needs to be honored, recorded and rewarded.

### 3) Reciprocity

Helping works better as a two-way street. The question: "How can I help you?" needs to change so we ask: "How can we help each other build the world we both will live in?"

### 4) Social Networks

We need each other. Networks are stronger than individuals. People helping each other reweave communities of support, strength and trust. Community is built upon sinking roots, building trust, creating networks. Special relationships are built on commitment.

### 5) Respect

Every human being matters. Respect underlies freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and everything we value. Respect supplies the heart and soul of democracy. When respect is denied to anyone, we all are injured. We must respect where people are in the moment, not where we hope they will be at some future point.

If you like to volunteer and give time to your community, TimeBanking is a way to get something back in exchange for your time. Richard Reeves not only serves as one of the coordinators for the Lathrup Village TimeBank, he has also earned time dollars creating two short videos to help promote it.

## Community Excellence Award

Lathrup Village won the statewide 2009 Michigan Municipal League Community Excellence Award. The project really touched the hearts of Michigan's officials, who voted for the TimeBank project as the overall winner in the Race for the Cup.

"They (Kim and Richard) just absolutely floored the Convention," said Lathrup Village City Administrator Jeff Mueller. "It was really awesome. There were 400-500 people there, and all the attendees voted . . . everybody jumped up and cheered (when Lathrup won). It was pretty cool."

"It was truly amazing being there—I was almost overwhelmed by it," Reeves said. "It was really cool. We always knew it was a good idea, but it's nice to have it validated by other people."

Since the Convention, Hodge and Reeves founded the MI Alliance of TimeBanks (MATB), to link and support

“ I’m so **EXCITED** about having a TimeBank in the neighborhood and I’m just new to Lathrup Village. **I’LL NEVER MOVE!** ”

—Beata Alghabra

TimeBanks across the state. They have been contacted by 74 cities and 80 organizations to find out more about TimeBanks. Three new TimeBanks have already sprung up since the fall of 2009—in the Southfield area, Ferndale, and southwest Detroit.

In addition, several Detroit communities are exploring TimeBanking and expected to begin soon. Organizing efforts are happening in Charlotte, Muskegon Heights, Sterling Heights, and many more communities.

MATB envisions sustainable communities throughout Michigan that are attractive, vibrant places to live because of

the strength of their social networks, and their ability to match unmet community needs with untapped community resources. It received its first grant from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan to help start three pilot TimeBanks and a Michigan Alliance of TimeBanks institute. For more info, visit [www.miTimeBanks.org](http://www.miTimeBanks.org) or to see what's happening with the Lathrup Village TimeBank, check [www.lathrupvillageTimeBank.org](http://www.lathrupvillageTimeBank.org). 



left to right: Jeff Mueller, Richard Reeves, and Kim Hodge.

*Tylor Skory and Monique LaBenne are the website coordinators for the Lathrup Village TimeBank.*

## WHO WILL TAKE HOME THE CUP IN SEPTEMBER?

2010 Community Excellence Award  
Regional Winners

R1: City of Monroe

R5: City of Harbor Beach

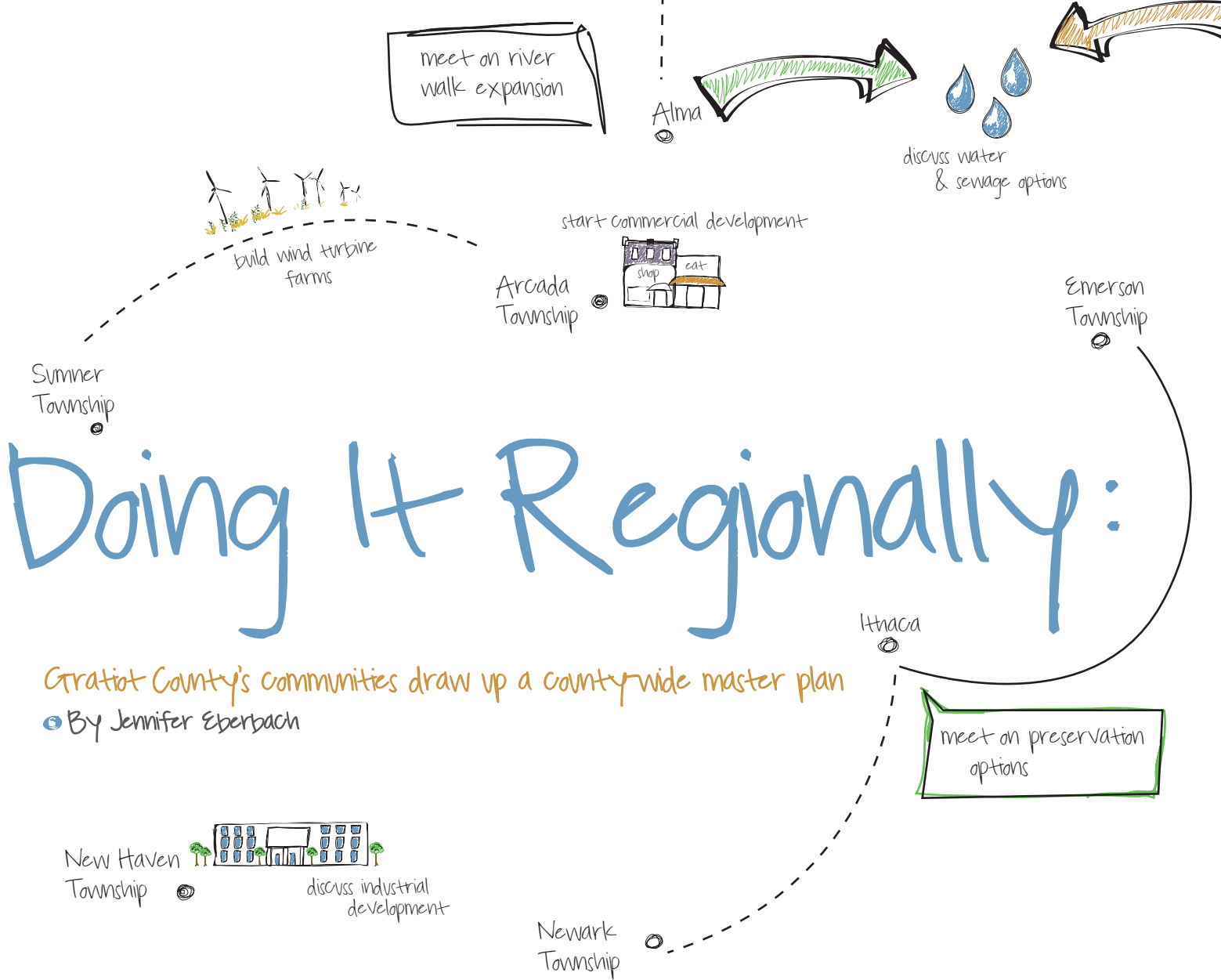
R2: City of East Lansing

R6: Village of Kingsley

R3: City of Grand Haven

R7: City of St. Ignace

R4: City of Saginaw



**S**o how can you cooperate without losing your community's identity? It can be done—just ask a group of Gratiot County leaders.

Symbolic of their collaborative spirit, the Gratiot officials sat down recently to share their story about how 221 Gratiot County communities worked together to create one county-wide master plan for all (and all for one). This is a unique effort that has not been done before to this scale in Michigan.

Alma City Manager Phillip Moore, Gratiot County Assessor Doug Merchant, and Greater Gratiot Development, Inc. President Donald Schurr, along with Project Manager Chelsey Foster, explained how the Gratiot Regional Excellence and Transformation (GREAT) plan lays out goals and objections that approach placemaking, development, land use, and improving Gratiot County communities with the entire region in mind.

The draft came out of active collaboration and open dialogue between Gratiot County's cities and townships, Greater Gratiot Development, and Partnerships for Change—Sustainable Communities, a program managed by the Land Information Access Association.



*The townships, cities and villages of Gratiot County have teamed together to develop a single community-wide comprehensive plan. This is a unique effort that has never been done before in the state of Michigan! Through this plan, each community may strengthen its own local planning efforts while improving Gratiot County as a whole.*



Like with any cooperative effort, one concern early on was maintaining the individual identities of each community involved. It was important that no one community lost their individual autonomy. To accomplish that goal, each individual governmental unit also has their own version of the master plan and the option to amend its goals and objectives—if they want to. However, there does not seem to be any talk of disagreement to date. The group’s account of the collaboration is one that champions the process of coming together to discover and negotiate similar goals. What they found was that they were able to get on the same page quite easily.

The GREAT plan is not the first instance of intergovernmental cooperation in Gratiot County, but this particular type of collaboration between so many different jurisdictions is quite unique. The idea grew out of a 2006 land use agreement between Alma, St. Louis, and Pine River Township. At first, their intentions were not to draw up a county-wide plan, however, they wanted to consult with each other on their ideas. A new idea dawned: Why don’t we just do this together? One after another more municipalities jumped on board and it “snowballed.”

The master plan operates under this simple assumption: If a person’s view doesn’t end at a jurisdiction line, then it is likely that community, culture, and economy does not stop there either. What one governmental entity builds, grows, or offers ends up belonging to the greater economy—especially when it might only take 10 minutes to drive to the next city or the neighboring township to shop or do business.



*Farming makes up a significant part of the economy of Gratiot County. Over 90 percent of the county is zoned agricultural, and upwards of 80 percent is under cultivation.*

A few wind turbine farms have been proposed in the county. If they are built, they will stretch across jurisdictional boundaries—even individual farms would cross geographic boundary lines. In the process of collaborating together on the GREAT plan, Gratiot County successfully created a common ordinance for wind turbines that could be applied to all of its jurisdictions.

Working together on a master plan also helped them define their collective vision for how to best reign in development that would compromise the integrity of Gratiot County’s agricultural heritage and natural beauty. “One of the

“ We value the **rural lifestyle** and the agricultural nature of our community and want to preserve that. At the same time, we’d like to have **COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT.** ”

—Alma City Manager Phillip Moore

A number of specific intergovernmental agreements and collaborative projects have been inspired by the convergence. Agreements related to public works, like Alma and St. Louis’ joint Solid Waste Authority, and additional discussions about water and sewage are happening between municipalities. They are also working together to determine the scope of a pathway, called the River Walk. It currently starts in Alma and they are figuring out just how many communities it will eventually span. There is also a general sense that everyone shares the county’s cultural and natural resources, along with the responsibility to preserve and improve them.

things we discovered fairly early on was that our goals and objectives were either the same or they were compatible. We value the rural lifestyle and the agricultural nature of our community and want to preserve that. At the same time, we’d like to have commercial and industrial development,” Alma City Manager Phillip Moore explains.

Over 90 percent of Gratiot County is zoned as agricultural land with upward of 80 percent under cultivation. Farming makes up a significant part of their local economy—from the farmers themselves to the businesses within the county that




*A snapshot of life in Gratiot County—the gazebo in St. Louis and downtown Ithaca.*

support the agricultural economy. Numerous mechanisms for managing development and land use are built into the plan that are meant to preserve this heritage as well as the county's rural charm.

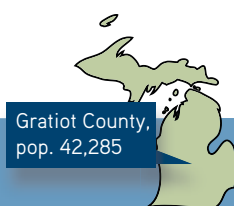
“A person's view doesn't end at a jurisdiction line . . . **COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND ECONOMY** don't stop there either.”

Greater Gratiot President Don Schurr thinks, “The key reason why we are doing this is to increase the efficiency and the effectiveness of local government; to avoid the duplication. To work towards a greater market orientation to provide services, the functions that we need individually in our municipalities, and collectively to make us an attractive place to live.” He further explains, “One of the goals from the beginning sitting in the chairman's position was to get people utilizing the same language—the definitions, the terms, the nomenclature—and to gain an understanding that when somebody is mentioning (for example) a business district on one side of a jurisdiction's boundary line, it was

the same as a business district on the other side of the line.” He thinks, “It's a seemingly simplistic concept but I think basic language is at the heart of understanding and the capacity for everybody to get along.”

Focusing on creating one master plan also ended up saving each community a bit of cash—a nice fringe benefit that came along with the collaboration. Instead of each community having to pay for a separate master plan, its assessment, and the cost of hiring a consultant, they split the costs. Moore points out that the time and money they saved is no small thing. “For some of the townships, developing a master plan is a lot of work. Townships, which may have no paid staff to speak of, may find it very hard to undertake a good master plan. By working together, we shared the burden a little bit and it made it much more obtainable for everybody.” 

## GREAT Members



- City of Alma
- City of Ithaca
- City of St. Louis
- Village of Ashley
- Village of Breckendridge
- Village of Perrinton
- Gratiot County
- Greater Gratiot Development
- Arcada Township
- Bethany Township
- Elba Township
- Emerson Township
- Fulton Township
- Hamilton Township
- Lafayette Township
- New Haven Township
- Newark Township
- North Shade Township
- North Star Township
- Pine River Township
- Seville Township
- Sumner Township
- Wheeler Township

*Jennifer Eberbach is a freelance journalist and professional copywriter. You may contact her at 734-929-2964 or [jen@jenthewriter.info](mailto:jen@jenthewriter.info). Visit her online at [www.jenthewriter.info](http://www.jenthewriter.info).*





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# Not Your Typical Convention

112<sup>th</sup> Annual Michigan Municipal League Convention  
September 21-24, 2010 – Dearborn, Michigan

## A New Concept for Convention

League Convention programming is centered on the eight critical assets for vibrant communities as identified by our Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3). The assets are: physical design & walkability; green initiatives; cultural economic development; entrepreneurship; multiculturalism; messaging & technology; transit; and education.



These eight assets will drive the change we need to achieve “Better Communities. Better Michigan.” and they guide the League in everything we do—from the issues we tackle in Lansing to the seminars and workshops we bring to your doorstep.

This year we’re bringing in high-energy, passionate presenters to create a fast-paced, intense and exciting experience based around the eight assets. We’ll combine the best that national experts offer with our own local success stories from around the state to deliver dynamic, to-the-point presentations followed by breakout discussions.

What you WON’T find at our Convention is doom and gloom. We all face very real, very major challenges, but those have been well-defined and extensively discussed. It is time for real solutions. We are determined to bring you creative options, visionary programs, and inspiring success stories that you can take home and shape to fit your needs.

*Be a part of the transformation and join us in Dearborn Sept. 21-24 for a Convention you won’t forget!*

## Breakout Sessions

Follow-up sessions to the high energetic morning experience will include a more in-depth presentation from the speaker, along with a presenter with a local perspective on the 21c3 topic.

- Physical Design & Walkability
- Green Initiatives
- Cultural Economic Development
- Entrepreneurship
- Multiculturalism
- Messaging & Technology
- Transit
- Education

## Ask the Expert Sessions

These sessions will not only provide you with the latest and greatest information available on the given topic, they will also give you the opportunity to ask questions of the experts in the field.

- Lame Duck or Not?  
Get the Latest on Lansing & D.C.
- Green \$\$\$ at Work
- Legal Eagles, Our Birdseye View
- Dearborn Delivers! What Works for Us
- Small Towns. Big Ideas
- Social Networking:  
Going Viral to Get Your Message Out
- The Ins & Outs of Risk Management
- A Community for All Ages
- Best Practices in Dearborn

## Housing

Host Hotel – Hyatt Regency, Dearborn  
Phone: 313-593-1234

### Housing Reservation Process

Housing reservations will only be accepted for those who have registered for Convention. After registering for Convention, a confirmation email will be sent to you within 48 hours. The confirmation email will contain your registration information and your personalized housing registration code. The hotel requires that you provide this code in order to make reservations during the League's Annual Convention.



This process has been put in place to deter overbooking of rooms and allows registered attendees to take full advantage of the Convention rate and secure housing in the host hotel. This also protects the League from paying attrition fees on rooms that are reserved and cancelled after the Convention rate is closed, and allows us to keep our registration fees lower.

### Housing Rates

Single or double: \$157 (plus an 8% occupancy tax)

### Parking

Free parking is available at the Hyatt Regency.

### Guests

Guest registration includes admission to the Annual Awards Banquet and the receptions. For an additional fee, guests can attend one of the mobile tours offered on Thursday afternoon. Other entertainment in Dearborn includes Greenfield Village, the Henry Ford Museum, shopping, local restaurants, and more! Visit [www.cityofdearborn.org](http://www.cityofdearborn.org) for more information on things to do and see in Dearborn.

## Convention General Information

### *How can I register?*

#### Online!

In order to reduce the amount of printed paper and increase member privacy, the League will no longer accept credit card payments on printable registration forms for League events. All credit card payments are to be completed online via My League ([www.mml.org](http://www.mml.org)). My League is your secure, interactive online League account. It's available to all members and non-members, with a quick and easy sign-up process.

## 112th League Convention Overview

### Tuesday, September 21

9:00 am-12:00 pm	Pre-Convention Workshops
9:00 am-4:00 pm	MAMA Municipal Law Program
10:00 am	Governance Committee Meeting
10:00 am-2:00 pm	Mayoral Summit
2:00 pm	Board of Trustees Meeting
2:00-7:00 pm	Registration Hours
3:30-4:15 pm	First-Time Attendee Orientation
4:30-5:30 pm	Welcoming General Session
6:00-9:00 pm	Host City Reception

### Wednesday, September 22

7:00 am-6:00 pm	Registration Hours
7:30-8:00 am	Continental Breakfast
8:15-10:45 am	General Session
	Parade of Flags
	Community Excellence Award Presentations
	21c3 Speaker Round-Up
11:00 am-12:00 pm	Annual Business Meeting
12:15-1:30 pm	Colloquium Lunch
1:45-3:00 pm	Breakout Sessions
2:00-7:00 pm	Expo Hall Open
3:00-3:30 pm	Networking Break
3:30-4:45 pm	Breakout Sessions
5:00-7:00 pm	Reception in Expo Hall
7:00 pm	Restaurant Romp
8:00 pm	Vendor Hospitality Suites

### Thursday, September 23

7:00 am-6:30 pm	Registration Hours
7:30-8:30 am	Continental Breakfast in the Expo Hall
7:30 am-3:30 pm	Expo Hall Open
7:30 am-2:45 pm	Silent Auction Bidding
9:00-10:15 am	21c3 Speaker Round-Up
10:15-10:30 am	Networking Break
10:30-11:45 am	Breakout Sessions
11:45 am-1:15 pm	Affiliate Organization Luncheons
1:15-2:30 pm	Breakout Sessions
2:30-3:00 pm	Networking Break
3:00-5:00 pm	Tours
6:00-8:30 pm	Reception and Annual Awards Banquet
8:30 pm	Afterglow

### Friday, September 24

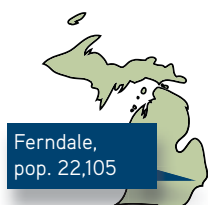
8:30-10:00 am	Closing Breakfast & General Session
	Community Excellence Award
	"Race for the Cup" Winner Announced



# FERNDALE'S NEW FLEET

By Jennifer Eberbach

**A new, more cost-efficient, greener fleet management plan is already in action**



Ferndale has already begun rolling out new municipal vehicles after city officials consulted with Enterprise Fleet Management on a cost-savings strategy. A new municipal lease agreement and the decision to maintain fewer, more fuel-efficient vehicles has freed up cash-flow

and the changes will save Ferndale around \$74,000 as the plan is implemented for the next ten years. A smaller fleet of police cars, dump trucks, vans, and other municipal service vehicles will be more efficiently maintained and replaced a lot sooner than under the old model.

Beyond the cash-flow benefits and cost-savings, Ferndale's new fleet management strategy makes the city a little greener. Officials took suggestions made by the community-led Environmental Sustainability Commission, which was set up by the Sierra Club's "Cool Cities" initiative—and got their endorsement. The new plan is also supporting the local tax-base by getting vehicles delivered through local dealership and maintenance shop Ed Schmid Ford—who hooked them up with new, more fuel-efficient Ford Focus police cars.

"Initially, our main goal was to improve our cash flow," explains Byron Photiades, director of Ferndale's department of public works.

Before changing their strategy, the city was purchasing vehicles straight-out and replacing them every twelve years. It was a big job to come up with

all that cash at once. "From a delivered price standpoint, we would have had to come up with \$185,000 to buy the new cars all at once," he reports. Ferndale's new five-year municipal lease mechanism allows them to spread the cost out—paying \$2,364 a month for all of the police cars, which will be replaced sooner, he says.

The municipality has two skilled mechanics who can perform preventative care and repairs; however "farming out" the work to Ed Schmid's repair shop frees up their hands to get around to all of the equipment that needs working on, which "keeps us on schedule," explains Photiades. By retiring "underutilized" vehicles and maintaining a smaller fleet, the city has more time to "better maintain the vehicles we do have," he adds.

Maintenance savings are significant when you are talking about something like a stop-and-go dump truck that sees a lot of road. Photiades jokes, "It's not like taking the van to and from soccer practice—some of these vehicles are used eight hours a day, five days a week."

**"Where can we be MORE PRODUCTIVE, spend LESS MONEY, and still keep a high level of services—as opposed to just cutting services? When you start cutting services it makes your COMMUNITY less attractive."**

—Byron Photiades, director of public works



*Ferndale replaced Crown Victorias with Ford Focuses; the new fleet reduced fuel costs by 30-40 percent.*

Well-maintained equipment equals well-functioning public services, according to Photiades. “The question was, where can we be more productive, spend less money, and still keep a high level of services—as opposed to just cutting services? When you start cutting services it makes that community less attractive,” he says.

Enterprise Fleet Management’s Regional Sales Manager Jason Weiss reports, the company “has historically provided fleet management services to commercial business,” however, around five years ago, the company started providing “comprehensive” consulting services to government units and municipalities. The company initially connected with Ferndale in 2006 and “really dove in” on collaborating on a strategy for the city’s fleet management issues in mid-2008.


Flash forward to 2010 and Ferndale is also a bit greener. The old police cars were Crown Victorias—large-engine cruisers that get about eight miles to the gallon in the city. Fuel costs were high. Not only was gas costing them money, but the police fleet did not gel with the community’s greener-than-the-average-bear image. The new Ford Focuses get eighteen miles to the gallon on low-speed city streets, which equates to a 35-40 percent reduction in fuel costs and a comparable reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Ferndale’s fleet got the green light from its Environmental Sustainability Commission, an appointed group comprised of volunteers from the community working in many different fields who support an array of causes. In 2008, the commission included a suggestion to update Ferndale’s fleet among its recommendations to Ferndale’s city council.

“Our purpose is to advise city council on ways to influence municipal policy to be friendlier to the environment. We’ve also added an educational component—we have workshops and try to attract people from the community to learn how to be better stewards of the environment,” explains Environmental Sustainability Commission member Leslie Coxon, an engineer by trade.


The Environmental Sustainability Commission started when former Sierra Club Cool Cities initiative organizer Leigh Fifelski, who was a Ferndale resident, worked with the city to create the commission and get them on the Cool Cities bandwagon. The Cool Cities Program is led by volunteers and is a collaborative effort between community members, organizations, businesses, and local leaders to implement clean energy solutions.

Photiades suggests being green “is a part of the image that we have in this city—that we are a progressive city, that we’ve got a lot of young people who have moved in. This is a partnership between government and its citizens to not only save money, but to do things for the environment.”

Freeing up big money and saving some dough, while keeping municipal service vehicles in the service of the Ferndale community, were big motivators to rethinking the way the city managed its fleet. The city was able to figure out a workable plan that will save money, which also aims to support their green and local-minded residents’ attitudes. 

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# SHARED SERVICES, CONSOLIDATION, & COST SAVINGS

Compiled by Kim Cekola

In 2005, Governor Granholm stated that local governments needed to combine services to save money. Since they had been sharing a variety of services for a long time, many local government officials were outraged. This issue has resurfaced in the press—stories on proposed fire consolidation, police consolidation, and 911 Emergency services consolidation have been carried in news outlets across the state. In fact, current examples of intergovernmental cooperation are too numerous (and possibly unknown, since local governments are made up of hard-working but modest people) to list. Below are examples of current shared service arrangements, explorations of consolidation, and examples of cost savings.

### Combined Purchasing Power

Saline collaborated with the Saline Area School Board to share the costs of purchasing and storing road salt for use on city streets and school properties. Purchasing in higher quantities resulted in lower per unit costs and a shared storage facility meant lower total facility costs between the city and the school board.



*In a successful cost savings effort, the cities of Northville and Plymouth share a building official.*

### Personnel Cost Savings

Northville and Plymouth share the use of a single building official. Technically employed by Plymouth, the building official's time is divided and reimbursed on an hourly basis by

Northville. This arrangement allows each city the opportunity to employ an additional building official, while having a portion (close to 50 percent) of the employment costs covered by the other city.

The city of Luna Pier contracts with Erie Township for building inspection services. The inspector works in Erie Township four days a week and spends one day a week in Luna Pier (but can be called by either community for a specific job). Luna Pier pays 25 percent of the building inspector's salary.

Hazel Park and Ferndale share an animal control service. Before 2006, each city had its own officers, but when one retired both communities determined that their combined populations only required one officer. They split the costs of the services 50/50, therefore spending half of what they did to have their own animal control units.

Wixom started an innovative cost saving initiative—the Compressed Work Week. The program consists of a four-day workweek, Monday through Thursday from 7:15 am to 5:30 pm, where employees work 9.375 hours excluding lunch. Police road patrol, fire/rescue, the library and Department of Public Works road maintenance operations are not affected. Overall access to city hall services remains the same; however, time is redistributed resulting in extended hours Monday through Thursday with the closing of non-emergency service operations on Fridays. After a 12-month cost review and performance tracking, the city saved \$48,337, and continues to receive positive comments from the public and employees regarding the many benefits of this program.

### Police/Fire/EMS

The assumption of fire and EMS protection for the Tri-Cities of Keego Harbor, Orchard Lake, and Sylvan Lake, by the West Bloomfield Fire department benefited all communities involved. The Tri-Cities were able to upgrade their fire department from a paid-on-call, basic life support agency to a full-time, advanced life support system at an affordable cost. West Bloomfield was able to reduce response times to the north-east portion of the township years ahead of schedule, without incurring the costs of building a station and purchasing the apparatus and furnishings.

In June 2008, the village of Wolverine Lake and the city of Walled Lake formalized a long-standing commitment to cooperation by signing the Walled Lake & Wolverine Lake Police Shared Services Agreement. Merging their

police departments enabled the municipalities to decrease duplication of service, increase efficiency, streamline operations, strengthen investigative capacity, augment training and equipment, enhance programs including drug education and awareness, and provide a more visible presence in the community as a whole.



*The city of Wixom initiated a cost savings effort “The Compressed Work Week,” a four-day work week, saving the city \$48,337.*

### Joint Planning Commissions

Bellevue and Bellevue Township became the first units of government in the state to form a joint planning commission. The rationale behind the partnership was to protect and enhance the economic condition of the village as the center of trade and commerce, and to protect the agricultural properties in the township.

The following municipalities have also been pioneers in the area of joint planning, with joint master plans, joint planning commissions or joint zoning ordinances:

- Bear Lake/Bear Lake and Pleasanton Townships (Manistee County)
- Frankenmuth/Frankenmuth Township (Saginaw County)
- Fremont/Dayton Township/Sheridan Charter Township (Newaygo County)
- Jonesville/Fayette Township (Hillsdale County)
- Manchester/Manchester, Bridgewater, and Freedom Townships (Washtenaw County)
- Mayville/Fremont Township (Tuscola County)
- Milford/Milford Township (Oakland County)
- Norway/Norway Township (Dickinson County)
- Suttons Bay/Suttons Bay Township (Leelanau County)

### An Intergovernmental Council


Alpena County, the city of Alpena and all the townships in the county formed the Alpena Intergovernmental Council (AIGC) in 1997. Members have been meeting on a quarterly basis to discuss planning, land use, public works, communications, roads and recreation activities, and other topics of mutual concern within the county. Still going strong after more than a decade, current projects include: a major recycling effort; an annual county-wide clean-up; support for joint economic development initiatives; a broadband consortium; mutual aid agreements for police and fire; and committees addressing roads, air/water quality and public safety. Recently the tri-county landfill authority defunded recycling—so, AIGC members joined together and developed a per capita funding formula accepted by the city and townships that is keeping recycling and the local transfer station alive while other options for future funding are being sought. The levels of trust, mutual respect and friendship among units of government in Alpena County are perhaps the greatest achievements of the council and will continue to provide a framework for the cooperation necessary to right-size government.

### Consolidation of Governmental Units

In a monumental undertaking in 2000, the cities of Iron River and Stambaugh combined with the village of Mineral Hills to form the first consolidated city in Michigan. It's hard to imagine the obstacles that were overcome for this to happen, which is quite possibly why there have been no others since. The desire to consolidate governments has not disappeared—in 2006, there was a citizen-initiated effort to consolidate the city of Grand Blanc and Grand Blanc Township into one governmental unit. This effort failed. Currently, there are two areas exploring the feasibility of consolidating governmental units—the city of Saugatuck and Saugatuck Township in southwest Michigan, and the city of Davison and Davison Township in mid-Michigan.

### In Conclusion

Consolidating governmental units, sharing services, or combining purchasing power to get better prices on goods will not solve local governments' deep-rooted fiscal problems. On the other hand, when state revenue sharing is consistently reduced, when unemployment is high and home foreclosure is prevalent, and local governments must continue to cut, cut, cut, then the idea of sharing services at a reduced price looks promising. Think about the programs the municipalities here have implemented, and be proud to be a part of local government in Michigan.

Summaries in this article were drawn from the Land Information Access Association and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. 

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*Kim Cekola is research specialist/publications editor for the League. You may reach her at [kcekola@mml.org](mailto:kcekola@mml.org) or 734-669-6321.*



# CASE STUDY:

## MICHIGAN'S CONSOLIDATION SUCCESS STORY



By Caroline Weber Kennedy

One of the most active and successful areas regarding municipal cooperation and collaboration in this state is the Upper Peninsula. The cities of Iron River and Stambaugh consolidated with the village of Mineral Hills in 2000. This former mining community once again holds a valuable commodity waiting to be tapped—a very timely wealth of knowledge and experience in consolidation matters.

In March 2000, the League published an article in *The Review* on the unprecedented consolidation of these three municipal entities. The results of the long consolidation process were reported:


*The people of the three communities approved the adoption of a charter which provides for the consolidation of three units into one new city with an estimated population of 3,576 effective July 1, 2000. Of the 949 persons voting, 76.6 percent cast their ballots in favor of the proposal.*

*This success came on the heels of two previous attempts to pass other consolidation proposals. The result surpassed the highest expectations of even the proposal's staunchest supporters. By community, the vote was as follows:*

Municipality:		
Iron River	394	75
Stambaugh	270	124
Mineral Hills	63	23

There were of course sticky issues during the consolidation process, such as: Will there be a name change? What happens to business names if the community name(s) change (what does Village Auto become when it is no longer located in a village, but a city)? What about street addresses? What about contracts, employees, and elected officials? The three communities were able to work these issues out. The key was a long “engagement.” Not so long that a date was never set, but long enough to take advantage of attrition in each municipality, combining positions and functions, creating new roles and phasing roles out, and renegotiating.

If you are thinking about consolidation, the first thing you need to do is identify all possible stakeholders, consider their concerns, and be prepared to answer questions thoughtfully and truthfully. Then, practice saying the “c” word out loud and settle in for a long engagement.

Iron River has many of the answers you’ll need up front and along the way. Like any successful marriage, it’s hard work. School rivalries often serve as community identifiers, but as these districts consolidated, differences dissolved. And despite the vast array of ethnicities here from the mining and timber eras, the people remaining have a shared history and socio-economic base. One reason it worked for Iron River is that the people have more in common than not—and acknowledgement of that is a critical first step. 

### HISTORY OF CONSOLIDATION EFFORTS IN MICHIGAN

#### 1982

Vote to merge the city of Battle Creek and a portion of Battle Creek Township passed 3-to-1.

#### 1993

After a five-year effort, the proposed consolidation of the village of Spring Lake and city of Ferrysburg failed after it was voted down in Spring Lake (it passed in Ferrysburg).

#### 2000

The cities of Iron River and Stambaugh, and the village of Mineral Hills consolidated into the city of Iron River.

#### 2006

A consolidation effort for the city of Grand Blanc and Grand Blanc Township failed. While the township was highly in favor of consolidation, the city was opposed.

*Caroline Weber Kennedy is manager of field operations for the League. You may reach her at 906-428-0100 or [ckennedy@mml.org](mailto:ckennedy@mml.org).*

# Are Personal Emails Captured on a Public Body's Computer System Subject to FOIA?

### Facts:

In March 2007, Chetly Zarko submitted a series of FOIA requests to the Howell Public Schools, including requests for all email to and from three Howell teachers, all of whom were also officials of the Howell Education Association. The requests were made in the context of heated negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement between the school district and union. All of the emails in question were captured on the school district's computer system. It was undisputed that Howell Public Schools is a public body subject to FOIA.

The teacher's union objected to the release of emails that addressed union matters on the basis that those emails were personal and not "public records" as defined under Michigan's Freedom of Information Act. Howell schools responded that there was no case law over this issue. The Howell Education Association then filed a complaint requesting a declaratory judgment, in part, that personal emails and emails pertaining to union business are not "public records" as defined by FOIA.

A "public record" is defined as "a writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body in the performance of an official function, from the time it is created" under Michigan's FOIA statute. MCL 15.232(e).

The teachers were also subject to the acceptable use policy of Howell Public Schools which states that employees may only use the school's computer system for "appropriate educational purposes." The policy further provides that email is not considered private communication and that any use outside of the "instructional goals" may constitute misuse of the system.

### Question #1:

Are personal emails that are generated through a public body's email system that are retained or stored by a public body "public records" and subject to disclosure under FOIA?

### Answer according to the trial court:

YES. The trial court determined that emails generated through the schools' email system that are retained or stored by the district are public records because they are "in the possession of, or retained by" Howell Public Schools.

### Answer according to the court of appeals:

NO. The court of appeals held that "mere possession of a record by a public body" does not render the record a public document. Rather, the use or retention of the document must be "in the performance of an official function." The court stated that for the emails at issue to be public records, they must have been stored or retained by the school district in the performance of an official function.

The court further reasoned that there was nothing about the personal emails, given that by their very definition they have nothing to do with the operation of the schools, which indicates that they are required for the operation of an educational institution.

### Question #2:

Does misuse by an employee of a public employer's acceptable use policy, to which the employee has agreed, render personal emails subject to FOIA?

### Answer according to the court of appeals:


NO. A public employee's misuse of the technology resources provided by a public employer, by sending private emails, does not render those emails public record. (Note: It is unclear if the trial court ruled on this issue.)

### Question #3:

Were the emails that involved "internal union communications" personal emails?

### Answer according to the court of appeals:

YES. To the extent that such communications do not involve teachers acting in their official capacity as public employees, but rather in their personal capacity as Howell Education Association members, such communications are personal and not subject to FOIA.

*Howell Education Association v Howell Board of Education and Howell Public Schools*, No. 288977, January 26, 2010 

Sue Jeffers is associate general counsel for the League. You may contact her at 734-669-6306 or [sjeffers@mml.org](mailto:sjeffers@mml.org).





## The Breezeway: A Nostalgic Rural Ride

A fine example of collaboration in northern Michigan is a project both officially and affectionately known as The Breezeway. County Road 48, aka The Breezeway, is a gorgeous 28-mile stretch connecting Boyne Falls to East Jordan to Ellsworth to Atwood. It has all the crucial elements of a nostalgic rural route—gliding up hill and down vale, winding 'round reflective lakes and slipping past historic farms. It is a stunning scenic drive in each of Michigan's distinctive seasons and those capricious days between.



*Breezeway events include the much-loved Breezeway Cruise.*

In June, the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Breezeway Cruise saw classic cars, motorcycles, hot rods and pick-ups, all bearing a common denominator—their drivers love this ride! The same can be said of Memorial Weekend, when hundreds participated in the first (and possibly annual) Breezeway Garage Sale, a locally adapted version of the “World’s Longest Yard Sale” along 127 from Ohio to Alabama.

### Branding and Maniacs

C-48 has long been a favorite route of both residents and visitors. The idea for “branding” the route germinated from a seed planted about seven years ago as one recommendation within a greater Chain of Lakes marketing study. “Branding” builds a public image or identity allowing for businesses and communities along the route to be promoted through marketing events as part of a larger whole. This helps a rural area become its own destination “point.” A number of entities presented the proposed project in application for one of the governor’s Regional Centers for Excellence Award grants and received \$25,000 over two years. Entering its second year, The Breezeway promises to be worthy.



*Part of the allure of this northern Michigan location is the gorgeous fall colors. Photo by Thomas P. Mann.*

On May 10, the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance held its annual luncheon and awards ceremony with the Breezeway Task Force receiving one of only two annual awards presented by the four-county Alliance—The Maniacs of the Year. The Maniacs is awarded for “enthusiastic economic development, leadership and encouraging a spirit of cooperation for the betterment of the C-48 communities.” Talk about enthusiasm—a turnout of 400+ people for the Alliance event illustrates the level of unity being achieved through regional collaboration on the rural front. [www.northernlakes.net](http://www.northernlakes.net)

### Attractions, Events and Plans

The Breezeway branding efforts included creating a website with the brand identity, tying all of community partners and businesses together through maps and listings. Distinctive signs were posted along the route with a ribbon-cutting at each, generating enthusiasm and media. In addition to the garage sale and classic car cruise, there is a fall color tour



*The fall color tour begins in Atwood and ends with a chairlift ride at Boyne Mountain. Photo by Boyne Michigan.*

with a Halloween costume theme beginning in Atwood and ending with a chair-lift ride at Boyne Mountain. The events are organized through the East Jordan Area Chamber of Commerce for the benefit of more than 200 businesses along the route, including a hand-blown glassworks. The route also features numerous agri-businesses including historic Stone Hedge fiber mill where visitors can purchase wool products and watch the entire process from shearing to dying.

Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy not only hiking, kayak and canoe opportunities, but the area boasts one of only two outfitters in Michigan that offer *winter rafting*. The Jordan River National Fish Hatchery received \$2.5 million in federal stimulus money and joins the Raven Hill Discovery Center for providing family-oriented education and adventure. Coming new to the route are several geo-caching sites and an historical map featuring two ghost towns and the “stolen” town of Afton. East Jordan Area Chamber of Commerce Director Mary Faculak says the Breezeway Task Force is looking forward to a road upgrade for the Atwood-Ellsworth section that would enable them to hold safe cycling events on the popular route. There is a world-class resort nearby, with which the area enjoys a symbiotic relationship but, “The immediate area’s lodging is limited,” says Faculak. “We have a great river location for which we are currently seeking investors, so this collaboration is yielding very tangible results.”

Both the Quilt Cottage and Soaps ‘n Such report visitors from Battle Creek, Jackson, and Kalamazoo arriving with news clippings of The Breezeway. There are resale shops for those who love recycling and benefiting others and the East Jordan Area Arts Council provides mini exhibits and workshops. Each of these unique places was like a loose gemstone, easily lost or overlooked, now linked together in a magnificent display that is The Breezeway.

### The Front Porch—A Non-Profit Community Cafe

The village of Ellsworth, struggling with 16-percent unemployment faced tough times the past two years as their only local diner and grocery store both closed their doors. Residents were left with nowhere to connect for even a cup of coffee. Meanwhile, a number of good-hearted citizens were mulling over bright ideas, and together they reopened the diner as The Front Porch—a non-profit community cafe serving breakfast and lunch from a menu with suggested donation amounts, instead of prices. It’s a local place for non-denominational fellowship and welcomes everyone. Only the cook and manager are employed, all others volunteer. At 3:00 pm, when the cook goes home, a fresh pot of coffee is left for those still socializing. Literally, the last one to leave turns out the lights. NPR and a number of other media outlets featured the story, and coupled with its connection to The Breezeway, this unique diner is now a popular tourist stop, which is great for local business. A true community development project, the café now fosters economic development. For more on The Front Porch, check out [www.thefrontporchellsworth.org](http://www.thefrontporchellsworth.org) or locate them through [www.ridethebreezeway.com](http://www.ridethebreezeway.com). 



*A true community development project, The Front Porch is a non-profit community café, opened after the only local diner closed. There are two paid employees—the cook and manager—the rest are volunteers. Photo by William D. Jackson.*

### Boyne City Wins NLEA Award

Congratulations to Boyne City for winning NLEA’s Project of the Year award for their One Water Street project, a \$12 million waterfront complex including restaurant, commercial, retail, hotel and marina components.

Caroline Weber Kennedy is manager of field operations for the League. You may reach her at 906-428-0100 or [ckennedy@mml.org](mailto:ckennedy@mml.org).







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### Quorum Question, Cityhood, and Other Issues

**Q:** With five of seven trustees present at the last council meeting of our general law village, the council voted to fill a council vacancy by a 3-2 vote. Are three votes or four votes required for a motion to pass—or does it depend on the nature of the motion?

**A:** MCL 62.1(1) of the General Law Village Act (1895 PA 3) states “In all votes for which not less than a majority vote of council is required, the calculation of the number of votes required shall be based on the maximum number that constitutes council.” For a seven person council, four constitutes a majority—and a quorum (MCL 61.1b). For any action in which the GLV Act specifically requires “a majority of council,” four votes would be required. For a GLV that has reduced the number of trustees to five, three votes are required for all actions requiring “a majority of council.”

So to answer your question directly, it depends in part on the nature and content of the motion. For those actions not requiring a “majority of council” in the GLV Act, e.g. appointments, local council rules will determine whether a majority of the council as a whole or a majority of those present is required.

Home Rule Villages and cities will need to check their local charter and/or council rules to answer this question.

**Q:** I saw in the newspaper that the village of Caseville became a city. Why would a village want to become a city?

**A:** On our website there is a paper called the “Impact of Changing from a Village to a City,” which discusses this in depth. However, long story short, becoming a city generally allows the community more flexibility and control of its internal affairs. Although there may be some savings to the residents as they no longer will have to pay township taxes, villages considering incorporation need to be aware that they will also now be required to assess property, collect taxes, and conduct county, state, and national elections. For more information, visit our website at [www.mml.org/resources/information/incorporation.htm](http://www.mml.org/resources/information/incorporation.htm).


**Q:** We need to upgrade our water system and were awarded Recovery Act monies to do so. The money is part grant and part loan. We will have to increase

water rates to pay back the loan. Some of our residents object to the increase and want to circulate a petition to put the matter on the ballot at the next election. Can they do that?

**A:** Perhaps. In order for a local government to borrow money—even from the federal government—it must issue a bond. Under state law, the municipality is required to publish a notice of the right of referendum. The residents then have 45 days to circulate and file a petition to stop the sale of the bonds, pending a vote of the people.

A note of caution: Although citizens generally have the right to petition, it is not the responsibility of the local government to provide them the forms or wording. In fact, caution must be used to not provide any information that might be construed as legal advice.

**Q:** At our last city commission meeting, a resolution was defeated by a tie vote with one commissioner absent. Many commissioners want this exact resolution brought back at our next meeting in the same form to have a new vote. There is nothing in our charter or commission rules that prohibits bringing the exact same resolution back before the commission. Some have raised a claim that this is prohibited by Robert’s Rules of Order. Can you give some advice and direction on this issue please?

**A:** First of all, it should be noted that Robert’s Rules of Order only govern a commission’s decision-making process, if the commission has formally adopted Robert’s Rules of Order. Voting again on a motion that has failed is not prohibited by Robert’s, except when it is done in the same meeting, and even then a member may move to reconsider the failed motion. What the commission is proposing to do is definitely permissible. Part of the confusion occurs because it is very natural to use the words “bring back” and that phrase conjures up questions related to the motions to reconsider and to rescind. Those motions do have some restrictions; however, neither motion is related to what your commission wants to do in this case. 

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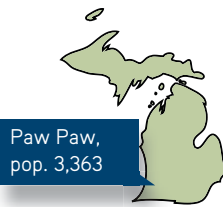
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