the review

the official magazine of the michigan municipal league

March/April 2008

michigan municipal league

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The Review

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The Review is the official magazine of the Michigan Municipal League. It serves as a medium of exchange of ideas and information for the officials of Michigan communities. The views expressed and the data presented by contributors and advertisers are not to be construed as having the endorsement of the officers, staff or membership of the League.

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A Busy Spring for Communities in Michigan

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

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

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

What's An MWAC?
As part of the League's strategic direction, we have placed the highest priority on boosting our organizational communications in 2008. The initial feedback regarding changes to *The Review* and the website has been fantastic. I appreciate all of the positive comments from members about the improvements that have already been made and can promise that we are just touching the surface of what we will be doing in the coming months.

As a means to enhance our traditional media communications in the same way, we recently retained Martin-Waymire Advocacy Communications (MWAC) of Lansing to spearhead our strategic communications efforts. Our role in the policy development process in the state has never been more critical, and our relationship with MWAC is already paying dividends. In an age when information overload is as common as snow in the U.P., it takes an expert touch to craft a message that can cut through the endless noise. The MWAC team has proven through the years that they can do it. Their aggressive strategies for gaining positive media mesh well with our hard-hitting policy agenda for communities in our state. If you're interested in learning more about Roger, Dave, and their crew you can check them out online at www.mwadvocacy.com.

Regional Seminars Offer You a Chance to Show Off!
The League's 2008 slate of Regional Seminars begin with Region I on April 18 in Wixom and won't conclude until June 4-6 in Baraga. In addition to outstanding professional development and networking opportunities, the meetings will again act as the launching pad for the Race for the Cup. Building on last year's initial success that saw the city of St. Joseph take home the first Community Excellence Award Cup for their wildly successful public art program, we are hoping for even more terrific entries this year.

The rules are straight forward. We are looking to highlight outstanding community projects undertaken or completed during the past year. To enter a project in the competition, communities are asked to make a brief presentation at their respective Regional Seminar. All members in attendance will then select which community project will represent the region at the League's Annual Convention on Mackinac Island in October, where the entire membership will choose the year's top project. Last year's list of entries acted as true inspirations for communities across our state and reminded everyone of what was attainable with vision and hard work. I can't wait to see what you have in store this year!

Daniel P. Gilmartin is executive director of the Michigan Municipal League. You may contact Dan at 734-669-6302, 800-653-2483 or dpg@mml.org.

Great American "City Firsts" Trivia Questionnaire

Which city was first to...?

1. What was the first city in the US to implement 911?

A. Addison, TX B. Essex, CT C. Salem, MA D. Haleyville, AL

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

A. Ellenville, NY B. Wabash, IN C. Boulder, CO D. Hamilton, OH

3. What was the first city in the nation to install a telephone exchange?

A. Salt Lake City, UT B. San Jose, CA C. New Haven, CT D. Madison, WI

4. What was the first city in the US to deploy city-wide Wi-Fi Internet connectivity?

A. Grand Haven, MI B. Spokane, WA C. Jacksonville, FL D. Cerritos, CA

Answers

1) D; 2) B; 3) C; 4) D

Grand Haven, Michigan. On July 29, 2004, the Mayor of Grand Haven, Roger Berman, announced the completion and full operation of America's first city-wide Wi-Fi broadband network with coverage extending 15 miles into Lake Michigan. Others have claimed the prize, but history will show that Grand Haven is the real deal for city-wide Wi-Fi.

Where is the Wi-Fi?

Coldwater, Bronson, Quincy, and Tekonsha (all operated by the Coldwater Board of Public Utilities) Grand Haven Ferrysburg Spring Lake Scottville Gladstone

*Cities in the process of acquiring Wi-Fi

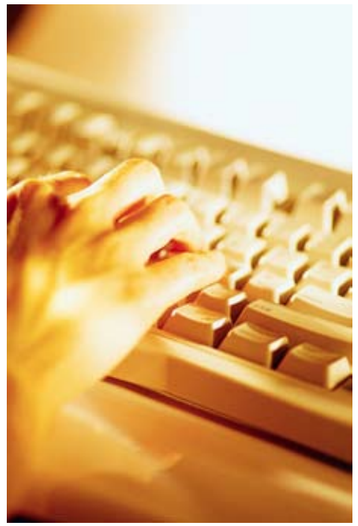
Muskegon Grand Rapids Traverse City Springfield

Westland to provide free dial-up Internet service

In January, the city started providing free dial-up internet to residents. The first residents allowed to sign up will be those 50 and older, then the service opens up to residents under 50. Signing up is fairly simple–users will be given a dial-up number and password to allow them to log on from their home computers. They must have computers with a modem. The library will provide technical support for those with questions.

By Jeanette Westhead

What You Don't Know Can Hurt You



Globalization, **information** and **connectivity** have changed the rules of business and government in the 21st Century. The knowledge-based economy, driven by knowledge-based jobs, is replacing the failing manufacturing-based economy. Goods and services are being developed, bought, sold and delivered over electronic networks.

Officials who participated in the 2007 Annual Convention saw the League's version of the widely distributed "Did You Know" video. This video brings home the exponential pace at which technology is changing and shrinking the world in which we live.

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

What does this mean for Michigan?

To attract talented millennial workers, communities will have to provide both the physical and technical infrastructure that appeals to them. Young talent is drawn to areas that promote and value learning, entrepreneurial spirit and diversity.

Physical infrastructure:

- active art and entertainment scenes
- walkable communities
- a mix of residential and commercial uses
- mass transit

Technical infrastructure:

- Wi-Fi, advanced Internet connections
- video conferencing, virtual meetings and access to distance learning
- collaborative development environments

How do we promote a knowledge-based Michigan?

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

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

Did You Know...

More than 50% of today's 21 year olds have created content on the web

70% of 4 year olds have used a computer

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

Radio...38
TV...13
Computer...4

The amount of technical information is doubling every few years

Something to ponder...

If knowledge-based workers could choose to live anywhere,

why would they choose to live in ____ (your town)?

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

Feature Article

By Brenda Currin

Are You e?

e-commerce, e-business, e-learning, and now e-government. Everyone has a website. It's a twenty-first century version of hanging out your shingle. But there's more to e-government than having a website. It's been only thirteen years since the U.S. government went online. In that short time, and often riding on the coattails of commercial applications, governments have learned to use their websites as a tool for administering programs, providing services, and engaging citizens in government and community. Those online capabilities are the "e" in e-government. For many smaller governments, your first website probably was the baby of an innovative employee, willing to take it on as an extra assignment. Now that website has grown, and it represents a significant investment of time and tax dollars. How can you be sure it's working for you? How can you be sure it has value to your staff and your citizens? A simple analysis of your site will give you some clues. It takes no expertise— no surveys, no focus groups, no statistics. Those tools may be helpful later, if you need to make changes. But for starters, use the questions presented in the analysis tool accompanying this article to look at your site and estimate for yourself how well it achieves six key goals of e-government:

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

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

In the Blink of an Eye, Historically Speaking

"e" is everywhere, but it's still a newcomer. Big users of the Internet can easily forget just how recently it swept in and changed everything. Think back twenty years, to 1987: chances are you hadn't even heard of it. Lots of Apple IIe's and 286s were around, but nothing was networked. Four years later—1991—the Internet was the newest thing, but it was all text. It allowed limited access to university and government resources from a distance. Then www—the World Wide Web—hit like a tidal wave. Suddenly, individuals, schools, and small businesses could access and publish information through graphic websites on the Internet. If you were in the corporate world, you may have gone online a little earlier, but for most people, the Internet entered the mainstream of American life only 10–15 years ago. Look at a comparable technology revolution: The automobile first entered the mainstream of American life in 1913 when Ford introduced the moving assembly line to mass-produce cars. The next fifteen years were filled with innovations that Americans today take absolutely for granted—stop signs, traffic lights, four-wheel brakes, car heaters, safety glass, numbered highways. Over the last fifteen years, the Internet has gone through comparable developments in speed, capabilities, and the role it plays in people's lives. When anything changes that fast, it's no surprise that some individuals and organizations are running a few years behind the curve. But with the Internet, a few years behind is a big

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gap. Closing that gap requires leadership and a commitment of human and financial resources. At the same time, it offers an interesting opportunity to benefit from the experiences, successes, and failures of others. You also can refer to your own experiences using Web resources to help decide what works, what's important, and where to focus your investment.

What Makes Government "e"?

The Internet broke out of its government/Defense Department/university incubator after the World Wide Web and graphic websites hit the scene. Corporations and businesses have led the way in developing new online capabilities: buying and selling, teaching and learning, creating spectacular visual impact, providing all kinds of services. In a short time, e-commerce has completely changed how people do business, locally, nationally, and internationally. e-government uses the tools of e-commerce to enhance delivery of government information and services to government employees, citizens, and government's business partners. e-government has been slower to develop than e-commerce but is now a strong presence at national, state, and local levels. The U.S. government went online in 1993. Now people can file taxes, apply for jobs, and access information and services from all government agencies online. By 2004, 98% of cities surveyed across the United States had some kind of website, and 77% had websites that allowed the public to conduct online transactions and receive online services.[1] When local governments first start, your websites often are not much more than online brochures of static information. They tell who you are, introduce your departments, give phone numbers, and often present travel information or histories of your community. The next step in developing the website is to add some information about the services each department offers—hours, employees to call, and e-mail contact information. Not really "e" yet. When you start adding forms and applications for people to download, when you start organizing information by user groups (contractors, homeowners, businesses, seniors, etc.) rather than by departments, when you start providing outside links to help people solve problems that go beyond the services you offer directly—these steps take you into the realm of "e." When you enable people to make payments for services or taxes online, when you make it possible for people to submit completed forms and applications online, when you reduce the cost of providing services and improve the level of services by offering them online—then you are deep in "e."[2] Congratulations!

Where Are You?

So where are you on the continuum from a website about your local government to e-government? You can use the observations and questions provided in the accompanying analysis tool to evaluate your website on six of the key goals of e-government—and therefore of website design.3 Doing the analysis should take you only an hour or two at your computer. (A few outreach questions involve talking to your staff to get additional insight, if you have the time.) If the examples offered don't apply to your community, try to think of something similar that does.

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

1—Focus on People

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

The current emphasis in e-government is to provide services, information, and transactions that citizens want and need. Savvy web designers base design decisions on the needs of the target clientele, so they help you carefully identify your clientele—citizens, employees, business partners—early in the site-development process. Input

Part 1—Focus on People

What to Look For — **Website Analysis**

___ Yes	___ No	Does your home page (the first page of your website) have links taking different groups of citizens (new residents, families, employees, etc.) to the information they are most likely to need?
___ Yes	___ No	Is some of the information arranged in a question-and-answer format?
___ Yes	___ No	Is there a Frequently Asked Questions section?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people find out what procedures to follow for a variety of common problems? Test the website: Can they find out what to do about a stray dog? How to get a building permit? How to help an elderly relative apply for Medicare? How to dispose of paint and solvents?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people find schedules and agendas for public meetings?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people review the minutes of public meetings online?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people request services online? For instance, can they e-mail someone to obtain a duplicate copy of their tax statement online?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people make comments about the website? If they make comments, do they get replies?

Not every planning and zoning decision will end up in front of a judge.

In fact, most won't. But considering the potential for damages resulting from a lawsuit, taking careful measures to ensure proper decision-making is the responsible thing to do. There are many risks a community may face in zoning litigation that go beyond just having the zoning decision overturned.

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

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

For more information visit

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from your clientele plays a significant role in determining the content and organization of the website. Secretaries and receptionists can offer tremendous insight into what people want and need. What do they request? What do they call about? What do they have to come to the office for? Websites can provide a primary source of information for citizens: How do I . . . ? Where can I find . . . ? Whom do I speak to for . . . ? The history of your community has its place on your website, but history is not what most people need on a daily basis to run their business, get their house built, get their trash picked up, or get their kids enrolled in community athletic programs. Assess your site on this dimension (see "Website Analysis," Part 1, on page 7).

2—Focus on Service

Can people transact their business with you online?

Most starter websites focused on information: let us tell you about our departments and programs—where they are located, what they do, who the key staff are. It didn't take businesses long to realize they could do a lot more over the Internet than provide information. Quickly they had people shopping, ordering, and paying electronically. In the dot.com revolution of the 1990s, they harnessed the Internet as a means of providing business and shopping services to their customers. Government services are rarely as tidy as the business buy-and-sell model. But many governments now use their websites as tools for providing at least some of their standard services. In addition to being a source of information about processes and procedures, the website becomes a source of the forms and applications needed to get permits and apply for services. It provides information about fees; it also is a means of paying those fees. People can find out about job openings or bid opportunities on the website; they also can apply for jobs or submit bids online. A service-oriented website puts people in touch with solutions, yours and others'. Links to higher levels of government, integrated into your website, can serve as a seamless extension of your services. Your website can help the people in your community find information and make transactions that they need and want. Whether the service comes from you or from the state or federal government, your site becomes the portal for "one-stop government." e-government services do not replace written, telephone, fax, and counter services. Many people have no access or minimal access to the Internet and online services, or they are not comfortable using the Internet to transact business. Complex cases and problems do not lend themselves to Internet solutions. Governments always will need to maintain effective face-to-face channels for providing services.

Part 2—Focus on Service — **Website Analysis**

What to Look For

___ Yes	___ No	Can people download applications for an outdoor-fire permit? A driveway permit? A business privilege license? A county or city job? A marriage license?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people fill out and submit these applications online?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people access county or city ordinances?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people access county maps? Property records? Geographic information system (GIS) information?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people register to vote online? Reserve public facilities? Order copies of birth certificates?
___ Yes	___ No	Does the website give people the option of registering for community events?
___ Yes	___ No	Can people pay their local taxes online? Their water bills?
___ Yes	___ No	Is there a clear notice that financial transactions such as the foregoing are guaranteed to be secure?
___ Yes	___ No	Are privacy policies clearly announced on the site?
___ Yes	___ No	Does the website have a service that lets people request e-mail updates on certain topics?
___ Yes	___ No	Does the website include a survey or polling feature that solicits input on certain topics of public interest?
___ Yes	___ No	Can employees take care of government business online, such as filling out expense reports?

But for many people who want standard, common services from government, the website offers round-the-clock information and services from the convenience of home.

3—Usability

Can people find what they're looking for on your website? Is it easy to use, read, and understand?

Many factors contribute to the impact your website has on people. If they get discouraged in the first few minutes trying to get help, that's just as bad as if you had a receptionist in your front office who was rude or didn't know much about the services you provide. Creating a website that's easy to use requires, again, a focus on the people using it: What will they be looking for? What words will they use to try to get to that information? How well do they read, and what language do they speak? What kind of computer

are they using, and how fast is their Internet connection? A U.S. Department of Education study of adult literacy indicates that half of all Americans read at the eighth-grade level or lower. Unfortunately, the average readability of U.S. government websites in 2003 was the eleventh-grade level.[4] Highly educated people who write content for websites may require special training to learn to write at an appropriate level for their target audience. "Plain-language writing" now is a requirement for federal government documents and websites (though sometimes you wouldn't know that). It uses words and sentence structures that are appropriate to the targeted audience. Jargon and acronyms appear only if the target audience for that piece of information will be familiar with them. Designing for usability also requires some understanding of how people access and use information. Your menus and links need to make sense and be easy to navigate. Organizing websites by department or agency has minimal use for citizens. They don't know which department is responsible for a given service. Instead, you should organize information by topic, interest group, keyword, or some other category that makes sense to the users of the site. Finally, your site needs to be aesthetically pleasing. This doesn't mean it needs to have lots of "Wow" and "Cool." In fact, too much can distract from the users' focus on their mission with your website (and you). The site tells people something about the character of your community. It makes an impression, and you want it to be a good one. Pages should be uncluttered so that people can find what they want. Pages should include graphic elements to focus attention on important information. And they should definitely use colors and fonts that are easy to see and read. Assess your site on this dimension.

Part 3—Usability

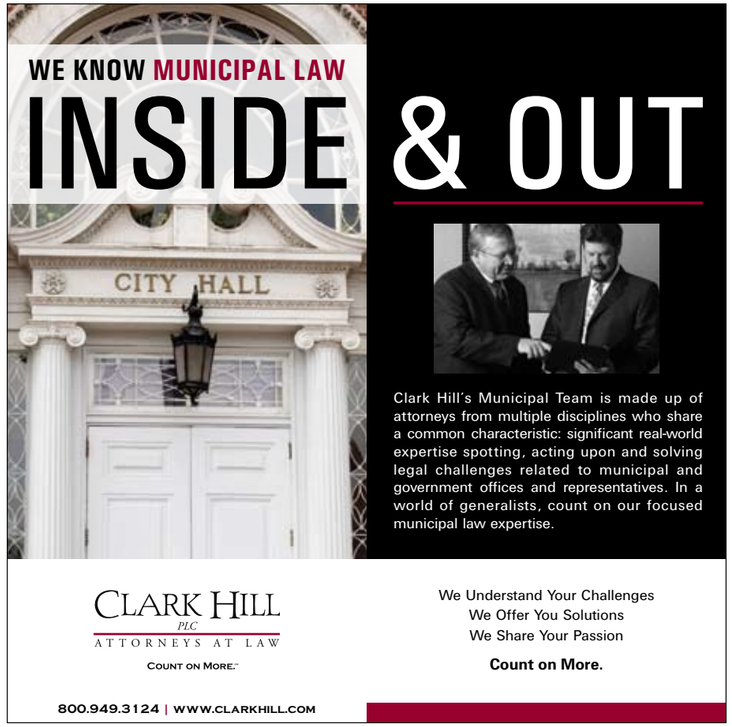
What to Look For — **Website Analysis**

___ Yes ___ No	Does the look of your home page give a good first impression of your city or county? What does it tell people about your community?
___ Yes ___ No	Is the home page cluttered? Does it take more than a moment to see how the front page is organized and what the options are?
___ Yes ___ No	Can people look at the menu options on the home page and decide easily which menu to click if they need to talk to the city or county manager? Get a permit for a new well? Renew a book at the library?
___ Yes ___ No	Does your website have a sitewide search tool?
___ Yes ___ No	Does your website have an index?
___ Yes ___ No	Does the website load quickly?
___ Yes ___ No	Do all the links work correctly?
___ Yes ___ No	Print several pages from your website. Do they print correctly, without cutting off the words on the right margin?
___ Yes ___ No	Is general information for the public written in short, easy-to-read sentences and paragraphs? Does the website use bulleted lists to make information even easier to understand?

4—Accessibility

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

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that governments receiving federal funding comply with certain standards for making websites accessible to people with visual and other impairments.[5] The World Wide Web Consortium has developed a similar set of Priority Level 1 guidelines for ensuring accessibility.[6] These standards are not required of local governments, but they do set an ideal for service to all members of the community. Philip Young covered the topic of standards thoroughly in the Winter 2005 issue of Popular Government.[7] The website analysis accompanying this article provides two



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

–Robert Petty, President, Michigan Government Management Information Sciences

Sterling Heights

Novi

Midland

Livonia

Wyoming

Kalamazoo

Role Models

These municipal websites are examples of exemplary Michigan local government websites. The Michigan Government Management Information Sciences group gives out a yearly "Best Website" award; the city of **Kalamazoo** was honored with this award in 2007. The other cities' websites are previous winners and runners-up.

Part 4—Accessibility

Website Analysis

What to Look For

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

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

simple questions you can use to check whether your website design addresses some basic Section 508 accessibility standards. Assess your site on this dimension (see "Website Analysis," Part 4, on this page).

5—Effective Content Management

Is your site updated frequently, and is the information accurate?

How useful is a website that was "last updated on January 23, 2001"? You might as well not have a website if you don't have a system for managing the content—for maintaining the site effectively and keeping information accurate and up-to-date. Whether you use contractors or have an in-house website manager, content management will always have a strong tie back to your departments. They drive the updates. If your system requires that all website changes go through the director of finance or the sheriff's administrative assistant (because ten years ago he or she took it on as an extra assignment), it may be hard to get timely information posted. Even if you have a designated staff member or department to maintain the website, there may be a bottleneck in getting new information posted. One option for reducing the bottleneck is use of specialized software for content management.

6—Costs and Benefits

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

If your citizens don't have to drive to your office, if you don't have to mail the forms, if your people can get the information they need today, if you don't have to spend time on the phone explaining

Part 5—Effective Content Management

Website Analysis

What to Look For

___ Yes ___ No Does your website say when it was last updated? How recently was it updated?

___ Yes ___ No If you have a calendar of meetings and events, are meetings and events posted for the next several months?

___ Yes ___ No Think of the most recent personnel change at the department-head level. Is the new hire listed on the website?

___ Yes ___ No If you have a News, or What's New?, or Current Events link, are the items posted current and relatively new?

___ Yes ___ No Is there any place to post critical information such as weather-related closings?

___ Yes ___ No Is there any information on your website about significant recent or upcoming events, such as tax due dates, property tax reappraisals, elections, and changes to ordinances? Is the information up-to-date?

Outreach Question

___ Yes ___ No Ask staff members what they do to make a change in or post information to the website. Can department heads get new information posted on the site within a week if they need to?

Content Development versus Content Management

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

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

"Content management" refers to maintaining a website—adding information and keeping content up-to-date. It is one of the biggest challenges of successful e-government. Specialized software for content management makes it possible to assign individual passwords for each page on the website. These passwords give one person in each department or agency access to that unit's content on the website. The interface is very simple, so staff members don't need to learn specialized web programming software. The software allows each unit to control its own critical information and service offerings. The software also spreads the work of maintaining the website among more people without risking unwanted changes to the website's underlying programming and design. Sixty-eight percent of U.S. cities are currently using or testing specialized software for managing website content.[1]

Note

1. National League of Cities and Center for Digital Government, 2004 Digital Cities Survey—Final Survey Report (Washington, D.C.: the League; Folsom, Calif.: the Center, 2004).

Part 6—Costs and Benefits

Website Analysis

What to Look For

___ Yes ___ No Can users download a job application form? An application for a building permit? Applications for social services? Requests for proposals (RFPs) for government purchases or contracts?

___ Yes ___ No Can users fill in and submit any of the foregoing forms online?

Outreach Questions

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

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

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

procedures—all save money for you or someone in your community.

Secretaries, receptionists, and other employees can answer the same basic questions hundreds of times a month by phone. If half of the callers could find the information they need on your website, it would free your staff for other work. They could provide more service to people who do need to call or come in for personal attention. Likewise, posting forms online to download saves you the time and cost of mailing materials, and people and businesses the time and cost of coming to your office. Even better, if people can fill out forms online, that saves a secretary the time it would take to enter information from a written application into a database or another computer format. And if people can make payments online, they'll save postage or travel time, and you'll save the cost of personnel to accept payments in person. It's easy to monitor these benefits by recording "hits": how many people access the website, how many people look at each individual page, and how many times each file is downloaded from the website. You can even collect information on whether the hits are from new or repeat visitors. Using this information, it isn't hard to project savings in staff time, printing, and postage and to determine which online services are offering the most benefit to the community.

Some other advantages of online services are less tangible, relating to hidden costs or enhanced opportunities. Websites overcome some of the obstacles of sharing information with large groups. They can serve a relatively unlimited number of users at the same time. They can spread demand for service over more of the twenty-four-hour day. And they can serve people over a wide geographic area. For economic development, the website is most likely the first impression you make on people and businesses considering relocation to your community.

Government officials cite long-term economic benefits to justify major investments in recruiting new businesses and industries. You can use the same justification for developing a website showing that the community is dynamic and that the local government offers great services to residents and citizens. Online services may actually cut the cost of providing services, and they may allow you to improve the quality and effectiveness of services. A 2003 Australian study of e-government benefits reported that cost savings are achieved through a combination of direct savings, savings on delivery costs, and improved internal processes. Some agencies even have an increase in revenue from the use of new chargeable services.[8] Services such as renewing driver's licenses and hunting licenses, or ordering copies of birth and death certificates, can be offered online with a fee attached. Of course, you need to ensure the security of all online transactions.

In addition, online services can provide improved service at no additional cost. Individuals and businesses estimate a cost savings of up to $25 per transaction due to faster turnaround of information requests and faster access to documents and forms. In the Australian study, more than 90 percent of citizens surveyed indicated an overall improvement in service delivery as a result of using e-government.

Now What? Strategies for Adding "e"

The accompanying analysis isn't a pass/fail evaluation. It suggests a continuum of investment. If you answered yes to a lot of the questions, then you're significantly invested in e-government.

Indeed, in doing the analysis, you may have gotten some additional ideas that will help you develop an even more dynamic, citizen-centered, service-oriented online presence. If you couldn't answer yes to many of the questions, then you know you have an opportunity for growth. This is not a time to place blame. The current condition of your website is the result of investment or noninvestment by many people in leadership and staff positions over a long period. In other areas—public safety, library services, social services—when you see the communities around you moving in a certain direction, you generally take some time to consider whether that direction would be good for your community.

So maybe it's a good time to look at the websites of five or six of your neighboring communities with similar budgets and demographics. It wouldn't hurt to look at websites of larger or more progressive communities around you, also. Are those communities using their websites in ways that might be beneficial to your community?

Then you can look back at your website with your colleagues and staff and consider the following questions:

- Does your website solve problems for individuals and organizations by providing needed information and services online?
- Are you using your website as a cost-effective channel for agencies, departments, and employees to serve individuals and organizations?
- Does your website convey an image that contributes positively to local economic development efforts and to general public perception of the community?

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

Market Research

- Find out what individuals and organizations want and need from you.
- Decide where to focus your investment and what you can realistically offer at this time.

Content Development

- Use public communication principles and your market research to collect and organize information and services.

- Use plain-language principles to write content for your website that will be logical and easy for people to use and understand.
- Make content development a major consideration in your budget.

Web Design

- Select the best Web applications to achieve your service goals.
- Design pages that will be attractive to people and easy to use and understand.

Ongoing Support

- Commit staff or resources to content management so that the website will be updated regularly.
- Establish realistic evaluation measures so that you can monitor cost benefits and other benefits to the community.

Whether you work with staff or with contractors, make sure your plans address each of these elements.

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

Notes

1. National League of Cities and Center for Digital Government, 2004 Digital Cities Survey—Final Survey Report (Washington, D.C.: the League; Folsom, Calif.: the Center, 2004).

2. Jonathan D. Parks and Shannon H. Schelin, "Assessing e-Government Innovation," in Handbook of Public Information Systems, ed. G. David Garson (2d ed. Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press, Taylor and Francis Group, 2005).

3. The tool is divided into six parts, which are presented separately in this article. An integrated version of the tool is available online at www.sog.unc.edu/popgov/.

4. Darrell M. West, Achieving E-materials Government for All: Highlights from a National Survey (Washington, D.C.: Benton Foundation; Albany, N.Y.: New York State Forum, Rockefeller Institute of Government, 2003). Available at www.benton.org/publibrary/egov/access2003.html.

5. The standards are available at www.usa.gov/webcontent/reqs_bestpractices/laws_regs/accessibility.shtml.

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7. Philip Young, "Local Government and the Internet: Key Issues and Best Practices for Nontechnical Officials," Popular Government, Winter 2005, pp. 20–27.

8. National Office for the Information Economy, E-Government Benefits Study (Canberra, Australia: Australian Government Information Management Office, Australian Government, 2003). Available at www.agimo.gov.au/__data/assets/file/16032/benefits.pdf.

The author is a professional writer who works with local governments and nonprofits to produce marketing and education materials that are easy to use and understand. . Contact her at b_currin@currin.biz..

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The Buzz

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

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

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

Forum: Focus on all of state's resources
T.C. Record Eagle, 2/09/08

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Tech 101 Glossary

Modern Internet Buzzwords and their Definitions

Blog - (weB LOG) a journal that is available on the web. Updating a blog is known as "blogging" and someone who keeps a blog is a "blogger."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Webinar - a seminar offered over the internet.

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

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

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

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

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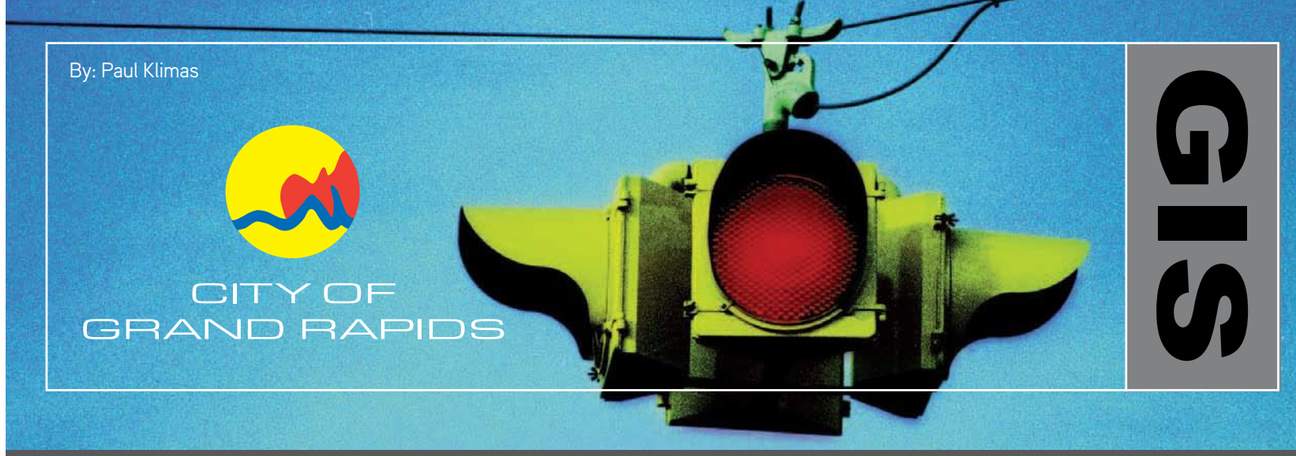


By: Paul Klimas

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

GIS

THE RIGHT TOOL

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

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

Maps-Antfarm	(For external access: *IMS.ci.grand-rapids.mi.us*) A basic-level tool supported by ESRI ArcIMS (Internet mapping services) that allows users to view many kinds of information and share that information with others. For instance, the Planning Department can use this tool to create mailing labels for all the residents in Grand Rapids. City staff can also create simple maps and conduct limited analysis through this tool, which requires very little training. If you know how to use Windows, you can use this tool very easily.
Internet Mapping Service	Another basic-level tool available on the Internet to both internal and external users that allows users to share information as they view sets of data relative to a particular entity. An entity (for instance, the City of Grand Rapids or the state of Michigan) places information on a service online; as users need that information, they visit the service and view the pertinent data there. For example, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) is looking at the crumbling infrastructure of the United States, and they are trying to determine how federal grant monies can best be served. The U.S. DOT staff would visit the state of Michigan's infrastructure data online at the Michigan DOT service to view all the data about our infrastructure. That information would help them decide where the federal grant monies would be allocated.
ArcMap	A medium-level tool that allows users to do complete spatial analysis. For instance, if the Fire Department wants to locate all the industrial properties that have hazardous material storage within a quarter mile of a school, they would use ArcMap to analyze those spatial locations and create a map with that information. Or, if Neighborhood Improvement has an Access database, they can join it with tables (in a different file format) using ArcMap and pull all that information together for other purposes. This tool requires more advanced training.
Geocoding	A more advanced tool that allows users to estimate the location of a point on a line and then place that point on a map. For instance, if Traffic Safety wants to map all the traffic signs they maintain, they can mass geocode them using all the addresses for those signs. The traffic signs might not be in the exact spatial location, but they'll be pretty close. This tool requires extensive training.
Extension Products	High-level tools offered by ESRI (such as ArcGIS Spatial Analyst and ArcGIS Geostatistical Analyst) that allow users to perform complex spatial modeling and analysis. For example, using Geostatistical Analyst, the Environmental Protection Department can assess the environmental risk of spills to ground water and surface water flows into streams and the Grand River. With Spatial Analyst, the Planning Department can determine which areas in Grand Rapids are zoned for commercial development and have a high water table on a steep slope (greater than 15 percent). While there have only been a few occasions for City IT/GIS staff to use these tools, the potential for planning and analysis using extension products is tremendous. These tools require extensive training.

GIS—Modeling Reality

If you think those tools are worth a try, get ready for the next level as you model reality. GIS, in its most powerful form, allows you to strategically plan for the future based on the reality you model today. The true purpose of a GIS is to model real-life events ("what-if" analysis) before they actually physically take place.

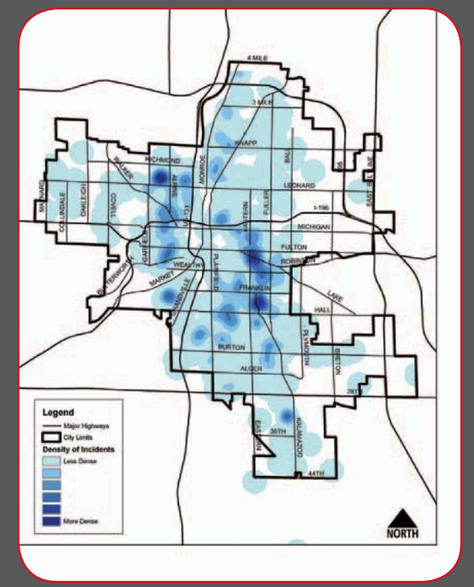
Deploy a GIS, and suddenly you're looking into the future. Using a powerful, high-level tool called a spatial data engine (SDE) geodatabase, users can analyze relationships spatially and model reality through a more intelligent visual representation. You're seeing not only where things are and how they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

Reality Check #1: Road Closures

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

Reality Check #2: Housing Nuisance Incidents

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



Reality Check #3: Stormwater Modeling

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

Paul Klimas, GIS Manager pklimas@ci.grand-rapids.mi.us

Feature Article
By Jon D. Kreucher Esq.

The 1, 2, 3 on DTV

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

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

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

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

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

As part of this transition, most all broadcasters like ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox are currently simulcasting their over-air signals in both an analog and in a digital format. At some point, though, this transition has to be complete–after all, there is little reason for broadcasters to transmit in both analog and digital forever, and the federal government wants some of its airwaves back. So the last day for full-power television stations to broadcast in analog is February 17, 2009.

HELP! Are DTV and HDTV the Same Thing?

While it looks like there should be a difference of only one letter, there's really a two-letter change in these acronyms. DTV stands for Digital TV, and HDTV stands for High Definition TV.

In an effort to make my former logic professor proud, please note that DTV is necessary for HDTV, but not sufficient. Put differently, the longer definition swallows up the smaller. All HDTV is sent in a digital format, and is, therefore, DTV. But not all DTV is HDTV. Instead, Digital TV can either be standard definition or high definition. Standard definition is akin to the pictures you get on the digital tier from your cable provider. Often, those pictures are noticeably crisper than those on the basic tier of the cable operator's service (note to direct-to-home satellite customers: All programming signals you get are delivered digitally, so you won't see a difference in picture quality between any of the tiers). High definition signals, however, contain more digital information about the picture being delivered. As a consequence, high-def pictures are usually better still than standard-def digital signals.

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

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

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

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

What's the PEG Controversy about?

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

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

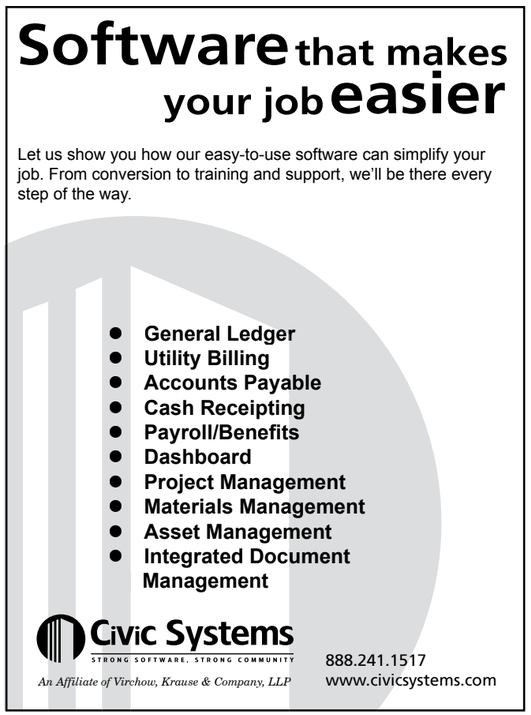
PEG channels have always been placed on the least-expensive tier of a cable operator's lineup and delivered to all cable customers. Comcast's plan to digitize and move these channels, however, will mean that only those with "digital converters" will still be able to view PEG channels – as a consequence,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

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

An Update From the League

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

–Bill Mathewson, General Counsel
Michigan Municipal League



for the vast majority TV viewers, and particularly for the couch potatoes among us.

So why the confusion over this digital transition? Well, cynics might note the economic opportunities at stake. This, for example, is a great time for some retailers to suggest that everyone needs a brand new digital TV. Cable operators would also love to see more digital converters in their customers' homes. Put differently, news that your old TV will still work on February 18, 2009, is neither sexy nor does it sell product.

2. But I Read A LOT of Books and Use My Antenna to Get TV!? Although declining in number, I know there are still some of you out there. In fact, there are an estimated 12–15 million of you nationwide that still get your ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox and other over-air television through a good antenna and a little luck (unless you live in Southfield. There, the signals are so strong they can be pulled in by a refrigerator).

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

3. COUPONS! If you're one of those folks that fall into the rabbit-ear realm of TV, the government's also here to help. You can apply for up to two coupons, each good for $40, for the purchase of a digital-to-analog converter. Fill out the form at https://www.dtv2009.gov/ApplyCoupon.aspx.

Hope this helps to clear up the fuzzy picture. If you'd like to learn more, visit http://www.dtv.gov/outreach.html. There, you'll be able to review sample press releases that can be used to reach out to your residents. You'll also have access to answers to frequently asked questions, posters, and more.

MML General Counsel Bill Mathewson

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

Ralph Acosta, Big George's

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

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

If you have digital, there will not be a change.

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

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

Q How long do these TVs last?

A Both TVs have a "half-life" of at least 60,000 hours, so they are on a par there.

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Description: Wade Trim provides engineering, planning, operations, environmental science and surveying services to municipalities, industries, and private corporations throughout Michigan, and six other states.

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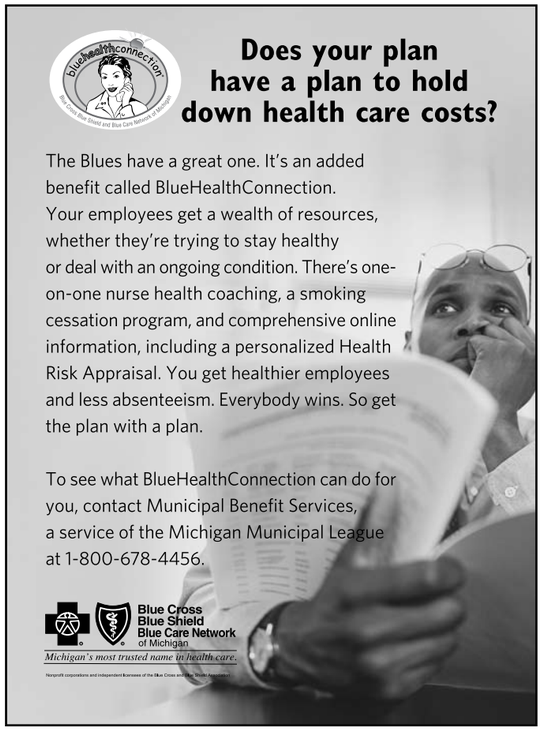

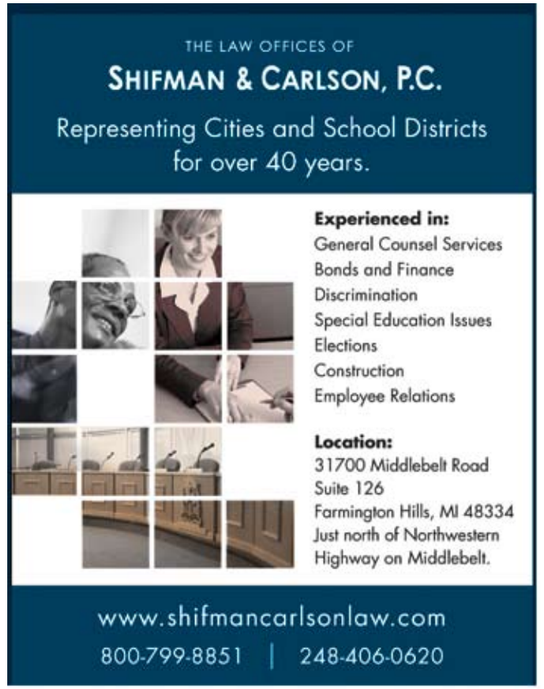

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Teen txt Acronyms: the Language of AIM

By Carson Cekola

There are a lot of acronyms that teens use now. Here are just a few...

lol laugh out loud
ex: *my brother fell then I lol.*

brb be right back
ex: *mom's calling, brb*

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

jk joking
ex: *I can't stand her. jk*

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

g2g got to go
ex: *DINNER TIME! G2G!*

rus? are you serius?
ex: *you aced it? rus?*

ttyl talk to you later
ex: *sleepy. ttyl*

ttly totally
ex: *I ttly want to go 2 the mall*

pos parent over shoulder
ex: *no swearing, pos*

plz please
ex: *plllzzzz ask your mom*

sn screen name
ex: *omg, what's her sn?*

ttfn ta-ta for now
ex: *she's here, ttfn*

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

atm at the moment
ex: *not atm*

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

rent a parent
ex: *the rents are bothering again*

b4n bye 4 now
ex: *omg Degrassi is on b4n.*

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

cu see you
ex: *I'll cu then*

ez easy
ex: *that's ez*

eg evil grin
ex: *hehehe, now I have a eg*

h8 hate
ex: *I h8 him*

w/e whatever
ex: *she's so w/e*

sac sleep at computer
ex: *so... late... I'm sac*

l8r, g8r later gator
ex: *dad wants me l8r g8r*

*** *** before & after a sentence=action.
ex: *omg I have a devil computer*shakes fist at sky**

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

ugh grunt
ex: *my mom wants me ugh*

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

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

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

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

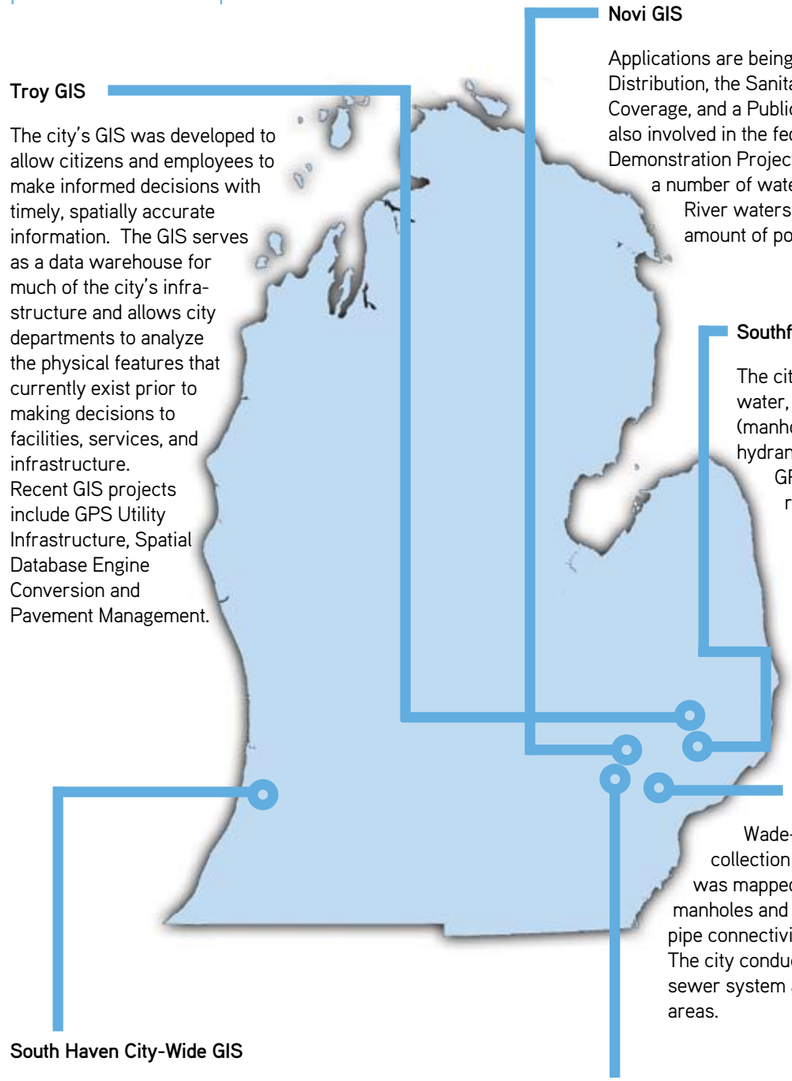
If you'd like a copy of the study, complimentary planning assistance or an on-site workshop call Amy Nelson at (773) 857-6784 or email her at anelson@bia.org.

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

THE BRICK INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

GIS in Michigan

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



Troy GIS

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

Novi GIS

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

Southfield Utility GPS Data Collection

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

Garden City Sanitary Sewer TV Inspection

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

South Haven City-Wide GIS

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

Farmington Hills GIS

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

By George B. Davis

Implementing the Municipal Civil Infraction Legislation

In 1994, legislation was passed authorizing a municipality to classify a violation of an ordinance (MCL 600-8701—600.8745) as a municipal civil infraction, essentially de-criminalizing violations of municipal ordinances. In addition, the law provides that municipalities may establish a municipal ordinance violations bureau to accept admissions of responsibility for infractions and to collect and retain civil fines.

Since then, municipalities across Michigan have classified violations of specific ordinances as municipal civil infractions and many have also established municipal ordinance violations bureaus.

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

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

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

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

Definitions

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

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

Designating which Violations are Municipal Civil Infractions

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

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

Designating Authorized Local Officials

The local officials authorized to issue municipal civil infraction citations (directing alleged violators to appear in court) or municipal civil infraction violation notices (directing alleged violators to appear at a municipal ordinance violations bureau) must be designated by ordinance for each violation that is to be treated as a municipal civil infraction.

Setting the Amount of the Fines

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

Specifying the Municipal Civil infractions Procedures

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

Commencing municipal civil infractions actions including the issuance of municipal civil infractions citations to appear in court; and, if applicable, the issuance of municipal civil infraction violation notices to appear at a bureau.

Issuing and Serving Municipal Civil Infractions Citations

The contents of municipal civil infraction citations forms, including who, when, where, how, etc., of an infraction, and what the alleged violator must do to respond to a citation (admit, admit with explanation, deny. etc.).

Establishing a Municipal Ordinance Violations Bureau

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

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

Adopting a Schedule of Fines

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

Adopting Citation and Notice Forms

The State Court Administrative Office has developed several generic citation and notice forms which are available online.

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

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A Few Questions on Internet Safety...

Q **Have you Googled yourself lately?**

We'd like to make a suggestion -Google yourself and your municipality. You might be surprised at the stories floating around in cyberspace. This can be a healthy reminder that it's best not to debate residents during public meetings. It's not very satisfying to see a negative story and say, "Yeah, well, you should see what the other guy looks like." If it feels like downbeat news in your community never goes away, you haven't experienced it on the internet. It is exponentially worse than that time in grade school when you threw up in the lunchroom and none of your schoolmates ever forgot.

Q **Have you been Cyber Bullied?**

Basically, anyone can say anything they want about anyone else, fact or fiction, as frequently as they want. A story can be spread worldwide, with doctored photos included, which might not be pretty. Hey, is that really Mayor Doe on the nude beach in Puerta Vallarta? Makes you shiver thinking about the next election, doesn't it (pun intended)? There is little, if any, established case law on this yet, but take heart, Dr. Phil is encouraging victims to fight back. Seriously, at this point, the MML is aware of instances of shall we say "bitter" residents with enough free time to set up anti-(your city) websites for the sole purpose of capitalizing, underscoring, and italicizing everything they don't like about anyone remotely related to your city/village/township government.

michigan municipal league

2008 Michigan Municipal League Capital Conference and Spring Expo

Wednesday, April 2, 2008 ~ Lansing Center, Lansing

This year the League's traditional legislative conference has been reinvented; the new Capital Conference incorporates innovation with the best of the past. Things to look forward to include:

- Critical updates on the issues in Lansing and Washington from League staff and other experts.
- Opportunities to make important contacts with other officials who face similar challenges to those facing your community.
- Networking breaks in the Spring Expo where approximately 100 vendors will showcase products, services and emerging technologies for local governments.
- Dedication of the League's new Capital Office in the recently renovated Mutual Building during the Capital Reception.

Welcome Keynote Speaker: Comedy Central's Rob Riggle

www.mml.org

Q & A on the Michigan State Legislature Website

Reported by Andrea Messinger

Q. What is the Michigan Legislature website?

A. http://www.legislature.mi.gov

Q. What search areas does the website include?

A. Browse the major categories–legislative, law and more–to find information on:

- Bills
- Calendars
- Chapter Index
- Committee Bill Records
- Committee Meetings
- Constitution Search
- Executive Orders
- Historical Documents
- Initiatives
- Journals
- Legislative PDA Pages
- Legislative Search
- Legislators
- MCL Search
- MCL Tables
- Often Requested Laws
- Public Act MCL Search
- Public Acts (Signed Bills)
- Publications
- Related Sites
- Requested Repeals
- Resolutions
- SBT (Repealed)
- Session Schedules
- Syndication–Bill Updates

Q. What can I find out about bills online?

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

Q. How will I know the current legislation of interest?

A. If you register as a user, you can sign up for email alerts when items of your choice change or are added to the website.

- An RSS on the Bills page allows for syndication of bill updates. For more on RSS, see our Tech 101 Glossary on page 18.
- Look for hyperlinks to hot legislative issues in League communications such as the Legislative Link e-Newsletter Visit www.mml.org to subscribe!

Q. How do I find a public act on the site?

A. Public acts exist in two different forms on the website:

- They can be bill documents approved by the Legislature, signed into law by the governor, filed with the secretary of state, and assigned a public act number. This version is as it was originally passed and is considered a legislative document. Use the Public Acts (signed bills) page to find legislative public act documents back to 1997. To obtain versions of a PA as it was passed prior to 1997, please contact the law library at 517-373-0630.
- Public acts also become part of the MCL. This version is as it exists today and contains the changes that have been made to it by way of legislation. This version is available if it was not an appropriations public act and as long as it has not been repealed by other legislation. Use the Public Act MCL Search page, www.legislature.mi.gov to find public acts within the MCL.

Q. How is the MCL organized?

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

MI Legislative Site (continued)

Q. Is there any way I can get the full text of state statutes online?

A. Text found on the Michigan Legislature is indeed the full text of the law. The word "excerpt" is included following the statute name above an MCL section to indicate the section itself is an excerpt of the entire statute. To read an entire statute at once (rather than individual sections), navigate to the statute itself, then click the "Printer Friendly" icon next to the document title.

Q. Are legislator voting records on the Michigan Legislature website?

A. Journals, or official records of House and Senate actions, are published following each day's session. Although not a verbatim account of what takes place on the floor, the journals reflect actions, communications, and roll call votes.

Q. Are committee meetings and session schedules listed on the website?

A. Yes, use the various search tools to browse the calendars, committee meetings, and session schedules pages.

Q. Can I find contact information for legislators and various committees online?

A. Visit the House and Senate sites:

http://house.michigan.gov/committees.asp

http://senate.michigan.gov/committees/standing.htm

Info. Source: http://www.legislature.mi.gov

Visit the Michigan Legislature website when...

...you know nothing about the item on next week's agenda except that it starts with PA – Public acts online date back to 1997. For versions passed prior to 1997, contact the Michigan law library at 517-373-0630.

...the cliff notes aren't working and you need the full text. The text you find online is indeed the full text of the law.

...on rare occasions, you forget the bill number. Try the various search tools to locate bills by sponsors, subject categories, keywords, etc.

...you lose track of a bill because you were out of town at an MML event. Legislation is updated daily, just check the Journals.

...you just have to have your own copy. As long as you follow the Acceptable Use Policy guidelines, download and copy away.

How a Bill Becomes Law

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

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

Title Reading

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

Referral to Committee

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

Committee Review

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

Committee Action

A standing committee may act on a bill in various ways. The committee may:

-Report the bill with favorable recommendation.

-Report the bill with amendments with favorable recommendation.

-Report the bill with the recommendation that a substitute be adopted.

-Report the bill without recommendation.

-Report the bill with amendments but without recommendation.

-Report the bill with the recommendation that it be referred to another committee.

-Take no action on a bill.

-Vote to not report the bill out of committee.

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

michigan municipal league

We help fund Michigan's communities
The MML advocates the use of tax dollars for critical services that citizens rely on most. Local communities are the economic backbone of our state and we see their viability as essential for a strong Michigan.

We spur economic development
Investing in Michigan's urban areas is paramount to the revitalization of Michigan. Built-out communities need assistance in redeveloping their infrastructure. The MML is working to provide strong communities as the centerpiece of a highly desirable state.

Transportation and Infrastructure
Businesses looking to locate or stay in Michigan consider the quality of infrastructure as a determining factor. The League works with members of Michigan's congressional delegation and all transportation interests to ensure that Michigan's transportation and infrastructure systems are effectively funded.

Environmental Protection
The League is committed to working with all interested parties on legislation to protect sources of groundwater from contamination, to give the state a greater voice in regulating solid waste imports and to implement the voter-approved Clean Water Bond. The MML is also working with Congress and the U.S. EPA to promote the wise use of our tax dollars to enhance environmental quality.

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Downtown Assistance: Coming Soon to Your Community

By Andy Schor

Michigan's economy is on the rise. That is due, in large part to new public and private investments in our full-service communities. Over the last few years, we have lost many jobs and people from Michigan. That is not news to you, I know. Local and state leaders are doing all they can to try to stem the tide of these losses and turn our economy around.

How can we jump-start Michigan's economy?

MML members say the first thing to be done is to create thriving urban centers. Both residents and employers want to live in a place that can meet their needs. They want municipal services like police and fire protection, parks, trash and recycling, water and sewer, code enforcement for starters. They want the option to work and shop near their homes. They want housing choices (houses, condos, lofts, apartments), good health care and good schools.

Want an example? Ask Google. Ask Compuware. Ask the Accident Fund and Jackson National Life Insurance.

But it is not just the MML that sings this song. Let me introduce the chorus: Governor Jennifer Granholm ("Come with me to the Next Michigan, where our cities are electric, alive with people and culture and energy and jobs"); the Land Use Leadership Council; Michigan's Future; CEOs for Cities; and countless others.

Thriving communities are the starting point, the first domino to fall in the long line of things we need to happen for recovery.

Downtown Package

Radical, you say? The Michigan Legislature can't do it, you say? Well, let me introduce Sen. Jason Allen (R-Traverse City). In his second Senate term, Allen clearly gets it. He held hearings statewide to find out what the Legislature can do to assist communities. Now we all want to say first and foremost–send us dollars! Well, he is not a magician. He cannot conjure up dollars where they don't exist. What he has done is craft a bill package that will help communities create jobs and revitalize their downtowns; bills that will change the law to be assistive, rather than restrictive.

Downtown Assistance: Coming Soon to your Community (continued)

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

SB 970 – Allow DDAs to operate retail business incubators

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

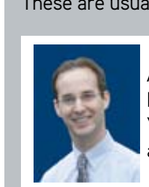
Corridor Improvement Authorities - Authorities that capture tax increment financing dollars for revitalization of community corridors.

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

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

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

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



Andy Schor is a legislative associate at the League's Lansing office.
You may reach him at 517-908-0300 or aschor@mml.org

When will this legislation be considered?

The Michigan Senate is working on this now. As we speak (or, as you read). They will have hearings and mark up these bills throughout the first few months of 2008. And, don't count out the Michigan House either. Rep. Mark Meadows, a Democrat and former Mayor from East Lansing, is working on legislation creating commerce centers, which would give priority consideration to full-service communities for economic development tools. This legislation is expected to be considered in the early months of 2008 as well. This could be a boon to our communities. Combined with the downtown package, these major initiatives are focusing on the necessity of assisting local economic development to bring back jobs and people.

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

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

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

On the corrections side, Michigan's incarceration rate is much higher than surrounding states–that needs to be examined.

The third biggest issue is individual insurance reform spear-headed by Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

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

Bill Ballenger
Inside Michigan Politics, Editor/Publisher

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

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

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

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

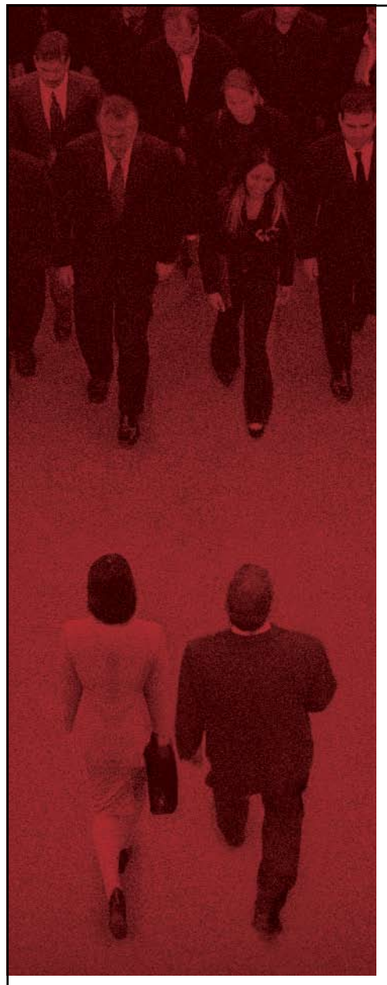
Larry Lee
Gongwer News Service, Vice President

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

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

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

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



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Legislator Salute

Lorence Wenke, State Rep.

63rd House District–Richland Twp.

N0997 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514
http://house.mi.gov/lwenke
lorencewenke@house.mi.gov

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

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

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

Rep. Wenke's Legislative Priorities:

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

Sen. Thomas' Legislative Priorities:

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

Legislator Salute

Buzz Thomas, State Senator

4th Senate District–Detroit

Capitol Building
Lansing MI 48909
www.detbuzz.com
ofcbthomas@senate.michigan.gov
866-348-6304 toll-free

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

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

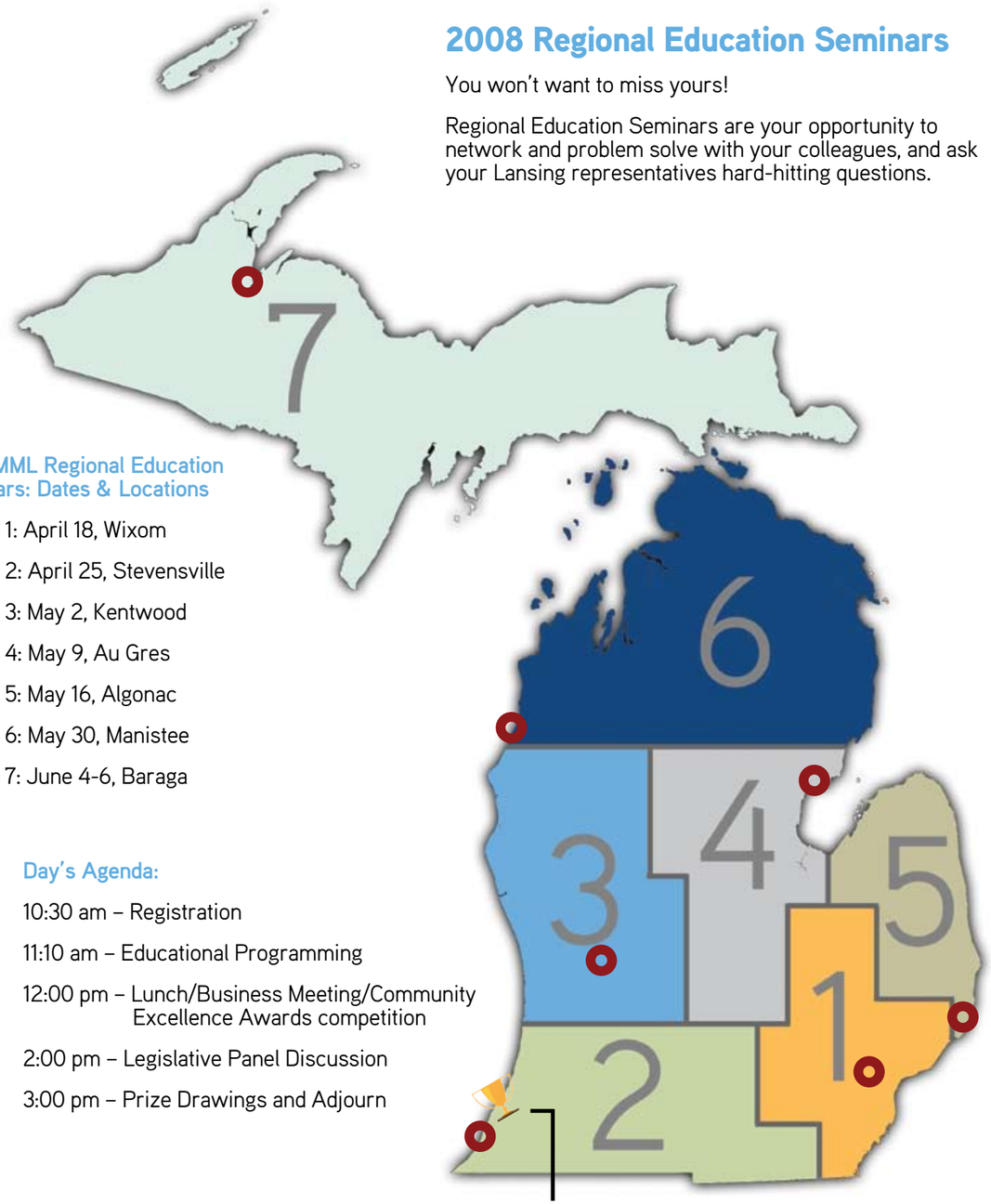
Thomas is an established figure in the fields of energy and technology, health policy, and urban development. He is also an avid supporter of the arts and culture community.

Thomas has a diverse background in business, working as a homebuilder in metro Detroit, where he was construction manager for Parkside Building Company and Avis Tech Park partners, managing both commercial renovations and single-family, residential construction.

2008 Regional Education Seminars

You won't want to miss yours!

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



St. Joseph, 2007 winner

2008 MML Regional Education Seminars: Dates & Locations

Region 1: April 18, Wixom

Region 2: April 25, Stevensville

Region 3: May 2, Kentwood

Region 4: May 9, Au Gres

Region 5: May 16, Algonac

Region 6: May 30, Manistee

Region 7: June 4-6, Baraga

Day's Agenda:

10:30 am – Registration

11:10 am – Educational Programming

12:00 pm – Lunch/Business Meeting/Community Excellence Awards competition

2:00 pm – Legislative Panel Discussion

3:00 pm – Prize Drawings and Adjourn

Interested in becoming a regional officer?

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

St. Joseph–Winner of the 2007 Community Excellence Award!

Considering entering "The Race for the Cup" in 2008?

These steps may help you decide:

- Evaluate your local success story (a program or project) :
  - -Is it innovative?
  - -Does it have application to other municipalities?
  - -What is its relative impact on the community?
  - -What is its relative impact on the region?
- Enter the Community Excellence Awards
- Attend your Regional Seminar and make your presentation
- Each Region chooses its own winner–seminar attendees vote
- Each Regional winner moves on to compete against the winners of the six other Regions at the Convention
- Attendees at the Convention will vote for one of the seven entries after a live competition
- The winner will be announced during the last event of the Convention

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

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

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

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

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

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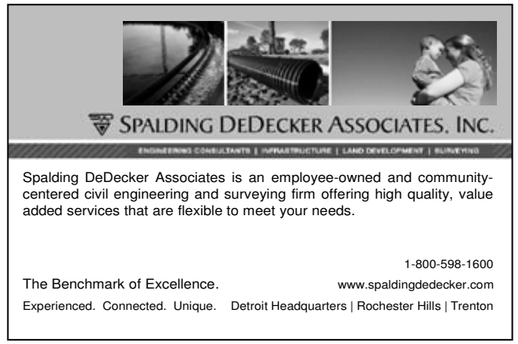

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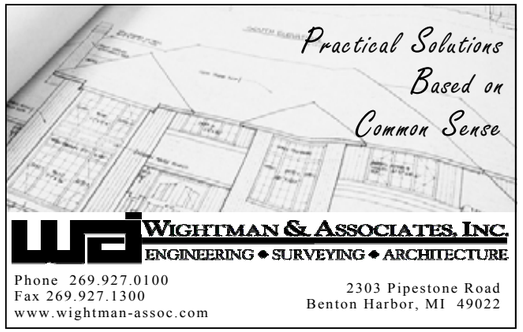

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- Regional Meeting
- League Publications
- Sample documents (such as policies, ordinances, and evaluations)

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Municipal Q&A

Coordinated by Mary Charles

Q: We are currently in the process of upgrading our computer technology and plan to move to digital storage of all minutes, ordinances, etc. It is not our intent to maintain any paper copies. Can we use a digital signature on the permanent copy of our minutes?

The short answer is probably not. However, this raises a much bigger issue. The State of Michigan has established guidelines for electronic storage of public records. You can find those rules on their website (http://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal_mhc_rms_st_for_digitizing_125531_7.pdf).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many of our members have found them to be a valuable resource. By sending one email, they are able to access a large number of people who very well may have had past experience with just the issue they are currently facing.

And yes, more than one individual from each community can sign up for each listserv.

Q: I signed up for the village listserv and tried to ask a question, but could not figure out how to access it. What am I doing wrong?

You can post a question on the listserv by sending an email to village@listserv.mml.org If you are a village president and want to send a question to the mayor/president listserv, send an email tomama@listserv.mml.org.

Q: We are wondering if 2007 PA 106, the Public Employees Health Benefits Act, affects cities and villages?

Yes–effective October 1, 2007, PA 106 applied to all public employers. MCL 124.73 defines a public employer as any "city, village, township, county, or other political subdivision of this state. . ." We are putting together additional information on this. In the meantime, the state has an excellent Q&A page at http://www.michigan.gov/dleg/0,1607,7-154-10555_13648-181920--,00.html.

Q: Do you have any sample computer-use policies?

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

Request for Information

The Resource Center relies on contributions from local officials to keep materials current.

We would appreciate receiving:

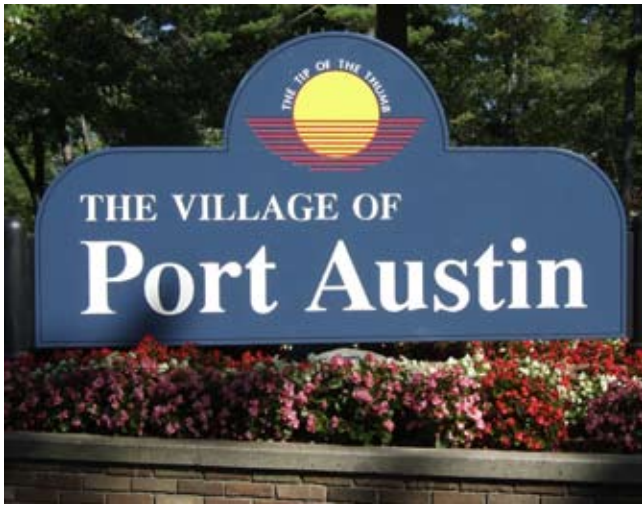
- Municipal Donation/Gift Programs.

Please send samples to the League's Inquiry Service, 1675 Green Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48105; fax it to 734-663-4496 or email it to info@mml.org. Thank you!

Mary Charles is a research analyst for the Michigan Municipal League. You may contact Mary at 734-669-6322 or mcharles@mml.org.

FOCUS ON

Port Austin



The unique, quiet little Village of Port Austin sits directly at the "Tip of Michigan's Thumb." From this vantage point, residents and tourists alike may view sunrise and sunset over the beautiful shores of Lake Huron. Port Austin is approximately two hours north of the Detroit area; it makes a perfect weekend getaway for city dwellers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Better Communities.
Better Michigan.

Please send address and recipient corrections to Susan Vasher at MML, P.O. Box 1487, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1487; phone 800-653-2483; fax 734-662-8083, or email svasher@mml.org. Thank you.